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**Thaci: It is high time for Kosovo citizens to be free from isolation (*media*)**

Kosovo President Hashim Thaci said during a lecture at the European Council on Foreign Relations in Paris that the European Union should do more to support the European perspective of the Western Balkans. “The European Union General Affairs Council has just published the conclusions on the Western Balkans. I have always called for and welcomed the EU’s increased attention to enlargement with Western Balkan countries. Despite many challenges the EU is facing, I congratulate EU member states for reaching positive conclusions and for giving their orange signal for opening negotiations with two other states in the Western Balkans: Albania and Macedonia in June next year. The more the region progresses towards the EU, the better it is for all of us, because it simply means more stability, sustainable peace, neighborly cooperation, increased foreign investments and greater prosperity,” Thaci said. He further argued that the EU should use the momentum in the Western Balkans to bring the region closer. “About 20 years after the end of the wars in the Western Balkans, all our states are making concrete progress towards EU membership”, he said. Thaci also talked about dialogue on normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, led by EU High Representative, Federica Mogherini. “On Sunday in Brussels, we held the first meeting within the final stage at the highest political level. Of course, these meetings are very difficult as the two countries involved in this dialogue and their representatives at the negotiating table, on our shoulders carry the bitter and bloody heritage of our one century-long history. The wounds of this century-long conflict have yet to be healed and I am sure it will take a long time for this to happen. But time is always precious. Despite the bitter past, we have no time to lose. We have to be responsible towards our state interests, but above all we must give our people what they deserve and demand from us. What do the citizens of the two respective countries expect? Peace, reconciliation, good neighborly relations, economic development and prosperity. And of course, a European perspective,” Thaci said.

**US calls on political spectrum to unite on dialogue with Serbia (*Koha*)**

The United States Ambassador in Kosovo, Greg Delawie, has supported efforts aimed at uniting Kosovo’s political landscape for the final part of dialogue with Serbia. Representatives of political parties have so far failed to reach consensus for the process. Delawie had separate meetings with representatives of institutions and leaders of parliamentary parties as part of efforts to unite the political landscape. “2018 is the year of dialogue,” the US Embassy told the paper. “It is paramount for Kosovo’s society and all political actors to unite and prepare for this important step that will guarantee Kosovo’s future”. Citing sources in the Assembly, the paper reports that a deal is now possible following Delawie’s involvement. The same sources said that Delawie’s initiative is to establish a broad-based team that will represent Kosovo in the negotiations and that the team will be mandated by the Assembly.

**Hoxha: We expect a positive recommendation by EC on visas (*Epoka*)**

Kosovo’s Minister for European Integration, Dhurata Hoxha, told the paper on Wednesday that Kosovo has met all the visa liberalization requirements. “Kosovo had a visa liberalization roadmap since 2012 and we had 95 criteria, more than any other country in the region. Our institutions have proved their commitment and I believe that by ratifying the border demarcation [with Montenegro] we met all the requirements. We have also made progress in the fight against organized crime and corruption, and we will continue to work on this even after visa liberalization,” she said. Hoxha also said Kosovo deserves a positive recommendation by the European Commission on visa liberalization.

**Arifi: ASMM management team meetings disappointing (*Koha*)**

The Pristina-based TV station reported on Wednesday that the report submitted by the management team for drafting the statute of the Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities is far from the expectations of the Kosovo government. The report, which was submitted only in Serbian and in Cyrillic, was sent back by the Office of the Prime Minister to be translated into other official languages. Avni Arifi, chairman of the implementing committee for drafting the statute, told ***KTV***: “I received minutes of the meeting that the Managerial Team had with some groups of interest. According to the Managerial Team, views of those groups will be included in draft of the statute. For example, they had one meeting with health staff, with education staff, and with education experts of north municipalities. The trend from those reports is not very promising. I hope that when they start producing the draft, when they send us the draft, it will reflect something else; otherwise, the trend is not encouraging”.

**Pacolli: Liberia will open embassy in Pristina (*Zeri*)**

Kosovo’s Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Behgjet Pacolli, rejected claims by Serbian authorities that Liberia has retracted its recognition of Kosovo’s independence. Pacolli met today with Liberian President, George Weah, and said the meeting reconfirmed the friendly relations between Liberia and Kosovo. Pacolli also said that Liberia will soon open an embassy in Kosovo.

**Serbian List expresses concern over security situation in Kosovo (*media*)**

Serbian List MP Igor Simic said on Wednesday that the current security situation in Kosovo is concerning. Simic welcomed the dialogue in Brussels but criticized the Kosovo government for not accepting the document that was written only in Serbian and Cyrillic. “Whenever there is mention of an agreement in Brussels which would bring peace and security for all living in Kosovo, some informal centers in Pristina oppose this and it all results in attacks against defenseless Serbs,” Simic said. Asked if the statute for the Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities is at a final stage, Simic said the statute is being drafted and that the deadline is August 4.

**Vucic’s “invasion of the north” remarks worsen Kosovo-Serbia relations (*media*)**

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic on Wednesday again mentioned the “eventual invasion of the north by Kosovo”. He said that Serbia needs to have a policy that is far more responsible than the policies it had in the 1990s. “The question is: what if during summer someone tries to invade northern Kosovo? What will be our response? Will it be a military response or will there be expulsion actions as in Croatia,” Vucic said. Political commentators in Kosovo and Serbia claim that Vucic’s statement can worsen relations between the two countries. Sonja Biserko, head of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, said that Vucic’s remarks could lead to increased problems. “At a time when a decision is expected, Vucic is making radical statements about Kosovo. This is creating a hostile position toward the people of Kosovo,” she added. Fatmir Sheholli, a political analyst from Kosovo, said recent statements by Vucic and Djuric are threatening the normalization of relations between Pristina and Belgrade. Sheholli also warned that there are different criminal groups in the northern part of Kosovo that can destabilize the situation. “Kosovo needs to deal with these groups,” he said.

**Serbian Defense Minister denied entry into Kosovo (*media*)**

Most online media report that Kosovo authorities have banned Serbian Defense Minister Aleksandar Vulin from entering Kosovo on Thursday, because of his nationalistic remarks about Kosovo. An advisor to Kosovo’s Foreign Minister confirmed the decision. The Serbian government’s office for Kosovo reacted to the decision saying that Kosovo and the European facilitators of dialogue in Brussels are responsible for this. “The decision was made to humiliate Serbia,” the office said in their reaction.

**The forgotten Special Court (*Zeri*)**

Although it was formed in 2015 and it became operational last year, the Special Court, which will address war crimes allegations in Kosovo, has yet to file its first war crimes indictments, the paper reports. Special Court representatives told the paper that the specialist chambers are fully operational since July last year and that they are doing their work, but they could not give any on when the first indictments could be raised. Representatives of political parties meanwhile have expressed skepticism that the indictments could be raised this year and some of them even argue that the decision to establish the special court was politically-motivated and that it harmed Kosovo.