

Main Stories 14 September 2018

* **European Parliament votes for visa liberalisation for Kosovo (*dailies*)**
* **Kosovo Government passes bill on KSF transition into armed force (*dailies*)**
* **NATO: Change of the KSF mandate, only through Constitution (*RFE/Epoka*)**
* **US Embassy: We were not consulted on KSF initiative (*media*)**
* **Veseli: Kosovo army will be created within a year (*KTV/Epoka*)**
* **Minister: Draft law lays out new competencies for KSF (*Epoka e Re*)**
* **LDK: Army requires consensus and international coordination (*Zeri*)**
* **Serbian List does not support Kosovo army (*RFE/RTK*)**
* **PSD: In principle, we support army initiative (*Zeri*)**
* **Vulin: The only aim of creating the army is conflict with Serbia (*RTK*)**
* **Thaci: Border adjustment ensures Presevo Valley joining Kosovo (*dailies*)**
* **Rama: Fate of the nation is in question (*media*)**
* **LDK tops recent poll (*Zeri*)**

**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**European Parliament votes for visa liberalisation for Kosovo (*dailies*)**

European Parliament voted yesterday in favour of the European Commission’s recommendation for opening negotiations with European Union Council on visa liberalisation for Kosovo. The recommendation was endorsed with 420 votes in favour, 186 against and 22 abstentions. The parliament’s rapporteur for visa liberalisation, Tanja Fajon, said Kosovo citizens are now one step closer to visa-free travel to Europe. In a Twitter post, Fajon said the process now will continue with governments of EU countries. “I shall not stop until we deliver!” she wrote.  European Parliament rapporteur for Kosovo, Igor Soltes, also hailed the vote. “I hope the EU Council will follow our example, Kosovo citizens deserve same opportunities,” he tweeted. Kosovo leaders also welcomed European Parliaments’ vote. Prime Minister of Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj, congratulated the citizens of Kosovo on European Parliament’s decision and assured them they would soon be able to travel freely to Europe. “Thankful to all MEPs and parliamentary groups, all parties and member states for supporting our right to freedom of movement,” Haradinaj wrote on Facebook. President Hashim Thaci said citizens of Kosovo are a step closer to achieving the right to free movement in the Schengen Zone. “I am convinced that this process will be concluded within a short period of time,” Thaci said in a Facebook post. At the same time, Minister for European Integration, Dhurata Hoxha, said Kosovo is now only one step away from visa liberalisation. She said Kosovo institutions met all necessary criteria for visa-free travel and today’s vote was acknowledgment of this work. She also thanked Tanja Fajon and all other MEPs that voted in favour of visa liberalisation for Kosovo.

**Kosovo Government passes bill on KSF transition into armed force (*dailies*)**

In a previously unscheduled meeting yesterday, the government of Kosovo approved three draft laws on the Kosovo Security Force, including that which stipulates its transition into an armed force. ***Koha Ditore*** writes on the front page that the initiative was not coordinated and as a result received straight away NATO’s condemnation whose officials said any change to the structure, mandate or mission of the Kosovo Security Force needs to go through constitutional changes. President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci said the move was not coordinated and did not have the approval from the international community and that unilateral actions can lead to isolation. However, in a Facebook post later in the day, Thaci said he supports KSF’s transformation and that the period before the Assembly votes on the bill should be used to convince sceptics to endorse the initiative. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj said consultations on the issue have been ongoing but that at the end of the day the decision is a competency that falls with Kosovo institutions. “Completion of security mechanisms is the greatest investment of our country towards a safe future. Kosovo will build an armed, professional, multiethnic and inclusive force, aligned with armies of peace and based on NATO standards,” Haradinaj wrote on Facebook adding: “In our journey we will be very careful that every step relating to the Kosovo army is made in agreement with our strategic partners in NATO, especially the US.”

**NATO: Change of the KSF mandate, only through Constitution (*RFE/Epoka*)**

NATO officials reacted to the decision of the government of Kosovo to endorse the package of draft-laws which regulate the role, function and serving of the Kosovo Security Force. In a response to the ***Radio Free Europe*** is stressed that “NATO’s position is clear, this is a matter of Kosovo authorities.” According to the Alliance, “any change of the structure, mandate and mission of the Kosovo Security Force, should be in accordance with the Constitution of Kosovo, which will require constitutional changes.” “Kosovo Security Force is a professional, multi-ethnic force and source of regional stability. This force has gone a long way. The reached progress is an example of successful capacity building by NATO, although more work is required. The alliance supports development of Kosovo Security Force according to the current mandate. NATO continues to be committed to the security and stability in Kosovo,” is said in the response. NATO also supports the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia mediated by the EU, assessing it as very important for peace and security.

**US Embassy: We were not consulted on KSF initiative (*media*)**

The US Embassy in Kosovo stated that they were not consulted when it comes to the decision to endorse the package of draft laws for transformation of the KSF. “The United States has always supported Kosovo’s sovereign right to an army and has worked closely with Kosovo on how to achieve this.  We have counseled a deliberate approach that keeps Kosovo in sync with our NATO Allies on this important step.  We were not consulted on the timing of this announcement and will have to analyze the draft laws to understand their purpose and effect,” the Embassy said in a press release.

**Veseli: Kosovo army will be created within a year (*KTV/Epoka*)**

Kadri Veseli, Assembly President of Kosovo, told ***KTV*** that the Prime Minister of Kosovo Ramush Haradinaj was coordinated with international partners, including the U.S. on creation of the army. “The Prime Minister had his own coordination. He so it reasonable and I supported this momentum,” Veseli said. “I see the statement of the U.S. Embassy also as a call for the Serb community that it is not good to block Kosovo,” he added. Veseli said he expects transformation of the Kosovo Security force into an army to happen within one year.

**Minister: Draft laws lay out new competencies for KSF (*Epoka e Re*)**

In an interview with the paper, Kosovo Security Force Minister Rrustem Berisha said the government’s approval of draft laws is good news and that it launches the transition of KSF. “The idea is to begin the transition process until circumstances for constitutional changes are created,” Berisha said. He added that the draft laws stipulate additional competencies for KSF but noted that its name will not be changed at this stage. He also said the bill foresees increase of KSF active members from 2,500 to 5,000 and of reserve troops from 800 to 3,000.

**LDK: Army requires consensus and international coordination (*Zeri*)**

Deputy leader of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), Agim Veliu, said his party supports all initiatives that are in the interest of Kosovo including that for Kosovo Security Force’s transition into an army but noted that such moves need coordination. “This is a sensitive issue that requires consensus but also coordination with international community because its role was decisive in KSF’s establishment,” Veliu said.

**Serbian List does not support Kosovo army (*RFE/RTK*)**

Deputy leader of the Serbian List, Igor Simic, told ***Radio Free Europe*** that they will not support creation of a Kosovo army. “The only legal military formation in Kosovo, based on the United Nations Security Council resolution 1244, is KFOR which deployed to these areas with consent of the Republic of Serbia,” Simic said.

**PSD: In principle, we support army initiative (*Zeri*)**

Head of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) parliamentary group, Dardan Sejdiu, said they support in principle transformation of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) into an armed force but that he could not blindly express support for the bill without first seeing what it says.

**Vulin: The only aim of creating the army is conflict with Serbia (*RTK*)**

Serbia’s Defense Minister Aleksandar Vulin, said Kosovo’s Army represents danger for the security in the region, and called on international community to react. “We appeal at the international community to ensure respecting of Resolution 1244 and not allow creation of the Armed Forces, which would endanger Kosovo’s security and stability, as well as that of the region,” Vulin said. According to him, the only aim of the creation of the army is conflict with Serbia and added that “we will not allow creation of formation for Haradinaj and Veseli to reach up to Nis.”

**Thaci: Border adjustment ensures Presevo Valley joining Kosovo (*dailies*)**

In his most recent press conference, President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci said that the final agreement with Serbia needs to be approved through a referendum. He also said that his ‘border adjustment’ idea will ensure Presevo Valley joins Kosovo and direct recognition from Serbia. He stressed that reaching agreement with Serbia will not be an easy process. There will be no agreement if there is no mutual recognition by both countries,” he said and added that there might be turbulences, but the end objective will be reached. Thaci said it is very important for the political specter in Kosovo to support the dialogue. According to him, there is no dialogue between Albanians and Serbs but between the state of Kosovo and the state of Serbia. Thaci said that during his meetings with the leaders of the region, he found support for agreement between Kosovo and Serbia. “I can already tell you that the eventual agreement between Kosovo and Serbia is gaining wide support by the day.”

**Rama: Fate of the nation is in question (*media*)**

The Prime Minister of Albania, Edi Rama, spoke for the first time in ***Top Channel*** about the eventual correction of borders between Kosovo and Serbia. “Albania is obliged to strongly support Kosovo and with this obligation, to follow and wait what representatives of Kosovo think and what do they agree for us to do. I cannot act Kosovo’s tutor. An internal strategic discussion is required, and this has to be done by those who lead Kosovo. And I am not seeing them doing this. Albanians should discuss as men at the Assembly and not to attack each other on broadcasters only to induce conflict. We have lost because we did not know how to behave with history,” Rama said.

**LDK tops recent poll (*Zeri*)**

A poll conducted by the Kosovo Democratic Institute has put the Democratic League of Kosovo as winner of elections if they were to be held now. LDK scored 23.8% of the respondents’ support, followed by the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) with 18.4%, and Vetevendosje with 17.6. Alliance for the Future of Kosovo came in fourth with 8.8% while Serbian List got 4.1%. Parties like the Social Democratic Initiative (NISMA), Social Democratic Party (PSD), New Kosovo Alliance (AKR) and Alternativa all fell under the 5% threshold. PDK deputy leader, Enver Hoxhaj, disputed poll’s results saying it was selective as it was carried out in municipalities led by LDK.

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