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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**Thaci: Time for historic settlement with Serbia (*media*)**

President of Kosovo, Hashim Thaci, told a press conference today ahead of his meeting with Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic on Sunday that the time has come for Kosovo and Serbia to reach an historic settlement in the form of a legally-binding document. “This agreement will enable full normalisation of relations between the two countries and peoples. I believe that after 20 years of talks the time has come to sign an historic agreement that will close a century-long tragic era,” he said. “I know difficult talks are ahead of us. A comprehensive agreement is necessary so that we as a country become part of the UN and membership to NATO and the EU is accelerated. As throughout, Kosovo will have the strong support of the US which is deeply interested in the reaching of a final settlement. The EU and its members are also interested more than ever before for an agreement for normalisation and Kosovo and Serbia membership to EU to be reached,” Thaci noted. Thaci underlined it was his constitutional duty to lead the dialogue to the end but also called for the establishment of a comprehensive team which he said would give the process more credibility and transparency. This team, according to Thaci, would consist of representatives of political parties, civil society, media, and experts of relevant fields. “This issue pertains us all, it is in everyone’s interest.” Thaci also spoke about the border between Kosovo and Serbia saying that the issue will be discussed in the dialogue. “There are 400km of borderline that will define the border between the two countries. the issue will be on the table,” said Thaci noting that Kosovo will insist on NATO representatives being present at the border talks which he anticipates will be difficult.

**Opposition turns down President’s call to join dialogue finale (*Koha*)**

Opposition parties have turned down President Hashim Thaci’s call to join the final phase of dialogue with Serbia which will begin this Sunday and they also refused to recognize Thaci’s leading role in the process, the paper reports on its front page. During a press conference on Wednesday, Thaci said he has the mandate and constitutional obligation to represent Kosovo and to lead the finale of dialogue with Belgrade and called on the opposition to be part of the representing team. Opposition representatives however turned down Thaci’s call in what the paper calls record time. They don’t want Thaci to lead Kosovo’s team and are adamant that the mandate to lead the team must derive from the Kosovo Assembly.

**LDK: We do not support Thaci leading dialogue with Serbia (*Kosova Sot*)**

Deputy leader of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), Ismet Beqiri, said the party has not changed its position in opposing President Hashim Thaci leading the dialogue for normalisation of relations with Serbia and that the comparison Thaci made between the time when he as opposition representative joined the talks on Kosovo status led by the late President Ibrahim Rugova and the current situation when he is urging the opposition to join the process is groundless. “President Thaci needs to be aware that we are dealing with different time contexts and it is well know how much President Rugova did for this country,” Beqiri said.

**LDK seeks early elections again (*media*)**

The Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), issued on Wednesday a communique, which notes that loss of the majority at the governing coalition, which occurred three months ago has put Kosovo in crisis. “Significant national matters cannot be addressed by a coalition of minority,” notes this press release. “Therefore, to overcome this situation, early elections are indispensable,” is stressed further. “In this spirit, LDK is ready to discuss reach of the consensus, otherwise the roundtables do not have any meaning. We will use all constitutional ways not to allow damaging of the country by this governing coalition of minority,” concludes the press release.

**Delawie: 2018, a year of success in dialogue with Serbia (*RTK*)**

The U.S. Ambassador to Kosovo, Greg Delawie expressed optimism with regard to the results of Pristina – Belgrade dialogue, mediated by the European Union. “TheEU High Representative Federica Mogherini, Presidents Aleksandar Vucic and Hashim Thaci, will continue their work on comprehensive normalisation phase of Belgrade – Pristina dialogue, take stock of existing agreements, inform of achievements to date, discuss next steps in view of an intensive period ahead,” Delawie wrote on his Twitter account.

**PSD hosts latest round-table of political parties (*media*)**

All media cover Wednesday’s roundtable of political parties in Kosovo hosted by the Social Democratic Party of Kosovo (PSD) and attended by representatives of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK), NISMA, Vetevendosje Movement and Alternativa. The Serbian List did not attend the meeting. Pristina-based Telegrafi news website carries a copy of a proposed joint statement of political parties, highlighting the point which notes that the fundamental responsibility for dialogue with Belgrade falls on the Kosovo Assembly as the highest legislative and decision-making institution. The statement also notes that “the Kosovo Assembly with a qualified vote (2/3 of MPs) adopts the state platform on dialogue which will serve as a document of basic principles and the state’s position vis-à-vis the dialogue and its agenda but also as an undeniable roadmap for the important process of dialogue”. PSD leader Shpend Ahmeti, said after the roundtable that the meeting focused on who should represent Kosovo in dialogue with Serbia. He said their proposal was for the Assembly of Kosovo to have this mandate and that if the responsibility is delegated to a certain person that it should be done by the Assembly. “Without clarifying the role of the Assembly on the matter, Thaci cannot lead the process. We cannot move forward in this process with Thaci saying that Mogherini has invited him or that Vucic wants to meet only Thaci. Even if Thaci gets the mandate for this process, it should happen through the Assembly. There needs to be an agreement among political parties on this issue. The position of our party is that Thaci does not represent the required political unity for the process. The government is in the minority now and we are entering a very important process. A divided Kosovo will have a weakened position in these negotiations,” Ahmeti said. “Today we wanted to discuss the mechanisms and who gives the mandate. We proposed that the mandate should be given by the Assembly,” he said. Commenting on Sunday’s meeting between Kosovo and Serbia Presidents in Brussels, Ahmeti said they don’t know yet the purpose of the meeting or what will be discussed there. He added that although there is no agreement between political parties on the matter, “in the future an agreement could be reached because dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade goes beyond political borders”. Ahmeti also argued that the opposition should have an active role in dialogue with Serbia, be it even as a monitor. Memli Krasniqi, head of the PDK parliamentary group, said that in his party’s view the dialogue with Serbia goes beyond the agendas of political parties and that all parties must be involved in the process. Krasniqi said no political party should fear a process which includes Washington and Brussels. LDK parliamentary group chief, Avdullah Hoti, said after the roundtable that Kosovo is faced with institutional crisis and that therefore early general elections must be held. Hoti said his party had initiated the idea of roundtables with the aim of emerging from the institutional crisis and that in such circumstances they cannot discuss other topics. Hoti also argued that “a minority ruling coalition” cannot address issues of national importance.

**McAllister: All Brussels agreements to be implemented (*RTK*)**

The European Parliament rapporteur for Serbia, David McAllister, said while reporting to the European Parliament committee for foreign affairs that each agreement reached in Brussels between Kosovo and Serbia must be implemented. “Both Kosovo and Serbia have to work on complete implementation of the reached agreements. Establishment of the Association is a priority, and the issue of energy has to be resolved among the parties,” McAllister said. He said that Serbia is in the right path for EU membership, adding that this depends on implementation of reforms and conditions set by the EU.

**Hoxhaj: UN seat and Association to happen in parallel way (*Zeri*)**

Kosovo’s Deputy Prime Minister, Enver Hoxhaj, said that the establishment of the Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities and Kosovo’s membership at the UN should happen at the same time. “With regards to UN and Association, my position now in 2018 is the same as in 2015 in that we need a model agreement for the Association that would incorporate into a bigger agreement which would normalise Kosovo-Serbia relations,” Hoxhaj said before the members of the Kosovo Assembly’s foreign affairs committee. Hoxhaj also said that at the final stage of the dialogue with Serbia, the important thing to focus on is how the process will go about and not who represents Kosovo.

**Veseli urges youth not to leave Kosovo after visa liberalisation (*Zeri*)**

Kosovo Assembly Speaker, Kadri Veseli, has appealed to the youth to stay in Kosovo after visa liberalisation gets the green light from the EU. “We expect visa liberalisation very soon but what we need to make sure above everything is to keep our youth here and create perspective,” Veseli said.

**Surroi: Politicians should not promise visa liberalisation this year (*media*)**

Several online media quote publicist Veton Surroi as saying that Kosovo’s politicians should not promise visa liberalisation this year. “Politicians should not keep making promises for visa liberalisation. There will be no positive decision this year. A possibility for next year is expected to be discussed at the end of this year. This is the verdict that is being prepared in Brussels and which will be announced at the end of this month,” Surroi wrote in a Facebook post.

**U.S. Ambassador Delawie meets Vetevendosje leader Kurti (*media*)**

The United States Ambassador in Pristina, Greg Delawie, met on Wednesday with Vetevendosje leader Albin Kurti in a tete-a-tete meeting, which according to ***Koha Ditore*** is the first of its kind. A press release issued by Vetevendosje after the meeting quoted Kurti as saying that they discussed the functioning of Kosovo’s institutions in line with eh rule of law and the principles of democracy in a parliamentary republic. “We also addressed issues related to economic development, education and employment, as well as the situation surrounding dialogue with Serbia … I explained to Ambassador Delawie the positions and the work of the Vetevendosje Movement on all these issues. We agreed to continue our contacts and meetings in the future,” Kurti said.

**Pacolli: Liberia has not withdrawn recognition (*media*)**

Kosovo’s Minister for Foreign Affairs, Behgjet Pacolli, has rebutted the news coming from Serbian officials that Liberia has withdrawn recognition of Kosovo. Pacolli said he has had a telephone conversation with Libera’s senior officials who according to him, confirmed that this state has not changed its position toward Kosovo. “Therefore, it is to regret that official Belgrade continues to invest vain efforts on destructive propaganda for internal consumption in Serbia. In the following days, the relations of the Republic of Kosovo with Liberia will culminate at the most senior diplomatic level,” Pacolli wrote on his Facebook account.

**UNHCR refutes Jevtic’s statement about 200,000 IDPs from Kosovo (*Koha*)**

The paper reports on page two that Kosovo’s Deputy Prime Minister Dalibor Jevtic has joined statements by Belgrade officials saying that there are 200,000 Serb IDPs that cannot return to Kosovo. The Kosovo government did not comment on Jevtic’s remarks, but they were refuted by the UNHCR Office in Kosovo. The latter told the paper in a written reply: “UNHCR estimates that there are around 89,480 displaced persons from Kosovo (from the 1999 conflict) in countries of the region and who still have shelter needs and are awaiting solutions … Around 72,000 of them are in Serbia, 729 in Montenegro and 394 in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. It is believed there are 16,357 displaced persons in Kosovo”.

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