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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**EU-Western Balkans summit in Sofia gets underway today (*dailies*)**

Papers report that the EU-Western Balkans summit in the Bulgarian capital Sofia is expected to get underway today and that Kosovo will be represented at the event by President Hashim Thaci, Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, and Foreign Minister Behgjet Pacolli. President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, said a day ahead of the summit that this will be a good opportunity for both sides to reconfirm that European perspective remains the geostrategic solution for the Western Balkans. “I hope to bring our Western Balkans friends closer to EU,” Tusk said.

**In Sofia, Thaci meets Mogherini and Vucic (*media*)**

Upon arrival in Sofia for the EU-Western Balkans summit, President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci met the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini and later on President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic. In a Facebook post published after the meeting, Thaci wrote that he discussed with Mogherini about the importance of Kosovo’s participation at the EU summit as well as the visa liberalisation process and the expectations of the people of Kosovo for moving freely within the Schengen zone. “With Madam Mogherini, we also discussed the need for continuing dialogue for normalisation of relations with Serbia. On this occasion, under the initiative of Madam Mogherini I had a joint meeting with her and President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic,” Thaci wrote. “We agreed that the final stage of the dialogue for normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia to begin in the near future, under a unified support from the EU, US, and other actors.” Thaci also said this “new momentum” requires mobilization of all political forces in Kosovo, the civil society, and the media “because the final outcome will be Kosovo’s recognition by Serbia and our membership in the UN.” Meanwhile, a statement issued by the European Union External Action Service notes that Thaci and Vucic confirmed their readiness to continue working intensively the EU High Representative to reach a comprehensive normalization of relations. “Given the priority the EU attaches to its relations with the Western Balkans, in particular this year, it is important that definitive progress is made in the coming period, so that both Serbia and Kosovo can advance in their European aspirations,” the statement reads.

<https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/44718/federica-mogherini-meets-presidents-vu%C4%8Di%C4%87-and-tha%C3%A7i_en>

**Hahn: Belgrade and Pristina to determine content of agreement (*Zeri*)**

European Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn, said it is up to Belgrade and Pristina to determine the content of a legally-binding agreement and that a long-term solution to normalisation of relations implies a realistic settlement based on international law. Hahn told ***Tanjug*** that the EU-facilitated dialogue has so far produced results in normalizing relations at a general level.

**Government initiates Plan B for the army (*Koha*)**

The Kosovo government has initiated a Plan B for transforming the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) into the Kosovo Armed Forces, because due to the veto of Serb MPs, it could not implement the process through constitutional amendments. According to the paper, a legal package, which has been submitted to the Office of the Prime Minister, does not foresee a four-year transition process, but rather focuses on removing certain limitations related to the capacity, mandate and the mission of the KSF. According to the new plan, the transition period will take ten years. The Office of the Prime Minister confirmed receiving the legal package. “The Government has received the package of laws on the KSF sent by the respective ministry. The package was not proceeded for discussion at the government meeting. Whenever this decision is made, we will inform you accordingly. The government wants this to happen as soon as possible, but always in coordination with our strategic partners,” the PM’s Office said in a written reply to the paper. Burim Ramadani, deputy minister of the KSF, did not want to refer to the package as Plan B. “This is not about plan A or plan B. we are coordinating the transition of the KSF with the aim of further capacity building. Our main objective are constitutional amendments, in order to change the name and to get as much support in the Assembly as possible. We are not discouraged by the current political position of Serb political representatives. On the contrary, we will continue our engagement to change this position. The constitutional amendments will take place whenever it is possible,” Ramadani said.

**Delawie: 2018 should be year of success of Pristina-Belgrade dialogue (*RTK*)**

The U.S. Ambassador to Kosovo, Greag Delawie, told ***RTV Dukagjini*** on Wednesday that there is no alternative to dialogue. “You don’t get to pick your neighbors. Some accommodation between Kosovo and Serbia is going to be essential for both countries. I would like to say that the Dialogue has achieved important things in the past. The police in the north, documents issues, transportation issues. But it is really time to focus on what happens next. What is the end state? And now is definitely the time to focus on that”. “Let me separate, to be clear, the Association drafting and the Dialogue overall. On the Association drafting, it took a while to get going, it is going now. I certainly hope that the drafting committee, which is called the management team, will look for ways to make the lives of everybody better here, be positive and I hope that the government when it is their turn will look at what the drafting team has come up with and find a way to reach agreement on everything. Regarding the overall Dialogue, I think it is time for intensive work, for more intensive work than we have seen in the last couple of years, absolutely. As I said earlier, 2018 is the time to make a deal,” he said. https://xk.usembassy.gov/ambassador-delawies-interview-with-tv-dukagjini/

**Apostolova: Internal unity important for final phase of dialogue (*Koha*)**

Nataliya Apostolova, head of the European Union Office in Kosovo, said in an interview to ***KTV*** on Wednesday evening that it is important for political parties in the Kosovo Assembly to reach unity and consensus on a platform for the final phase of talks with Serbia. “Mr. Vucic has been engaged in such a dialogue for several months now. This is happening at several levels, including the academia, the Serb Orthodox Church … therefore, it would be important for Kosovo to seek this kind of unity for the final phase,” she said. Apostolova also said internal dialogue should determine who will represent Kosovo in the final phase of talks. “Parliamentary parties should sit and discuss what should be done to resolve this problem if it arises. This includes the platform and the forum where these matters must be addressed, and not with the international partners because Kosovo must have ownership in the process,” she added.

**Serbian President sets condition for resuming dialogue (*media*)**

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said in his meeting with EU High Representative Federica Mogherini that Belgrade will agree to resume talks with Pristina in Brussels under two conditions. “Yes, we will return to dialogue, but first the Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities must be formed and the other condition is that the other side must be ready for compromise talks,” Vucic is quoted as saying in Serbian media.

**Vucic accepts compromise for Kosovo but not humiliation (*Kosova Sot*)**

The President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic, said that many people in Serbia feel tired of promises that their country will someday be part of the European Union. He said no one has guaranteed that Serbia will be part of the EU, but prior to this, a final agreement with Kosovo is required. He said that he is ready for compromises with regard to Kosovo, but not to humiliate Serbian nation. “First of all, no one has guaranteed that we are going to be part of Europe in 2025. They said: ‘If you do your job…’ This had primarily to do with Kosovo. ‘If you resolve all the problems with Pristina’ and then everything else, including the rule of law and everything that we request from you, then you could become an EU member in 2015,” Vucic explained.

**Hoxhaj: EU to soon decide on visa liberalisation (*Zeri*)**

Kosovo’s Deputy Prime Minister, Enver Hoxhaj, said upon return from a visit to Brussels that Kosovo has met all requirements to be granted visa liberalisation and that this was confirmed by all interlocutors he met in his recent trip including European commissioners Johannes Hahn and Dimitris Avramopoulos. “Kosovo has fully met all criteria for free movement and the decision of the European Commission will be made public in a short period of time,” Hoxhaj said.

**Brnabic: Vucic received verbal suggestions on Kosovo (*RTK*)**

Asked by a journalist in Novi Sad on whether the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic, received an official document on the solution of the Kosovo “issue”, the Prime Minister of Serbia, Ana Brnabic, said on Wednesday that she has discussed the matter with Vucic, but that she cannot publicly comment on this in order not to harm the negotiating position. “He received verbal suggestions,” Brnabic said.

**Rama against idea of Greater Albania (*Euronews/Epoka*)**

The Prime Minister of Albania, Edi Rama told ***Euronews*** on Wednesday that his country has for obligation to defend Albanians who live outside Albanian state. He said that Albanians in Balkans have never been in a better position than now. “In Kosovo, they have their own state. In Macedonia, they are part of a real revolution heading toward change of the approach toward Albanian language and population. In southern Serbia, I hope that their conditions will improve, based on the fact that Serbs in Kosovo are treated much better,” Rama said. “I have always said that I have a dream for us to unite under the same sky of the European Union, and I have never dreamt for a greater Albania, because I have great dreams for a great Europe, with Albanians in it,” Rama said.

**Serb academia in the north request amendment of Kosovo Constitution (*Zeri*)**

The Management Team tasked with preparing the draft statute for the Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities met the dean of the University of Pristina Law Faculty in Mitrovica North, Vladan Mihajlovic, who said that the Constitution of Kosovo needs to be amended to make way for the establishment of the Association/Community. “Dean Mihajlovic underlined that without changing the Constitution of Kosovo, there can be no valid foundation put in place for the functioning of the Community of Serb majorities in line with what was agreed in Brussels,” reads a statement issued by the Management Team which goes on to state that no one, including Pristina, has mandate to interfere in the work of the Team. Meanwhile, Avni Arifi, Chief of Staff to Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, said the draft statute has not been prepared as yet but once it is, other stakeholders such as the civil society, media, and the government will give their assessments. He also said that once put on paper, the draft statute will be sent to the Constitutional Court for review.

**Zoran Vukotic acquitted of war crimes charges (*media*)**

The Basic Court in Mitrovica has acquitted Zoran Vukotic of war crimes, clearing him of beating then killing four ethnic Albanian civilians and assaulting and robbing others in 1999. The court found him not guilty of beating and then killing four men - Hamdi Fazliu, Enver Rrustolli, Avdulla Fazliu and Fahredin Fazliu - at the Fazliu family’s house in Vushtrri/Vucitrn on May 5, 1999. Vukotic was also cleared of involvement in the unlawful detention of 17 civilians in a former agricultural building in Vushtrri/Vucitrn.

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