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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**Thaci: No partition or exchange of territories (*media*)**

All media cover Kosovo President Hashim Thaci’s press conference in Pristina on Wednesday. Thaci said he was not optimistic that an agreement with Serbia will be reached. He spoke at the press conference also about last weekend’s speculation for turbulence in the north. According to him, presented fake news showed how far some are from the reality. “The main issue remains the dialogue between Kosovo state and Serbia. I have said it several times that it is a difficult but a necessary process. Possibilities to reach an agreement with Serbia are minimal. But we should make maximal efforts to use every opportunity in order to reach a historic agreement through dialogue led by the EU and the U.S.,” Thaci said. “I am committed to reach an agreement and after the request of the representatives of Presevo, I have proposed correction of the border with Serbia, as the only possibility to legitimize requests of Albanians there. This does not mean division for Kosovo, and neither autonomy for Serbs. Correction of borders means complete unification of Presevo Valley, Mdvegje and Bujanovc, which must be e regular, transparent process. If the agreement between Kosovo and Serbia is reached, then no one will be against the dialogue. The time of war has ended, there will be no division, exchange or autonomy. There will be only correction if there is accordance by both sides. According to him, the request of Presevo Valley leaders is institutionalized, however it will be presented at the table of discussions in Brussels. “This momentum should not be lost, is not used properly, Valley citizens are anyways coming to Kosovo, around 12 thousand people already left from there. Albanians there should enjoy all the rights as the other Albanians. This does not bring fear, but new possibilities. Furthermore, it will be too late if this opportunity is lost. 91 percent of Kosovo citizens support the idea of unification the country with the Valley, therefore politics should only respect the will of the citizens,” Thaci said. Asked if he has changed his position on Kosovo borders, Thaci said the meeting with Presevo leaders has changed his mind. “After the meeting with the leaders of the Valley, I have changed, and their request obliges me to institutionalize it, excluding any possibility of division, exchange or some kind of autonomy,” Thaci responded. Thaci said that without normalization of relations, neither Kosovo nor Serbia can move towards membership. “If dialogue happens to fail due to our fault, Kosovo could be transformed to some northern Cyprus, Ossetia or Nagorno Karabakh. The EU and U.S. are against this frozen situation, therefore everyone in Kosovo and Serbia should work for a balanced agreement,” Thaci said. According to him, this is what Kosovo leaders were told in Brussels by Kosovo friends. During this press conference, Thaci said he is ready to pass leadership of the discussions in Brussels to the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK). “I am ready for Mr. Hoti to lead the discussions between Kosovo and Serbia. All our potentials will be Hoti’s as chief negotiator, the presidency and majority of political parties, we will all be on his support,” Thaci said. During today’s press conference, Thaci expressed appreciation to all security institutions for preventing incidents and situations which would have a been a bad message from Kosovo to the World. He said Kosovo will fulfill all Brussels agreements, including the one on Association, but by respecting the Constitution of Kosovo.

**Haradinaj says borders cannot be made with words (*media*)**

***Koha Ditore*** reports on its front page that Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj and President Hashim Thaci have diametrically opposite stances on the idea for border changes. Haradinaj said during a visit to Vlora, Albania, on Wednesday that he considers the issue of “border adjustment” to be unacceptable and that borders cannot be moved with words but only with war. “The people of the Balkans were misfortunate to have experienced tragic wars and today’s reality is a result of those wars. We need to consolidate our achievements, Albania, Kosovo, wherever there are Albanians. This is why I find it unacceptable to open the issue of borders,” Haradinaj said.

***Koha Group* terminates communication with Thaci over his remarks (*Koha*)**

***Koha Ditore*** notes on its front page that when asked how he would react if Serbian President Vucic uses the same argument for northern Kosovo that Thaci is using for Presevo Valley, President Thaci insulted ***Koha***’s reporter by saying “I don’t speak of behalf of Vucic as you and your media do”. ***Koha Group*** later issued a reaction saying they will “terminate any official communication with the President and his Office, as long as he does not withdraw the words that he publicly addressed to us, and publicly apologises to us for the allegation that we speak on behalf of Vucic”. “Koha Group media will cover the President’s agenda and will publish reports from those events, whenever they consider that it is in the interest of the public and of the truth; however, they will not publish interviews, comments, statements to other media and social networks, as long as he does not withdraw his words against the Koha Group media,” the statement notes. The Association of Journalists of Kosovo too issued a press release criticizing Thaci for his remarks. “The Association of Journalists of Kosovo finds the labelling and the discourse that the President used against the reporter to be unacceptable and it constitutes a threat to the professional integrity of the work of reporters and the media. The AJK calls on President Thaci not to use accusations and unfounded labelling against reporters and the media that they represent. The AJK calls on President Thaci to distance himself from a lynching language and to show maturity and respect the work of reporters,” the press release noted.

**Hoti certain Thaci will not lead dialogue with Serbia (*Zeri*)**

Head of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) parliamentary group, Avdullah Hoti, said he was convinced President Hashim Thaci will not be able to lead talks with Serbia as he has no mandate to do so. “Citizens of Kosovo will decide through free elections who will lead dialogue with Serbia. One thing is for sure and that is that this person will not be Thaci,” Hoti wrote on Facebook. He also said Thaci’s statements regarding Kosovo borders are unconstitutional. “Instead of him being the safeguard of the Republic of Kosovo constitutional order, he is undermining it on daily basis,” Hoti said.

**Germany supports EU efforts on Kosovo-Serbia dialogue (*Bota Sot*)**

Following the call to German Chancellor Angela Merkel by the Kosovo Foreign Minister Behgjet Pacolli to get directly involved in the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, Bota Sot has obtained a written response from the German Federal Government saying that reconciliation of former Yugoslav countries was a particular concern for Chancellor Merkel and the government and that this was the reason why she initiated the Berlin Process. The German Government also said it supports EU efforts and particularly those of the EU High Representative Federica Mogherini to help the parties reach agreement for normalisation of relations.

**Russia comments on Kosovo – Serbia border issue (*Koha*)**

The Russian Embassy in Tirana issued a reaction on Tuesday on the issue of “border changes” in which it included an earlier press release issued by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The reaction notes that “all issues pertaining to Kosovo’s final status must be resolved based on UN Security Council Resolution 1244. In this respect, Belgrade and Pristina have agreed to direct dialogue brokered by the European Union. Russia continuously supports the process of negotiations, it insists on the implementation of all agreements reached and will never try to discuss the issue behind the backs of the parties involved. We call on the media community to refrain from flagrant speculations about the existence of secret deals between Moscow and Washington. No one should play with an extremely dangerous tendency of ruining Russian – American relations, from which international security depends, and no one should incite tensions in a region as complicated as the Balkans”.

**Croatia: Partition would bring instability to the region (*Gazeta Express*)**

The Croatian Embassy said on Wednesday that eventual partition would bring instability to the region, the news website reports. “We don’t believe border changes would make the region more stable. On the contrary, this would set precedents that can create additional problems instead of solutions. Ultimately, it would also have destabilizing effects across the region … We strongly support the EU-facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia and we hope for swift progress in the process,” the statement said.

**Thaci meets former Trump advisor Steve Bannon in Pristina (*Klan Kosova*)**

Klan Kosova reports that President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci has met in Pristina former strategist to the US President Donald Trump, Steve Bannon. The two are said to have discussed a number of issues including the final stage of dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia and the options on the table to reach an agreement. Bannon was a founder of the Breitbart News, a right-wing news website and has recently set up a Brussels-based foundation Movement.

**Mustafa: No one dares to sign Valley’s remaining under Serbia (*Klan Kosova*)**

Ragmi Mustafa, leader of the Democratic Party of Albanians in Presevo Valley, said he believes that Presevo Valley can unify with Kosovo. “There is no doubt that Albanians of the Valley have received this with the greatest pleasure. We are for this option. Since Serbia is not ready to improve the issue of the Albanians to higher level, it should withdraw from both the Valley and Kosovo, while these Albanians should remain united in the Republic of Kosovo,” Mustafa said. “I have followed the German Chancellor while approaching the Berlin wall last year saying that dreams became reality. Why should this not happen to us?” asked Mustafa. “There is no hand that dares signing an agreement that leaves Albanians colonized in Serbia,” he said. “The international community does not impede reach of any agreement that resolves problems between two neighboring countries. We have two announcements of the ambassadors in Pristina and Belgrade, and we have seen this as final green light that any proposal can be put on the table of discussions,” Mustafa said.

**Bujanovac Mayor: Partial solution for Presevo Valley brings tragedy (*Zeri*)**

Mayor of Bujanovac Municipality, Shair Kamberi, said in an interview with the paper that an outcome of the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue would not be complete if it does not address the Presevo Valley issue. He pointed out however that Presevo Valley is not seeking any solution that would undermine Kosovo’s territorial integrity and nor should Kosovo give up its demands towards Serbia for the sake of Albanians in Presevo Valley. He said that if the Presevo Valley issue is not resolved completely, it will lead to a ‘humanitarian tragedy’ and will continue to generate instability in the region.

**Thaci prolongs Constitutional Court’s blockade (*Zeri*)**

The paper reports on the front page that President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci has not yet decreed five new members of the Constitutional Court elected by the Assembly on 6 July. As a result, the Court remains with no quorum and no decision-making powers, a situation it has been facing since June. Thaci is quoted to have said that the new judges will be decreed this week and that they are finalizing all necessary procedures. Asked on whether however he plans to decree the Radomir Laban who is wanted by Serbian authorities on criminal charges and Safet Hoxha who was a member of Thaci’s previous party, the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), Thaci said he has not yet received names of all proposed judges but noted that in the past, presidents of Kosovo did not overturn Assembly’s decisions.

**Kosovo academic Islami banned from entering Serbia (*dailies*)**

Papers report that former head of Kosovo’s Academy of Arts and Science, Hivzi Islami, was not allowed to enter Serbia through the boundary line of Mucibabe/Buhic. Islami’s family members, travelling with him, were allowed to pass but not Islami who is originally from the village of Letovice, Bujanovac municipality. Deputy Prime Minister of Kosovo, Enver Hoxhaj, condemned the actions of Serbian authorities saying they were part of ‘systematic repression’ against Albanians living in Serbia.

**Foreign Ministry reacts to Serbia’s banning entrance to Islami (*RTK*)**

Kosovo’s Foreign Ministry considers a low move the action of Serbian authorities to ban entrance to former head of Kosovo’s Academy of Science and Arts and member of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts, Hivzi Islami, to visit his family in Presevo. “Such actions of dividing Academic Islami from the rest of the family, re-awaken sad memories of the dark history of the policies of our northern neighbor - Serbia and strengthen the conviction for the apparent lack of political will to implement the agreements reached between the two states in Brussels and the expressed institutional commitment to full normalization between our two countries,” is written in the communique of the Foreign Ministry, which considers that the action is in contradiction with any human value and serious violation of the freedom of movement, as a basic European principle.

**Women NGOs accuse institutions of failing to protect women and children (*media*)**

Kosovo Women’s Network (KWN) has expressed outrage at the recent murder of a mother and daughter by the husband/father in the village of Brekoc, Gjakova/Djakovica municipality. In a statement, women NGOs said they were deeply concerned at the lack of interest on the part of relevant institutions regarding the lives of women and girls in Kosovo and stated that if proper measures had been taken against the perpetrator, “we would not be writing this statement today and a woman and a child would still be living”. Prior to the murder, the victim had reported to the police that she received death threats from her estranged husband, but the police said they were unable to locate the suspect. Chief prosecutor for Gjakova/Djakovica told Kallxo.com that the suspect was known to authorities and that he had been previously indicted on domestic violence charges. Online media are reporting that the KWN will organize a protest in Gjakova on Monday with the motto “Stop killing daughters and wives”.

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