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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**EU to start accession talks with FYROM, Albania, pending reforms progress (*media*)**

The European Union will start accession negotiations with Macedonia and Albania, pending progress on reforms. Some member states have expressed concern over corruption and the rule of law in the two countries. The deal was confirmed to German news agency DPA by diplomatic sources after talks on Tuesday among the bloc’s European affairs ministers. Some member states expressed concerns about corruption and the rule of law in the two EU hopefuls. Others have pushed to bring the six Western Balkan countries into the EU fold to bolster the bloc’s influence in the region. ***Koha Ditore*** reports on its front page that a conditional date for the start of membership talks was the compromise that EU ministers reached on Tuesday. The paper notes that France and the Netherlands were strongly against the accession talks, while Germany supported the start of negotiations. Link to the Council’s conclusions: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/35863/st10555-en18.pdf>

**Veseli: Communication with EU visas liberalization should increase (*Epoka*)**

The President of the Assembly of Kosovo Kadri Veseli expressed gratitude to the European Union’s institutions and Euro-deputies for the major support in the process of visa liberalization for Kosovo people. He took to Facebook to write that Kosovo institutions should not stop their work until fulfillment of the basic and deserved right of moving freely in Europe. “We have started an initiative which found support of the institutions of the country and EU member states. Kosovo has fulfilled all the criteria for liberalization of visas, however our entire obligation does not end here. During these determinan months, we should continue to fulfill our European agenda, while communication with EU institutions and every other mechanism with impact in this process should increase,” Veseli wrote.

**Hoxha denies reports that Brussels will send new visa mission to Kosovo (*Express*)**

Kosovo’s Minister for European Integration, Dhurata Hoxha, denied reports in some media according to which Brussels will send a new mission to Kosovo on the implementation of visa liberalization criteria. Hoxha also said that it was a matter of days before the European Commission comes out with a positive recommendation for visa liberalization for Kosovo. “Based on our official meetings and information, but also through unofficial channels, there was no mention of another fact-finding mission. There is also no mention of additional requirements for Kosovo,” Hoxha told the news website on Tuesday. “The latest conclusions of the Council pave way to the European Commission making a recommendation for visa liberalization for Kosovo”.

**CE and EP call on EU to liberalise visas for Kosovo (*Zeri*)**

A group of Euro-deputies who have been directly involved in reporting for the Western Balkans, has sent an open letter to the leaders and government of the EU member countries as well as to President of the European Council Donald Tusk. Tanja Fajon, Knut Fleckenstein, Eduard Kukan, Monica Macovei, David Martin, Alojz Peterle, Tonino Picula, Cristian Dan Preda, Igor Šoltes, Charles Tannock, Ivo Vajgl, urged the European leaders to demonstrate their clear commitment to the European perspective of the whole region, agreeing upon the opening of accession negotiations with Skopje and Tirana at the upcoming European Council on June 28th and 29th. “In the ongoing accession negotiations with Montenegro and Serbia, new chapters should be opened. Visa liberalisation for Kosovo should be implemented. The reform efforts of Bosnia-Herzegovina should be rewarded, depending on the outcome and aftermath of the general elections on October 7th. The EU must remain a reliable partner because the conditions for steps ahead have been fulfilled, as the European Commission and the European Parliament pointed out,” they wrote.

**Haradinaj: Thaci should report to the Assembly on dialogue (*Zeri*)**

The Prime Minister of Kosovo Ramush Haradinaj said on Tuesday at the Kosovo government meeting that it would have been good if Kosovo’s President Hashim Thaci, reported at the Assembly on the flow of the dialogue with Serbia held in Brussels. “Dialogue is the most sensitive issue now. It would have been good to create a protocol for communication with the institutions which would have been sustainable. The president usually does not report to the Assembly about ordinary cases, but it would have been good if he did this when dialogue is concerned,” Haradinaj said. According to him, it necessary for Kosovo political parties to have a communication instrument and know the truth about dialogue.

**Thaci discusses with Stoltenberg creation of army (*Zeri*)**

The President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci had a telephone conversation with the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. Thaci reportedly said that Kosovo will create its army in coordination with its allies. “We discussed about the necessity of moving forward on finalizing the process of transformation of Kosovo Security Force into an armed, multi-ethnic and professional army,” Thaci wrote on his Facebook account.

**A speedy agreement would favor Serbia (*Zeri*)**

Reach of an agreement between Kosovo and Serbia within a few months, is assessed to be in favor of Serbia, as it enables its moving forward toward EU membership. Opposition political parties and civil society claim that Kosovo should not continue with the final phase of the dialogue without the reach of internal consensus. Serbian media reported on Tuesday that the EU has let Serbia know that reach of a legally binding agreement with Kosovo is determinant in Serbia’s path toward Eu integration.

**Tahiri: We do not fear vote of confidence (*Epoka*)**

Member of the leadership of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), Abelard Tahiri told the paper that the government is functioning without any problem and that there is no reason to think that it will not end its mandate. He said the governing cabinet is functioning as a single body, with serious approach toward healthcare, social welfare, rule of law, Euro-Atlantic integration as well as economic development. He said there is no reason for the governing coalition to fear vote of confidence or other opposition initiatives, adding that government benefits from a productive opposition.

**LDK to hold final roundtable of political parties (*Telegrafi*)**

Avdullah Hoti, caucus of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), said on Tuesday that his political party will soon hold the final roundtable that will conclude the cycle of discussions among the political parties in Kosovo. He added that there is no need to continue further with the roundtables. “The subject will be conclusion of the open discussion initiated at the first roundtable: setting the date of new elections in order to pull the country out of institutional crisis and agreement on reforms and actions that should happen in the meantime,” Hoti said.

**O’Connell: Encouraging to see Minister describe Zharku case as shameful (*media*)**

British Ambassador to Kosovo, Ruairi O’Conell, said on Tuesday that it was encouraging to see Kosovo’s Minister of Justice, Abelard Tahiri, describing the case of Xhabir Zharku as shameful. O’Connell wrote in a Facebook post: “the citizens of Kosovo deserve action to stop any repeat. We are ready to help. A good first step would be to remove the law that allows convicted criminals to evade their punishment. This is a test for Kosovo commitment to fight criminality in politics”. Zharku, former mayor of Kacanik, was sentenced to three years in prison by a Kosovo court but evaded justice by fleeing to Sweden, and then returned after the statute of limitations expired.

**Investigations into Ivanovic case point to criminal groups in the north (*Koha*)**

According to investigations conducted so far by Kosovo’s Special Prosecution, perpetrators that stand behind the assassination of Kosovo Serb politician Oliver Ivanovic are not members of the Albanian community, the paper reports on page five. Unnamed sources from judicial institutions told the paper on Tuesday that doubts are focused on Serb criminal groups in Mitrovica North but there are no specific individual suspects yet. The prosecution has interviewed many witnesses, but according to sources, no important information was provided that could help resolve the case. “Investigations are mainly oriented toward criminal groups in the northern part of Kosovo. The same people are believed to be linked to powerful people in Kosovo and Serbia,” the source said. Pristina-based news website ***Gazeta Express*** quotes Syle Hoxha, a prosecutor with the Special Prosecution of Kosovo, as saying that investigations are ongoing but that he is almost certain that the perpetrators of the crime are not Albanians and pointed to criminal groups operating in the north.

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