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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**Thaci: I am against ethnic borders, but I am not naïve (*media*)**

Several local media cover an interview that Kosovo President, Hashim Thaci, gave to ***EWB***.

*European Western Balkans: How do you see the future of European integration of Kosovo? There are many who think that Kosovo is “stuck” in the EU accession process, but that might change with the normalization of relations with Serbia. What is your opinion about this?*

Kosovo is now implementing the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU, which is part of the accession process. There is a long list of reforms that we need to both adopt and implement. The Government and all institutions are working intensively to ensure credible and sustainable progress. But more needs to be done. As for the future of the EU accession, all of the Western Balkan countries have the path open but none of us will be able to join the EU family before we resolve the open bilateral issues and that would include demarcation of borders with each other. This has been made abundantly clear in various forums. For Kosovo, it means we must continue with dialogue and the reconciliation process.

*Apart from the dialogue with Serbia, what do you think are the main obstacles for Kosovo’s EU accession path and being granted visa liberalization?*

The EU accession path is a distinct and complex process. But as long as reforms are being implemented and we solve outstanding bilateral issues the road to accession will be open and we’ll conclude it successfully. Visa liberalization is separate. There, Kosovo has fulfilled all conditions. We had more conditions than anyone else in the Western Balkans. We had more complex conditions like border demarcation with Montenegro and far more rigorous documentation of the fight against organized crime. This process was not fair. Countries from Colombia to Ukraine and Moldova, let alone our neighbors in the Balkans, already enjoy visa liberalization with the Schengen zone, but life and politics as well as the EU integration process in not always fair. We were patient and we delivered. The European Commission confirmed we have delivered and now we expect the European Parliament and members states to recognize Kosovo’s immense progress and dedication. This process will take weeks and months, not years.

*Now about the dialogue. You have mentioned on several occasions the possibility of “territorial corrections” between Serbia and Kosovo, but denied the possibility of partition of Kosovo. What are “territorial corrections” if not the division of Kosovo or at least the exchange of territory?*

Kosovo must close the chapter of conflict with Serbia in a permanent and sustainable formula. Our republic is a fact in international relations. It has been recognized by 116 UN members states and it’s an equal member in many international multilateral forums, from IMF and World Bank to Venice Commission or Berlin process. Yet, membership to EU and NATO, which is a desire of 92% of the population of Kosovo, is elusive until we settle open bilateral issues. Kosovo with Serbia has many issues, from the legacy of war, like the missing and war reparations, to more contemporary issues. Some of these issues were being tackled in dialogue in Brussels but time has come for the final and legally binding settlement. I’m against ethnic borders. But I’m also not naïve. I know that Serbia prefers to drag their feet on the inevitable recognition of Kosovo. They would like to maintain status-quo, but this limbo is not possible to maintain anymore. So, we have to define this bilateral relationship, we have to define the 400km long border between two republics and we have to end with Kosovo in UN. This is why our Western partners are open to creative and progressive solutions, so we can reach this aim. I’m ready to discuss solutions with anyone to guarantee Kosovo’s cemented place and perspective as a member of Euro-Atlantic family of nations. Read full interview at: [*https://bit.ly/2wndhca*](https://bit.ly/2wndhca).

**Veseli: Kosovo will not negotiate its statehood and territorial integrity (*media*)**

Kadri Veseli, leader of the Democratic Party of Kosovo and President of the Kosovo Assembly, said on Monday that Kosovo will under no circumstance negotiate its statehood, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Veseli said in this respect, it was absurd for opposition parties to call an extraordinary assembly session to discuss the issue. “Kosovo is an independent and sovereign state and as such it takes part in the dialogue with Serbia. Kosovo does not negotiate its statehood, sovereignty and territorial integrity. State institutions remain committed to achieving our objectives for membership of UN, NATO and EU. Under no circumstance, will we become part of dark scenarios, false causes and sessions that incite tensions and panic,” Veseli said.

**Merkel, Trump discuss Western Balkans (*Koha*)**

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and U.S. President Donald Trump discussed the situation in the Western Balkans over the phone on Monday, a spokesman for Merkel told media, without providing further detail. The news website reports that Merkel said recently that she is against border changes in the Western Balkans. Meanwhile, John Bolton, the U.S. National-Security Advisor, said the U.S. would not mind the exchange of territories between Kosovo and Serbia if the two countries agree on this.

**Kocijancic: Kosovo, Serbia should be given space to reach agreement (*RTK*)**

The European Commission assesses that Kosovo and Serbia should be given space to agree on the content of the agreement for normalization of relations, said Maja Kocijancic Spokesperson for EU Foreign Affairs and Security Policy at a press conference in Brussels. Kocijancic said the EU as mediator of the dialogue, cannot comment possible elements of the agreement, however it will continue to work in an intensive manner with both parties, in order to reach a comprehensive and sustainable agreement which will be supported by the international community. Kocijancic said “the permanent solution means a sustainable and realistic solution in accordance with the international right. Asked by the journalists if the EU accepts change of borders, exchange of territories and ethnically clean territories, Kocijancic said she does not want to enter speculation or details,” at this final phase e of the dialogue.

**Ruling coalition partners soften their position on border negotiations (*Koha*)**

The paper reports on its front page that partners of the ruling coalition are softening their opposition to President Hashim Thaci’s decision to join the idea of his Serbian counterpart, Aleksandar Vucic, to discuss Kosovo’s borders in the Brussels dialogue. Ruling coalition partners have softened their position vis-à-vis the idea and none of them was able to say on Monday if they would leave the negotiating team in the event President Thaci will not take their positions into account.

**Opposition seeks extraordinary assembly session on dialogue (*Zeri*)**

Avdullah Hoti, caucus of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) has received the support of the Vetevendosje Movement and of the Social-Democratic Party, for an extraordinary session of the Assembly of Kosovo. This session is expected to take place before the regular Assembly session scheduled for 7 September. “At this session we will propose endorsement of a resolution with a single point, which would confirm that the territory of Kosovo is one and inseparable and no one enjoys the mandate to negotiate it. No one can bargain with Kosovo state,” he said. He said that in the days to come, he will seek support of other political parties as well as that of the civil society.

**LDK says it won’t allow Thaci to make deals with Kosovo’s territory (*Epoka*)**

The Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) issued a press release on Monday saying that it won’t allow Kosovo and Serbia Presidents, Thaci and Vucic, to make deals with Kosovo’s territory. “Kosovo is one and inseparable. Kosovo’s territory cannot be part of deals. President Thaci must stop … Negotiations on Kosovo’s territory are anti-constitutional and whoever joins such games will bear constitutional and political responsibility. We will coordinate actions in the Assembly to stop the President from questioning Kosovo’s sovereignty and territorial integrity,” the press release noted.

**Vetevendosje announces protests before 7 September (*Epoka*)**

Vetevendosje Movement is expected to organize protests in Pristina before the next meeting of the presidents Hashim Thaci and Aleksandar Vucic in Brussels. They claim that the aim of the protest will be to oppose the recent initiative for “correction of the borders” respectively exchange of territories with Serbia. Kosovo Assembly MP from the Vetevendosje Movement, Ismajl Kurteshi, told the paper that the exact date is not set yet, however the protests will take place prior to the next meeting between presidents Thaci and Vucic in Brussels. “We have not received any special response from the other parliamentary groups. They publicly stated that they will be an active part of the protests from the moment that they will be called. We consider that September is the time when protests should organize, because until then, MPs are on holidays,” Kurteshi said. “Thaci has been already told publicly and officially by the opposition parties that these meetings are considered his private meetings, where he as an individual represents his private interests but he does not represent interests of Kosovo,” Kurteshi added.

**NATO is not informed about plan of Kosovo-Serbia negotiations (*Zeri*)**

NATO Admiral at the Allied Joint Force Command Naples, James Foggo, together with COMKFOR Salvatore Cuoci, visited on Monday Decani Monastery and the municipality of Decan. “I do not know how their plan looks, but they are the officials that you have elected. There is democracy in both sides of the border, in Kosovo and in Serbia, and they are your officials that you have elected through free vote and these officials represent interest of majority in both countries. I am pleased that the dialogue is resuming and that presidents Vucic and Thaci are also in the dialogue in Brussels. As military people that represent NATO and KFOR, neither me nor General Couci are at the room where these negotiations take place between Thaci and Vucic,” Admiral Foggo said. Foggo and Cuoci met Decan/Decani mayor Bashkim Ramosaj and the Minister for Infrastructure Pal Lekaj, who promised that Kosovo institutions will not interfere in a biased manner at the protected zone of Decani Monastery.

**Thaci replies to Kandic: Kosovo is home to all its citizens (*media*)**

The President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci, said he will engage for the freedom and security for all Kosovo citizens, including the Serb community. His comment comes as a response to the Serbian humanist Natasa Kandic, who requested from Thaci to engage personally to enable for Serbs from Gjakova/Djakovica to visit the church and their homes on 28 August, without having to subdue humiliations that they faced last year. “It is unimaginable and unacceptable today for someone to violate the rights or not to allow the visit of the Serb Citizens at their religious sites, be it in Gjakova or anywhere else in Kosovo. Kosovo is a state of all citizens, no matter religion, culture or ethnic belonging. We are the most democratic country in the region and further, where ethnic communities are defended by Constitution,” Thaci said. He further expressed gratitude to Natasa Kandic for her activity before, during and after the war.

**EU could help vetting on justice (*Zeri*)**

Maja Kocijancic, spokesperson of the EU High Representative for Foreign Policy, told the paper that if Kosovo or other partners request help of the European Commission, the latter would consider specific circumstances, including previous processes on assessment of judges, prosecutors and other legal profiles. “It belongs to Kosovo institutions to decide on organizing the judicial system in Kosovo in accordance with the constitutional and legal framework. There is no suitable way for everyone. If Kosovo or partners seek support of the European Commission to commence similar processes, the Commission will consider specific circumstances, including previous processes or the existing once on assessment of judges, prosecutors and other legal professions. Such process would require q wide consensus of the actors in the society” she said.

**Civil society to hold another protest against state chief prosecutor Lumezi (*Koha*)**

The paper reports that civil society representatives will protest again on Wednesday against interference and pressure on the work of the State Prosecution and same as last week, will call for the resignation of State Chief Prosecutor Aleksander Lumezi. Protesters will also call for a vetting process, the reevaluation of judges and prosecutors.

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