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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**Thaci: Border adjustment destroys Serbian dream for Kosovo partition (*Epoka*)**

Kosovo President, Hashim Thaci, said in an interview to the paper that, the adjustment of the border with Serbia will eradicate the Serbian dream for the division of Kosovo. He added that those who object this idea are political kamikazes. “Correction of the borders and inclusion of Presevo, Medvedje and Bujanovac in Kosovo, definitely eradicates the longstanding dream of Serbia’s Academy of Sciences and Arts for division of Kosovo or creation of Republika Srpska in Kosovo. It is with interest to reiterate that the entire process should be followed with complete transparency and accountability and finally, citizens through referendum will say their word and express their will,” Thaci said. He said that he would not allow anyone to block reach of the final agreement with Serbia, which according to him, assures a European future for Kosovo. Thaci called on opposition parties to be part of the dialogue as according to him, facing of arguments should happen at the table. “It is very easy to criticize and very difficult to face opponents of Kosovo. It is not easy for me either to face Vucic. It is easy to stay a spectator, but it is difficult to play. Therefore, political parties should enter the game and take responsibilities during the battle. If they do not want to do so, then at the end of this process, if we reach some kind of agreement, citizens through referendum will say if they are for or against this agreement,” Thaci said. He added that he will not allow for the Association of Serb-majority Municipalities to have executive competencies. He expressed optimism that a good ground for an agreement with Serbia will be reached in spring of the next year.

**Vetevendosje’s Kurti warns with protests against President Thaci (*media*)**

Vetevendosje leader Albin Kurti said on Wednesday that President Hashim Thaci should not make deals with Kosovo’s territory otherwise he will be dismissed through protests on the streets, several online media report. Kurti said his party will not accept any agreement signed by Thaci and his Serbian counterpart, Aleksandar Vucic, “because Thaci lacks legitimacy and is not authorized by the Assembly to represent Kosovo in talks with Serbia”.

**Ahmeti: Thaci to end ‘border adventures’ (*Zeri*)**

In an interview with the paper, leader of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) Shpend Ahmeti said he finds it unjustifiable for the Assembly of Kosovo to go on summer recess at a time when President Hashim Thaci has entered some ‘adventures’ which even he himself cannot explain in his press conferences as on one hand he talks about border adjustment and on the other he says he supports the statement of the German Chancellor Angela Merkel. He said the Assembly of Kosovo needs to take responsibility over the dialogue process with Serbia as Thaci is not authorized to negotiate on Kosovo’s behalf. “This president is going out and saying things no one in Kosovo supports,” Ahmeti said.

**Serwer: U.S. will say no to border changes (*Radio Free Europe*)**

Daniel Serwer, Balkans analyst and professor at John Hopkins University in Washington, said in an interview to ***Radio Free Europe*** that the division of Kosovo or the exchange of territories will pose a great threat to the Balkans and that it won’t be accepted by the United States of America. Serwer said Serbia always tried to divide Kosovo but that what is new is Kosovo President Hashim Thaci’s initiative to adjust the border in the eastern side. He further argued that Kosovo and Serbia have already opened the Pandora Box in the Balkans and that they should close it as soon as possible. “Without German support, the idea of border adjustments, exchange of territories, swapping lands, call it whatever you want, can simply not go forward,” Serwer said.

**Volker: Serbia’s recognition of Kosovo serves the entire Balkans (VOA, RTK)**

Kurt Volker, former U.S. representative at NATO and current U.S. Special Envoy to Ukraine, told Voice of America that the entire region including Serbia, could benefit from closing the Kosovo chapter. He called an injustice the fact that Serbia and EU member states have not recognized Kosovo as a state. “As a result, they are blocked on relations with the EU and are not completely able to benefit from the declaration of the independent state,” he said. “Serbs should move forward. In my opinion, the best thing for Serbia is integration in the EU. If Kosovo and Serbia as well as the others in the region manage to do this, we will see a much more functional region in the aspect of ethnic relations, status, economic development and politics,” Volker said.

**Kai Sauer comments on ideas for exchange of territories (*Deutsche Welle*)**

Several local media cover an interview that Kai Sauer, the Permanent Representative of Finland to the United Nations and former assistant to Kosovo Status Envoy, Martti Ahtisaari, gave to ***Deutsche Welle***.

*What has happened with the Ahtisaari Plan for Kosovo?*

I think that plan was made not only for Kosovo but for the whole region. You may very well be familiar with the Erdut plan for Croatia, the Ohrid plan for Macedonia and certainly the Dayton plan. All these plans had some flaws. They were very difficult to implement. I think the Ahtisaari plan was the best, compared to other plans in the region. The irony is that it was not accepted by the United Nations Security Council, because of one of the member states. The Ahtisaari plan was drafted carefully not only by Ahtisaari, but by several international institutions, including the Council of Europe, the Venice Commission on the constitutional aspects of the plan, the OSCE and UN on aspects related to minority rights and human rights, and so on. This was a comprehensive and politically-balanced plan, and it was supported by all members of the Security Council, except one. It is in human nature that sometimes it takes 10 to 20 years to accept something that was initially deemed unacceptable. One tries different roads, loses time and energy, fails, and then resorts to the initial idea. Some aspects of the Ahtisaari plan can be used in the future too.

*Border adjustments or exchange of territories were not part of the Ahtisaari plan. Why is this now talked about in the Balkans?*

It is true that borders have become part of the discussion. They were never part of the Ahtisaari plan and no one wanted border changes then. Discussions on border changes include sensitivities and certain risks. Neither the international community nor representatives of European institutions have raised these as possible ideas. I think we need to be very careful if we take these into ideas into consideration. What is clear is that we need to work together, the European Union, the United States of America and other stakeholders, to conclude the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia. Both countries want to become members of the European Union, but this is not going to happen without resolving this bilateral issue.

*Washington and Brussels are not making public statements. Have Brussels and Washington abandoned the previous policy of no border changes?*

I cannot answer this question. You need to ask the EU and Washington. What I have seen is that Western Balkans is back in our agendas. It’s not the way it’s supposed to be, but we should not shy away from our responsibilities, especially from the concerns of the countries involved. So when autumn comes and people come back from leave, discussions will continue and answers will probably be given.

*Are you still involved with the Western Balkans? Is there a plan for the Western Balkans?*

I follow developments in the region. I think that for several different reasons, international focus is shifting back to the Western Balkans. Many actors are involved. You must have surely noticed that many studies and articles have been published. I would take note of a study by EastWest Institute which gives several recommendations to the U.S. administration.

*Yes, I was there when the study was presented. But no one mentioned border changes there.*

Yes. Many authors and academics, who have carefully studied the situation, have expressed their reservations and want to be careful when talking about border changes. According to the studies, this is not a popular alternative.

*Do the United Nations have a plan for Kosovo?*

The UN has limited influence. The United Nations execute decisions, they are not decision-makers. Decisions are made by the member states and the UN executes them. The UN stands behind Resolution 1244 adopted in 1999. Being a taxpayer to the UN, my question is if the UN has properly used resources to implement this resolution and to maintain peacekeeping operations. For several years now, we no longer need a peacekeeping operation in Kosovo. The UN peacekeeping operation is not the model to solve Kosovo’s problems. European institutions must be able to take over this situation.

**Mirel: Partition of Kosovo presents threat to region (*Zeri*)**

Pierre Mirel, former European Commission Director General for Western Balkans, said in an interview with Skopje-based news agency ***MIA*** that a possible partition of Kosovo could have repercussions in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and the wider region. “One immediately thinks about Republika Srpska but also the Albanian community in Macedonia, the Croat cantons in Bosnia which would want to join Croatia. This however goes even further: Hungarians in Slovakia, we can imagine Russia would also use this example with Transnistria,” Mirel warned. He said he was surprised at the ‘mild’ reaction of European Commission to statements made by President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci and President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic concerning exchange of territories. “Thaci says he wants ‘minor’ adjustments but there is no such thing in this region, it is impossible. If you touch one element, the other will wish to follow suit,” Mirel said.

**Arifi: Crazy ideas in minutes of meetings on Association (*Koha*)**

The Kosovo government said on Wednesday that ideas mentioned in the minutes of meetings of the Management Team for the Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities are crazy and that they will not be included in the statute of the Association. Avni Arifi, head of the Kosovo delegation in technical talks with Serbia, told the paper on Wednesday that the requests mentioned in the minutes are unacceptable. “The content of the minutes looks more like a brainstorm by staff in relevant areas … There were good ideas tabled in those meetings, but dominating were crazy ideas on how the statute might look like,” Arifi said. “If the Management Team has created hope among those citizens that such requests can be implemented, I really feel sorry for them”. The paper recalls that among the requests mentioned in the minutes are for the Association/Community to have competencies on property, privatization, economy and education.

**Thaci reacts to special prosecutor’s resignation (*media*)**

President of Kosovo, Hashim Thaci, has strongly condemned threats against special prosecutor Elez Blakaj which led to his resignation this week. In a Facebook post, Thaci said the rule of law is the foundation of a democratic state and society. “I strongly support our justice institutions in their tireless work in strengthening the justice system which is functional, transparent, accountable, and enjoys full trust of all citizens of the country,” Thaci wrote. Justice Minister Abelard Tahiri said it was unacceptable for a prosecution to consider resignation as alternative to receiving threats. Tahiri said crime and corruption need to end once and for all. Meanwhile, ***RTV21*** reported that Blakaj is no longer in Kosovo and has fled to the US with his family.

**Delawie on prosecutor’s resignation: A sad day for rule of law in Kosovo (*RTK*)**

The U.S. Ambassador to Kosovo Greg Delawie, took to Twitter to comment on the resignation of Elez Blakaj, a prosecutor with the Special Prosecution of Kosovo. “A sad day for the Rule of Law in Kosovo when a top prosecutor feels he must resign due to threats and lack of support. Especially upsetting when he was working on a massive pension fraud case,” Delawie wrote.

**Bahtiri: River Iber/Ibar bridge to be reopened next month (*Zeri*)**

Mitrovica Mayor Agim Bahtiri said that the main bridge on River Iber/Ibar will be reopened next month and blamed the leadership of Mitrovica North for delays in bridge’s inauguration. “There are some minor works at the bridge which could be finalized as early as next week. According to EU senior officials’ agenda the project could be inaugurated sometime in September,” Bahtiri said adding that opening the bridge to traffic would facilitate communication and cooperation between communities.

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