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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**Austrian Chancellor Kurz visits Pristina (*media*)**

The leading story in all media today is the visit to Pristina by Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and his meetings with President Hashim Thaci and Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj. ***Koha Ditore*** reports on its front page that the Austrian Chancellor is in favor of land swap between Kosovo and Serbia, but he is skeptical about visa liberalization and the future army of Kosovo. “President Thaci has received support from Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz for his idea on border correction with Serbia. Kurz said they are even in favor of land swap if the parties agree on this. On the other hand, Prime Minister Haradinaj did not address the media after his meeting with Kurz, but later in the day said the idea for border correction is dead,” the paper reports. After meeting President Thaci, Kurz told reporters that Austria will support any agreement reached between Kosovo and Serbia even if this involves border correction. “The Austrian government supports any agreement between Kosovo and Serbia. We are confident that any agreement that is reached will not be opposed by any country. If the agreement involves border correction, the EU will support it,” Kurz is quoted as saying in ***Gazeta Metro***. The news website also notes that “the Austrian Chancellor has killed hopes for visa liberalization”. “Many member states are still skeptical. This is why I am careful when I talk about this issue, because of the expectations,” Kurz said. ***Telegrafi*** quotes political commentators in Pristina as saying that Kurz’s remarks about visa liberalization should serve as an alarm for Kosovo's authorities. ***Indeksonline*** reports that after his meeting with Prime Minister Haradinaj, the Austrian Chancellor did not mention the idea of border changes between Kosovo and Serbia. The news website quotes Kurz as saying, “I feel very good to be here in Kosovo and I want to thank you about the friendship between the two countries. Austria is a strong supporter of Kosovo. Austria strongly supports dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia and we are interested in your future in this respect, therefore, we want to see the people of Kosovo supporting dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia because the success of this process will serve your future and peace and stability in the region”. Under the headline ***A scandalous visit by Kurz, speaks against the army too***, ***Gazeta Express*** reports that the Austrian Chancellor talked about border changes, gave bad news about visa liberalization and even made negative remarks about the future Army of Kosovo.

**Thaci: Agreement with Serbia brings peace and security to the region (media)**

Kosovo President Hashim Thaci said today in Pristina that he is confident that a comprehensive agreement between Kosovo and Serbia will bring peace and stability for both countries and the region. After meeting Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, Thaci said Kosovo has made its clear its vision for a Euro-Atlantic future. “We need to be even more committed to concluding internal reforms,” he said. Thaci also said Kosovo is committed to continuing dialogue and reaching an agreement with Serbia. “We are doing our best to build fair relations with Serbia. Kosovo remains deeply committed to dialogue with Serbia that will ensure sustainable peace, mutual recognition and Kosovo’s membership to international organizations”. “We had the opportunity to discuss developments in Kosovo and the future of the region. Austria is chairing the EU and during this period it has promoted the membership of the Balkans in the EU. We are committed to achieving this objective. In this respect, good neighborly relations are a primary condition,” Thaci said.

**Haradinaj against Kurz’s position on Kosovo-Serbia agreement (*Zeri*)**

Prime Minister of Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj, has come out against the position of the Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz regarding the final agreement between Kosovo and Serbia saying that the idea of border change is dead. Such scenarios, according to Haradinaj, have only resulted in tragedies in the Balkans. “There is no dilemma and no one should be worried,” Haradinaj said adding that the Austrian Chancellor will not define conditions on which the agreement with Serbia would rest and is not insisting on any particular arrangement.

**Germany has not changed position, Kosovo’s border cannot be touched (*Bota Sot*)**

The German Government’s information office told the paper in a written reply that it is very important for a future agreement between Kosovo and Serbia to be acceptable for both sides. “The position of the Federal Government on this matter has not changed. It is crucial for agreements on normalization of relations to be acceptable and sustainable for both parties. This is why we strongly support the EU’s efforts to promote the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo,” the reply notes.

**Thaci and Vucic to meet this week in Brussels, sources say (*Koha*)**

Citing unnamed sources, the paper reports that Kosovo and Serbia Presidents, Hashim Thaci and Aleksandar Vucic, will meet in Brussels this week. According to the sources, the two leaders will meet either on Thursday or Friday. The paper notes that the meeting comes at a time of intensified debate over a final agreement between Kosovo and Serbia with land swaps as one of the options that is reportedly being discussed by the two presidents despite serious opposition in Kosovo and in some EU member states.

**Kosovo imposes protective measures to products from Serbia and Bosnia (*media*)**

The Kosovo Government has decided to impose protective measures in a way of a 10 percent tax to imported products from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The measure will affect products coming from these two countries with the exception of products of international brands. Minister of Trade and Industry, Endrit Shala, who suggested the increase, said this is international practice. He said the tax will apply to milk and dairy products, water, biscuits, juices, and construction material. “Serbia is spending a great deal of money to damage the state of Kosovo and a vast part of this comes from the trade with our country. This is the best response to Serbia’s destructive behaviour,” Shala said as quoted in ***Zeri***. “We will not back down until Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina treat Kosovo like every other country. These measures do not constitute a violation of CEFTA,” Shala is quoted as saying in ***Express***. Meanwhile, ***Koha Ditore*** reports on the front page that Serbia has been ‘hit’ with economic sanctions in response to its latest offensive to weaken Kosovo’s international standing and quotes Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj as saying that this is only the beginning. “Processes on many issues will become more dramatic,” Haradinaj announced. Kosovo’s Foreign Minister Behgjet Pacolli said the measures are part of ‘proportional’ approach to Serbia and that Kosovo’s patience has come to an end. “Serbia will come to realise that any of its negative, damaging, undermining actions against Kosovo will come with a price tag,” Pacolli wrote on Facebook. At the same time, ***Gazeta Express*** writes that President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci who is known to have “excellent” relations with Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic has not yet commented on Kosovo government’s latest decision.

**EU requests Kosovo to lift tax against Serbia and Bosnia (*Koha Ditore*)**

European Union has requested the government of Kosovo to urgently clarify the decision for increasing taxes on products coming from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and expects authorities in Pristina to lift the measures. Maja Kocijancic, spokesperson for the European Commission, told ***KTV*** that that the decision of the Kosovo government is a clear violation of the CEFTA agreement and undermines the concept of regional cooperation.

**Djuric: Dialogue to resume once Pristina lifts tax measures (*Klan Kosova*)**

Head of the Serbian Government’s Office for Kosovo, Marko Djuric, called the Kosovo government’s decision to impose a 10 percent tax on imports from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina “dangerous” and “unlawful”. Djuric said the Kosovo government’s decision has resulted in blocking the Brussels dialogue in all levels and that no talks can take place until the decision is lifted.

**Opposition requests Assembly session to discuss foreign policy (*Zeri*)**

Opposition parties – the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and Vetevendosje – submitted yesterday request for an extraordinary session of the Assembly to discuss Kosovo’s foreign policy which they claim is riddled with scandals and failures. The request states that instead of foreign policy priorities being long-term, they are changed on daily basis leading to confusion and unpleasant situations.

**Veseli: We expect EU countries to support visa liberalisation for Kosovo (*Zeri*)**

Kosovo Assembly Speaker Kadri Veseli said in a meeting with Florence Mangin, Director for Europe at the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, that Kosovo has fulfilled all visa liberalisation criteria and is expecting the EU countries to support decision to lift the visa regime. “We will continue reforms from the European agenda. Kosovo’s address is the EU and NATO,” Veseli said.

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