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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**Assembly passes laws paving way for creation of Kosovo army (*dailies*)**

Kosovo Assembly approved in the first reading yesterday three draft laws relating to the transformation of the Kosovo Security Force into a Kosovo army although the name will not be changed at this point. The first law foreseeing transformation of the Kosovo Security Force Ministry into a Ministry of Defence was supported by all 101 MPs present in the session while the second piece of legislation, that on Kosovo Security Force was passed by 101 MPs and none against. The final draft law relating to service with KSF was passed with 96 votes in favour and none against. Under the front-page headline *“The Army Begins”,* ***Zeri*** writes that the legislation relating to the KSF united all parliamentary parties except the Serbian List which left the session in sign of protest over the proposed laws.

**Haradinaj: Adoption of KSF laws, crucial days for our country (*social media*)**

Kosovo Prime Minister, Ramush Haradinaj, said that the adoption of the package of laws for the transitioning of the Kosovo Security Force marks one of the most crucial days for Kosovo. Haradinaj wrote in a Facebook post: “One of the most crucial days for our country for consolidating our statehood and the path toward NATO … Members of the Kosovo Assembly sealed the right of our sovereign country for the transitioning of the KSF into a military and defense mandate, as a provider of security for all citizens and communities, a multiethnic and professional force in line with NATO standards. I thank every individual MP and all political parties, the government and the opposition, which are showing political unity and consensus on national topics. The transitioning of the KSF will be beneficial for the citizens and communities of Kosovo, the region and our strategic partners”.

**Serbian List protests KSF transformation laws (*media*)**

Serbian List has objected to the draft laws passed by the Assembly of Kosovo yesterday regarding Kosovo Security Force and walked out of the session in sign of protest. MP Igor Simic said the content of the draft laws is in conflict to the interests of Serbs in Kosovo. “Albanians and Serbs need economic development not militarization,” Simic said adding that a Kosovo army will not bring social welfare to the people. He said the Serbian List would not be supporting creation of a Kosovo army noting that this would be in violation to the UN Security Council resolution 1244. “Perhaps representatives here would listen more carefully to us if we used teargas, but due to our respect for those citizens who voted for Srpska List, we are not going to do that; instead, we will leave the room,” Simic also said.

**Kosovo President Thaci congratulates on the army (*Facebook, Epoka*)**

Kosovo President Hashim Thaci congratulated voting of the package of laws at the Assembly of Kosovo, which foresee transformation of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) into an army. Thaci shared on his Facebook profile a video which presents some trainings of the KSF members and parts of his speech when while a Prime Minister, he made public the initiative for transformation of this force. “Always by honoring fatherland and in service of all citizens. The best sons and daughters of the country, soldiers of the Republic of Kosovo,” Thaci wrote.

**NATO reaction after Assembly decision on KSF (*RTK*)**

After the decision of the Assembly of Kosovo to open way to creation of the army of Kosovo, a NATO official reportedly told RTK that NATO’s position is clear: NATO supports development of Kosovo Security Force under its current mandate. “Kosovo Security Force is a professional force and source of stability in the region. If this mandate evolves, NATO should reconsider its engagements in Kosovo. It is important for any initiative related to the KSF mandate, to have full consultations with all communities in Kosovo and NATO allies. NATO remains engaged on security and stability of Kosovo, through our longest operation, KFOR,” NATO official responded.

**Serbia’s first reactions on Kosovo’s army (*Epoka*)**

Serbia’s Defense Minister Aleksandar Vulin said on Thursday that “the so-called army of Kosovo is an army that is being created to threaten Serbia”. “As long as Resolution 1244 is in power, there cannot be other armed forces but KFOR in Kosovo. Kosovo’s Army without Serbs and which is opposed by Serbs, is an army created to threaten Serbia and Serbs,” Vulin said.

**Edi Rama congratulates vote on Kosovo Army (*media*)**

Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama hailed on Thursday the adoption of laws for the transitioning of the Kosovo Security Force into the Kosovo Army. Rama wrote in a Facebook post: “Praised be the martyrs of Kosovo and blessed be the new-born Army of Kosovo!”

**Pacolli: We are all united when it comes to Kosovo (*social media*)**

Kosovo’s Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Behgjet Pacolli, took to Facebook to write about the adoption of the package of laws for the transitioning of the Kosovo Security Force. “Congratulations Kosovo! Our state marked a significant step toward its strengthening. Political unity reflected today at the Assembly is an extraordinary news for our future. We are together when Kosovo is in question,” Pacolli wrote.

**Pacolli says reports that Kosovo Serb MPs were insulted, part of propaganda (*RTK*)**

Kosovo Foreign Minister Behgjet Pacolli reacted in his social media account on allegations that Kosovo Serb MPs were insulted during the Kosovo Assembly session saying they are part of Belgrade-sponsored propaganda. Pacolli said that anyone that was present in the session knows these allegations are untrue and that Kosovo Assembly in respect to all democratic procedures established Kosovo army yesterday.

**Hoti: Vucic telling lies to try and present Kosovo Serbs as victims (*social media*)**

Head of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) parliamentary group Avdullah Hoti in a Facebook post accused President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic of telling lies in an attempt to present Kosovo Serbs as victims. “According to this strategy, the more independent Kosovo is the worse Serbs will be. Fate of Serbs in Kosovo will not change by UNMIK’s departure or by KSF with a new mandate. The fate of Kosovo Serbs will ultimately change for the better when Belgrade stops using them for daily political interests,” Hoti wrote.

**Minister Berisha: We will change KSF name when time is right (*RTK*)**

Kosovo Security Force Minister Rrustem Berisha said that the name of the Kosovo Security Force will be changed when favourable political conditions are in place. He said the present laws will provide the KSF with new competencies in protecting the territory of Kosovo and authorisations to serve abroad.

**Djuric expects reactions from international community on KSF bills (*Zeri*)**

Head of the Serbian Government’s Office for Kosovo, Marko Djuric, said Serbia is expecting powerful reactions from the international community regarding Kosovo Assembly’s approval of laws for creation armed forces. He said a Kosovo army could have “unimaginable consequences for the security in the region” and that the international community has the moral and political authority to prevent further deterioration of the region’s militarization.

**Thaci: If someone has a better idea, I will give up on border correction (*media*)**

Kosovo President, Hashim Thaci, said today that he will give on his idea for border correction with Serbia if “the skeptics will have a better idea that will make the five non-recognizing EU member states recognize Kosovo’s independence”. Thaci said Kosovo will not lose from a border correction agreement and that Presevo Valley joining Kosovo would save the latter from dangerous ideas. “Kosovo cannot boycott dialogue with Serbia because it cannot assume the responsibility for this in the face of our partners. This historical correction will be done for the safe future of borders. I know there have been debates and suggestions, I thank you for the criticism too, it was useful. The unification will be done by reaching an agreement that will help Presevo Valley join Kosovo; we will keep Ujman [Gazivoda Lake], Mitrovica and Trepca,” he said. Thaci pledged he will not allow Kosovo’s partition, the land swap or executive competencies for the Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities. “Some might find it impossible, but it can happen if we stand united. Serbia did not suggest [border] correction, but this saves Kosovo from dangerous ideas … We are in a good position … We need to move swiftly toward membership of international organizations and we need to make swift, difficult and good decisions for our country and at the same time not remain hostage of folklore from the past”. Commenting on his visit to Gazivoda Lake in September, Thaci said: “Some people are even mentioning the Pandora’s Box. It is ridiculous when an Albanian politician makes that reference. Albanians have neither opened nor will they close it. My visit to Ujman Lake was not accidental. I went there to show that that place was and will forever remain part of Kosovo”.

**“I don’t believe in border changes, but it wouldn’t be bad for Albanians” (*media*)**

Kosovo’s Deputy Prime Minister, Enver Hoxhaj, said on Thursday that although he does not believe in border changes between Kosovo and Serbia, if it did happen it would not be bad for Albanians. In an interview to ***Vision Plus***, Hoxhaj said timelines for reaching a final agreement between Kosovo and Serbia do not imply a bad agreement. “March 2019 has been set as a timeline for an agreement, but this doesn’t mean that we have to reach a bad agreement or just because Mogherini’s mandate expires,” Hoxhaj added.

**“Best solution for U.S., mutual recognition between Kosovo and Serbia” (*Koha*)**

Cameron Munter, former U.S. Ambassador to Belgrade, said in an interview for ***N1*** that the best solution for Washington would be mutual recognition between Kosovo and Serbia. “The best solution is an independent Kosovo and an independent Serbia learning to work together for the future,” he said. Asked to comment on a recent statement by U.S. Ambassador to Belgrade, Kyle Scott, who said that for the U.S. Kosovo is an independent state, Munter said: “As Ambassador Scott said, this is nothing new. This is the position of the U.S. vis-à-vis a real country, just like Serbia is a real country. This has been our position for ten years now. I am surprised that Serbs are surprised by this. The U.S. have always believed that there is a future for an independent Kosovo and an independent Serbia, in cooperation and path toward Europe, with support from American friends. This has always been our position and I think that this is exactly what Kyle Scott said”.

**Leaders: Kosovo’s membership at INTERPOL retains peace and security (Epoka)**

The President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci and Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, said during the conference organized on the occasion of the EU Anti-Trafficking Day that Kosovo’s membership at INTERPOL will have impact on preserving peace and stability in the region. They assessed that by being part of the INTERPOL, Kosovo will be more capable to fight human trafficking.

**UNMIK departure would rejoice Pristina and anger Belgrade (*RFE*)**

Pristina and Belgrade continue to hold opposite positions on the conclusion of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), the news agency reports. The U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, recently wrote a letter to UN Secretary General calling for the end of the UN mission in Kosovo. Haley’s request was welcomed by the government in Pristina but opposed by the Serbian government. A spokeswoman for the Kosovo government told ***RFE*** that the end of the UN mission and the replacement of UNSC Resolution 1244 would contribute to peace and stability in the region. “The time of UNMIK and Resolution 1244 has passed and the sooner this resolution is removed, and Kosovo joins the United Nations, this will contribute to peace and stability in the region,” the spokeswoman said. Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, on the other hand, said “the withdrawal of UN peacekeepers from Kosovo would leave Serbia with no other solution but to protect the ethnic Serb population in Kosovo”. Balkans analyst, Daniel Serwer, said he was not surprised by Belgrade’s opposition to the idea, “because for Serbia the UN presence is a sort of proof of its sovereignty in Kosovo, and this is meaningless because in reality it has no sovereignty, except for the northern part of Kosovo and some control in other areas inhabited by the Serb community”. “But Belgrade too has accepted the Brussels agreement and for the Constitution of Kosovo to be implemented throughout the territory of Kosovo,” Serwer added. The UN mission in Kosovo did not reply to the news agency’s questions about the mission, engagement and its current activities.

**House owned by Albanian in north Mitrovica attacked (*Telegrafi/Klan Kosova*)**

A house owned by an Albanian man in the northern part of Mitrovica was attacked by Molotov cocktail last night at around 8 p.m. The house was inhabited at the time but no one was hurt although the blast caused considerable material damage, said the owner Qamil Hajrizi. ***Telegrafi*** unsuccessfully reached out to the police for comment.

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