

Main Stories 10 July 2018

* **Another blow to visa liberalization process (*Koha*)**
* **Hahn: We will keep our promise, decision on visas before summer (*Koha*)**
* **Thaci: Avramopoulos confirmed good news on visas soon (*media*)**
* **Thaci meets Medvedev (media)**
* **Vucic and Thaci had a short discussion in Ankara (RTK)**
* **Pacolli: It is time for final agreement between Kosovo and Serbia (*Epoka*)**
* **Concerns raised over delay of visa liberalisation recommendation (*Zeri*)**
* **Thaci: Resignations of Serb KSF members, organised (*RFE*)**
* **Withdrawal of Serbs from KSF, Serbia’s destabilizing scenario (*Koha*)**
* **KSF Commander: Serbs’ withdrawal doesn’t affect KSF transformation (*Epoka*)**
* **Veseli: Let Mustafa take the lead of dialogue with Serbia (Zeri)**
* **Haradinaj seeks UK’s support for Kosovo army (*Zeri*)**
* **Kurti: “Pseudo opposition” keeping the government alive (*Zeri*)**
* **Gashi: Terrorism and extremism, main security threats (Epoka)**
* **Cohu opposes Hoxha’s selection as new Constitutional Court member (*Zeri*)**
* **Trepca miners enter general strike (*Kosova Sot/RFE*)**
* **Reporter investigating Ivanovic assassination, brutally beaten (*Indeksonline*)**

**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**Another blow to visa liberalization process (*Koha*)**

The paper reports on its front page that the European Parliament’s Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs was scheduled to vote today on giving rapporteur Tanja Fajon the mandate to negotiate visa liberalization for Kosovo. This would have been the first step in the procedure and the last opportunity for this to happen before the summer break. The voting however was removed from the agenda and was left for autumn, as the European Commission has not confirmed that Kosovo has met all the requirements. The paper’s correspondent in Brussels notes that some diplomats even believe that the Commission has intentionally delayed the process making it impossible for the Parliament to initiate the procedure.

**Hahn: We will keep our promise, decision on visas before summer (*Koha*)**

The EU Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn, told ***KTV*** before the start of the EU – Western Balkans Summit in London that a decision on visa liberalization for Kosovo will be made soon. “We will keep our promise and the decision will be made before summer leave,” Hahn was quoted as saying. His statement was welcomed by Kosovo’s Foreign Minister, Behgjet Pacolli, who said that Kosovo will get visa liberalization before the end of the year.

**Thaci: Avramopoulos confirmed good news on visas soon (*media*)**

Kosovo President, Hashim Thaci, said on Monday that the European Commissioner for Migration and Home affairs, Dimitris Avramopoulos, confirmed to him that there will soon be good news for visa liberalization for Kosovo. Thaci said in a Facebook post that Kosovars deserve to travel without visas in the Schengen region. “The EU Commissioner for Migration and Home Affairs, confirmed to me that the Republic of Kosovo and its citizens rightfully expect good news for visa liberalization and that they won’t be late … The citizens of Kosovo are anxiously waiting for the end of this process and freedom of movement in the Schengen zone. Kosovo deserves to become part of mobility in Europe,” Thaci wrote.

**Thaci meets Medvedev (media)**

The President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci met with Russia’s Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, in Ankara, Turkey. “In the margins of the Presidential Inauguration of Recep Taiyp Erdogan, I had a brief meeting with PM Medvedev, Russia. I asked him for our countries to start interaction while we both agreed that a possible agreement between Kosovo and Serbia will bring lasting peace in the Western Balkans,” Thaci wrote on his Twitter account. Kosovo Ambassador to the United States of America, Vlora Citaku assessed the meeting as historical. “Now this is news. For the first time, Kosovo President and Russian Prime Minister under the same roof, having a chat in Ankara today,” Citaku wrote on her Twitter account.

**Vucic and Thaci had a short discussion in Ankara (RTK)**

The President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic, confirmed his meeting with the President of Kosovo, Hashim Thaci, where both of them are participating on inauguration of the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. “I discussed shortly with him, being that there were too many people, and difficult discussions await us in Brussels again,” Vucic said. He added that the date of the resumption of the dialogue is not known yet. Asked if a final agreement between Kosovo and Serbia will be reached, Vucic said “I have said it several times that I am not sure. We will try to do our best,” Vucic said.

**Pacolli: It is time for final agreement between Kosovo and Serbia (*Epoka*)**

Kosovo’s Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Behgjet Pacolli said on Monday at the London Summit session that the Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia has brought positive progress and results, however he added, “it is time to talk about a final agreement, from which both countries could benefit”. According to Kosovo’s Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Pacolli presented at the Summit priorities and achievements of the government of Kosovo and valued highly contribution of the Western Balkans countries on the Berlin Process, for acceleration of creating infrastructural conditions for economic development as well as further building of peace in the region through constructive cooperation.

**Concerns raised over delay of visa liberalisation recommendation (*Zeri*)**

Although Kosovo institutional leaders had vowed that the European Commission recommendation on visa liberalisation would be announced end of June or first week of July this has not happened yet, the paper writes on front page. It recalls that two months have passed since the EC experts carried out a fact-finding mission in Kosovo to determine how far the final visa liberalisation condition has been implemented and, according to the EC, their assessment is still ongoing. Experts have meanwhile expressed concern over the delays saying this is not good news for Kosovo. “The more it gets postponed, the worse it is,” said Naim Rashiti from the Balkans Research Policy Group based in Pristina.

**Thaci: Resignations of Serb KSF members, organised (*RFE*)**

President of Kosovo, Hashim Thaci, said that talks and consultations are underway with Serb members of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) after recent resignations of a number of them thought to comes as a result of pressure from Belgrade authorities. Thaci said it was clear the resignations were part of an organised plan. However, Thaci said he could not say at this time with certainty that there is a clear political motive behind this but added that authorities and senior KSF officials are listening to opinions of each and every Serb KSF member and are emphasizing the importance of them continuing their work with KSF. “At the end of the day, Kosovo is home to all its citizens. But I can say one thing that no one in Kosovo or outside of it can prevent the right of Kosovo as an independent and sovereign country to have its army. This is already a done deal,” Thaci said.  He noted that Kosovo army will be established in partnership and coordination with NATO, the US, and other international allies. “Kosovo Armed Forces will be a multiethnic army with NATO standards, inclusive, in the service of peace and stability. It will be an army with a firm goal and vision for NATO membership. It will be a defence army and naturally keen on participating in international peacekeeping missions. It will convey the message of peace and under no circumstances a threat for anyone.” Thaci said he expects a final agreement with Serbia to help both parties but underlined that Kosovo’s future is not related to that of Serbia.

**Withdrawal of Serbs from KSF, Serbia’s destabilizing scenario (*Koha*)**

The paper reports in one of its front-page stories on the withdrawal of Serb members from the Kosovo Security Force (KSF). Sources close to the KSF told the paper on Monday that all Serb members have received orders from Belgrade to leave the force. The same sources said that Belgrade’s aim is to include a special military battalion within the Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities. Kosovo government officials acknowledged on Monday that Serbs were leaving the KSF due to pressure from Belgrade. The Office of Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj told the paper that “dozens of Kosovo Serbs are not without work and without any income for themselves and their families due to Belgrade’s nationalistic policies. Instead of encouraging Kosovo Serbs to integrate in public and institutional life in Kosovo, Belgrade is putting political objectives before human dignity and the well-being of Serb citizens in Kosovo”.

**KSF Commander: Serbs’ withdrawal doesn’t affect KSF transformation (*Epoka*)**

Kosovo Security Force (KSF) Commander, Rrahman Rama, in a front-page interview to the paper, expressed concern over the withdrawal of over 40 Serb members from the KSF. Rama however said that this would not affect the transformation of the KSF into the Kosovo Armed Forces and that new Serb members will soon join the force. Rama also said that the KSF would continue to be an all-inclusive force and ready to carry out its duties.

**Veseli: Let Mustafa take the lead of dialogue with Serbia (Zeri)**

Kosovo Assembly Speaker, Kadri Veseli, has called on opposition parties to become part of the dialogue for normalisation of relations with Serbia saying that anytime Kosovo political spectrum acted in a unified way the outcome was better. He even suggested Isa Mustafa, leader of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), take the lead of the process adding that grudges should be left aside at this important time for Kosovo. “Instead of focusing on the substantial aspect of how to deal with Serbia, how to get our partners to our side… we are preoccupied with who will be the first,” Veseli said.

**Haradinaj seeks UK’s support for Kosovo army (*Zeri*)**

In London for the EU-Western Balkans summit, Prime Minister of Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj, met UK’s Armed Forces Minister, Mark Lancaster, and urged the country to support transformation of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) into a Kosovo army. In a Facebook post, Haradinaj said Kosovo remains determined on its path to NATO and EU membership and that participation of the KSF in peacekeeping operations as part of British troops was also a topic discussed in the meeting with Minister Lancaster.

**Kurti: “Pseudo opposition” keeping the government alive (*Zeri*)**

In a two-page interview with the paper, Vetevendosje leader Albin Kurti said that although the current government of Kosovo led by Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj is very weak, there are problems with opposition. “Some of them are afraid to go to elections because they will not pass the threshold and remain without mandates and economic and social benefits of being MPs. Some want to wait for this government to bring to life the ‘Zajednica’[Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities], they want Thaci to finish the dialogue with Serbia because they fear these issues if they come to power,” Kurti said. Asked to comment on recent Kosovo Democratic Institute (KDI) poll which ranked Vetevendosje as the third-largest political force, Kurti said there are many people who don’t truthfully answer poll questions for fear of repercussions. “We are ready for elections, we will be the first, we will fare better than in June 2017,” he declared.

**Gashi: Terrorism and extremism, main security threats (Epoka)**

Kosovo’s Minister of Interior Bejtush Gashi, spoke at the London Summit about the efforts of Kosovo in the war against terrorism and violent extremism. He stressed that these two matters continue to be the main security threat, not only for lives and properties but democratic values and manner of living of the society as well. “Kosovo government and its specialized institutions will continue to combat this major evil of humanity until the end,” Gashi said.

**Cohu opposes Hoxha’s selection as new Constitutional Court member (*Zeri*)**

Anti-corruption NGO, Cohu, has called on President of Kosovo, Hashim Thaci, not to decree Safet Hoxha as one of the new members of the Constitutional Court voted last week by the Assembly of Kosovo. Cohu said Hoxha was politically affiliated with the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) after serving as party’s municipal councilor in Suhareka and also taking part in party’s rallies. Cohu said candidates like Hoxha do not meet the required criteria of integrity and independence and should therefore not be decreed to the post.

**Trepca miners enter general strike (*Kosova Sot/RFE*)**

Trepca miners have announced a general strike after they say their demands were not met by Kosovo institutions. The miners are demanding all mine’s zones of interest be included in the draft statute for the mining complex, recognition of work experience, health insurance, and a higher pension. Head of Trepca trade union, Shyqri Sadiku, told RFE that the government has time until Monday to meet the miners’ demands.

**Reporter investigating Ivanovic assassination, brutally beaten (*Indeksonline*)**

The news website reports that Stefan Cvetkovic, a reporter who is investigating the assassination of Kosovo Serb politician Oliver Ivanovic, was brutally beaten in downtown Belgrade on Monday. Cvetkovic wrote in a Facebook post that he is now safe and no longer in Serbia. “The force I am up against is very strong … You can kill me, but you cannot kill the truth,” Cvetkovic wrote. ***Indeksonline*** also notes that Cvetkovic recently gave a statement to Kosovo’s authorities on his investigations into the Ivanovic assassination.

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