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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**Thaci agrees with Merkel, seeks recognition from 5 EU countries (*RTK*)**

Kosovo President Hashim Thaci hailed the statement of the German Chancellor for inviolability of the borders in Western Balkans. “I salute the statement by Chancellor Merkel on the inviolability of borders in the Western Balkans. All that remains to be done is for majority of EU members to convince 5 of the EU non-recognizers and Serbia to recognise Kosovo within these borders. The sooner this happens the better it will be for the region,” Thaci wrote on his Twitter account.

**Thaci: Referendum on final agreement with Serbia (*RTK*)**

Kosovo President Hashim Thaci said in an interview to ***RTK*** that the people of Kosovo will have the final say on the agreement between Kosovo and Serbia. “I will work hard that if there is no agreement at the Assembly of Kosovo, the final say to be that of the citizens of Kosovo, with their will through referendum. The will of the citizens closes every debate. This is why I am in favor of the people of Kosovo having the final say on the final agreement between Kosovo and Serbia,” Thaci said. He added that border adjustment eliminates the option of creating another Bosnia in Kosovo, the claim for “Republika Srpska” in Kosovo, for any autonomy of Serbs in Kosovo, as well as for Kosovo’s exchange or partition.

“Correction of the border between the Republic of Kosovo and that of Serbia means demarcation of 400 kilometers between Kosovo and Serbia, which in one way or another, sooner or later, will happen. Now we also have the institutionalization of the request of the leaders of Presevo Valley to join Kosovo. Therefore I think that it would have been with interest to discuss this issue and I pledged in front of them that I will raise this issue at the table of talks in Brussels. If the parties reach a joint and good-will agreement, then no one can be against a peaceful process, neither the U.S., nor the EU or NATO,” Thaci said.

**Thaci: Demarcation/correction in words and peace, far from bullets (*media*)**

Kosovo President Hashim Thaci took to Twitter on Tuesday to say that the “demarcation/correction of the 400km long border between Kosovo and Serbia will happen with dialogue, it will be written in words and in a peaceful process. Far from crazy talk about hostilities, bullets or war. Those ideas are foreign and must be rejected by all”. In an interview for the Pristina-based television channel ***T7***, British Ambassador Ruairi O’Connell said his government is categorically against the idea of President Hashim Thaci on exchange of territories. He said implementation of such an idea would constitute a precedent for other situations in the Balkans. “Borders are written with words but are changed with bullets,” O’Connell is quoted to have said.

**Hoti: LDK welcomes Merkel’s statement on “border adjustments” (*Zeri*)**

Head of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) parliamentary group, Avdullah Hoti, said his party welcomes the recent statement by the German Chancellor Angela Merkel that territorial integrity of the Western Balkans countries is inviolable. Hoti said he hoped this would make certain people in Kosovo and Serbia stop promoting the idea of border changes which he said he believed is done in a coordinated manner.

**Growing international pressure against talks on “border adjustments” (*Koha*)**

The paper reports on its front page that the most powerful countries in Europe, such as Germany, the United Kingdom and France have come out against the idea of Kosovo and Serbia Presidents, Hashim Thaci and Aleksandar Vucic, for adjustments to the Kosovo – Serbia border. These countries are concerned that the idea – which threatens to destabilize the whole region – is supported by the Trump administration in Washington. Media in the U.S. and Europe have reported on a meeting between Trump’s son-in-law, Jared Kushner, and Serbian Deputy Prime Minister, Ivica Dacic, which left open the possibility of border adjustments. Meanwhile, the U.S. has said that Kosovo and Serbia must reach a sustainable agreement that does not create instability in any of the countries or in the region. “The content of any agreement on the normalisation of the relations between Kosovo and Serbia should come from the parties themselves. We will continue to support both sides and the EU as a facilitator,” the U.S. Embassy in Pristina told the paper on Tuesday. ***Le Monde*** on Tuesday carried a special article on the issue of border adjustments calling it a dangerous game, noting that European countries are concerned about the prospect and that the British have already rejected the idea. The U.S. news website ***BuzzFeedNews*** too reported that Europeans are concerned about the approach of the Trump administration and quoted a French diplomat as saying that the idea of discussing borders is destabilizing.

**Ischinger against exchange of territories (RTK)**

Former mediator of talks between Kosovo and Serbia, Wolfgang Ischinger, rejected on Tuesday the idea of exchanging territories in the Balkans. “A view I strongly support: Angela Merkel: No Balkan border changes,” he wrote on his Twitter account, to add further that “as a former EU negotiator on the Kosovo- Serbia relationship, I happen to share the view that opening of the Pandora Box of territorial changes should be avoided.”

**OSF report on territorial exchange between Kosovo and Serbia (*Zeri*)**

The paper writes on the front page that it has obtained a copy of a report prepared by a group of Serb experts commissioned by the Open Society Foundation in Belgrade which lays out different possible options for a final agreement between Kosovo and Serbia. In this respect, the report also talks about the idea of land swap between Kosovo and Serbia whereby only the Presevo Municipality, without Bujanovac and Medvedja, would join Kosovo while its four northern municipalities would join Serbia. The authors of the report said that only 7.1% of residents in Medvedja are Albanian and therefore it joining Kosovo would not be a viable option. At the same time, Bujanovac is estimated to have around 54% Albanian population but to exchange it with Kosovo could present a political and security threat in the longer term.

**Serwer: Partition of Kosovo incites violence (*Kosova Sot*)**

In an interview with the paper, Balkans analyst Daniel Serwer reaffirmed his position against partition of Kosovo and territorial exchange with Serbia saying no EU-aspiring country needs to give part of its population through different deals. Asked on whether he notes a change in the US government’s position in Kosovo, Serwer said than an ethnically nationalist administration like the current one in the US will find it more difficult to rule out ethnically nationalist solutions such as exchange of territories in contrast to the previous liberal, democratic administrations.

**Presevo Mayor: Status of Presevo Valley must not damage Kosovo (*Koha*)**

Presevo Mayor, Shqiprim Arifi, said in an interview to the paper that Presevo Valley will not agree to division under any circumstance. “We will not agree to Medvedja remaining under Serbia and Presevo and Bujanovac joining Kosovo. We will also not agree to half of Medvedja, Bujanovac and Presevo remaining under Serbia, and for the other half to join Kosovo. Under no circumstance must a single village be divided from the entirety of the Valley. This is our position. However, there is a political party that breaks this principle. This party says that they are ready to swap a village here for a village in northern Kosovo. This does not make sense because it damages the Republic of Kosovo,” Arifi was quoted as saying.

**Delawie and PSD leaders discuss dialogue (*Zeri*)**

The US Ambassador Greg Delawie met yesterday leaders of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) – Shpend Ahmeti, Visar Ymeri, Dardan Sejdiu – and discussed the recent political developments, rule of law, and dialogue with Serbia.

**Visa liberalisation information campaign gets underway in Kosovo (*Epoka*)**

An information campaign on what visa liberalisation actually entails has been launched in Pristina yesterday. Minister of European Integration, Dhurata Hoxha, said in a Facebook post that the campaign is aimed at providing answers to three main questions: what you need to know about visa liberalisation, what is visa liberalisation, and what it is not. “We know the importance of liberalisation and we have worked hard to come to this as soon as possible,” Hoxha wrote.

**Special prosecutor resigns amid threats (*media*)**

Several media report that Elez Blakaj, a prosecutor with the Special Prosecution of Kosovo, has resigned his post two days ago. The news was confirmed by the chief prosecutor of the Special Prosecution, who also said that they don’t know the reasons behind the resignation. Citing sources in judicial institutions, ***Koha Ditore*** reports that Blakaj resigned amid threats he received during his work. “Blakaj constantly complained of receiving threats during his work. He also complained about the lack of institutional support,” the source said. The paper recalls that Blakaj investigated and filed indictments in several cases related to terrorism and recently he was investigating abuses with the lists of war veterans.

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