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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**Apostolova: European values to be upheld at all times (*Koha Ditore*)**

Asked to comment on the ban Kosovo athletes and MPs faced by Serbian authorities to take part in events there, Head of the EU Office in Kosovo/Special Representative, Nataliya Apostolova, said that European values need to be upheld at all times, not just on Europe Day. She said the dialogue is also about free exchange and contact between officials, friends, people and communities. “Neighbours have to interact and live together, side by side, in order to have a normal life,” Apostolova said. She called on Kosovo and Serbia to resume dialogue which would ultimately lead to the full normalisation of relations.

**KSF transformation bill submitted to government (*Zeri*)**

The Kosovo Security Force Ministry has submitted the draft law on the force’s transformation to the government of Kosovo for approval, confirmed ministry’s spokesperson Ibrahim Shala. He said they are convinced all parliamentary parties will support the transformation of the KSF being that an armed force would be in the interest of all the people of Kosovo. Meanwhile, Kosovo government spokesperson Donjeta Gashi said the government wants to make sure that the future army is created in cooperation with all political parties in Kosovo. “According to the government’s legislative programme, this was planned for 30 April but this package of bills has not yet been addressed at the government meeting,” Gashi said.

**US ambassadors in Kosovo and Serbia condemn ban for Kosovo athletes (*media*)**

The US Ambassador to Kosovo, Greg Delawie and the one in Serbia, Kyle Scott have condemned Serbia’s decision to ban participation of Kosovo athletes at European championship in Novi Sad. “Normalization of relations should at the very least mean that young athletes, no matter what their ethnicity, are free to compete in international competitions. Sad to see their dreams shattered by international politics over which they have no control,” Delawie and Scott both wrote on Twitter.

**Association managing team requests government’s support (*Epoka*)**

Members of the managing team for establishment of the Association/Community of Serb-majority Municipalities, held on Thursday a meeting in Mitrovica north with the outgoing Minister of Local Administration, Ivan Todosijevic. According to an issued press release, they discussed the structure of the draft statute of the Association for Serb-majority Municipalities and the content of the document. Members of the managing team were informed about technical needs, while Minister Todosijevic promised to the team that he will ensure optimal working conditions, by raising the matter at the government of Kosovo for coordination and cooperation with municipal authorities in the north. This was the second meeting between the managing team and Minister Todosijevic.

**“International pressure can make Serbia tell locations of mass graves” (*Epoka*)**

Prenk Gjetaj, head of the Kosovo government committee for the missing persons, told the paper that Serbia could tell about the fate of the missing persons only if obliged by the international community. He said the European Union should condition Serbia’s EU integration with the issue of the missing persons. He added that opening of Serbia’s military and police archives could help to a great extent. However, he added, being that this could only happen with the permission of Serbian authorities, this cannot happen without a major international pressure.

**EU rejects government’s plea for covering unpaid bills in the north (*Koha*)**

The paper reports that the European Union has rejected Kosovo government’s request to cover the costs of unpaid electricity bills in the north which leaves the government and the Ministry of Economic Development to seek other solutions. In a response to the paper, the Ministry said they are working on finding a transitional solution to this problem until Serbia takes over these responsibilities under the Brussels dialogue.

**Kosovo opens embassy in Abu Dhabi (*media*)**

The President of Kosovo, Hashim Thaci and the Foreign Minister Behxhet Pacolli, in presence of representatives of the United Arab Emirates, inaugurated on Thursday Kosovo’s Embassy in Abu Dhabi. This is Kosovo’s first embassy in the Gulf, which is a major economic power, media report.

**Norwegian envoy: Serbia cannot join EU if Russia vetoes Kosovo at UN (*Zeri*)**

Norwegian Ambassador to Serbia, Arne Sanes Bjornstad, commented on the statement of Serbian and Russian officials that Russia has the power to prevent Kosovo from gaining UN membership saying this would in turn create serious problems for Serbia joining the EU. “Normalisation of relations with all neighbours is a precondition for EU accession. Is it ‘normalisation’ then when Serbia still works on preventing Kosovo’s membership at United Nations,” asked Bjornstad.

**Orthodox Monastery prevents construction of Decan road (*Koha*)**

The Orthodox Monastery in Decan is reported to be preventing the construction of a road leading up to the Decan mountains as part of it goes through the special protective zone. The Monastery has asked the local authorities to change the route of the road but Mayor Bashkim Ramosaj said the construction works are ongoing and the road will be paved. He said the road does not infringe the protective zone adding that the current state of the road is impassable. “This road leads up to the Beleg Mountains and many other villages and this area represents the most picturesque mountainous region,” Ramosaj said.

**“Minister Rikalo suspends director for not issuing grant to his wife” (*Koha*)**

The paper reports on the front page that the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development, Nenad Rikalo, has suspended the director of the Agency for Agricultural Development, Elhami Hajdari, after he refused to issue a grant to a Prizren-based company for which he said has ties to the ministers wife, Biljana Rikalo. Minister Rikalo cited intimidation as the reason behind the suspension of Hajdari but in his notification he says the move also relates to the failure to carry out instructions from the relevant minister. The paper reports that the “Ekstra Fruit Filling” company based in Prizren was supposed to get €164,000 as part of the second installment of a grant but inspectors concluded that the company has not met the terms of the contract. Furthermore the Prizren company is alleged to have won the grant together with a company based in Trstenik of Serbia which is run by Rikalo’s wife.

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