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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**Haradinaj: Tax on Serb products will not be lifted (*dailies*)**

Prime Minister of Kosovo Ramush Haradinaj reiterated that the 100-percent import tax on products from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina will not be lifted despite international pressure. “This decision is not of the government but of all Kosovo because we are all consumers. Damages caused to us from Serbia do not only affect the government but each and every citizen of the country,” Haradinaj said adding that he does not plan to retract the decision.

**U.S. calls on Kosovo to lift import tax decision (*Zeri*)**

The U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Mathew Palmer, has called on authorities in Pristina to retract tax on imports from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina saying it represents an obstacle to continuation of dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. Palmer made the comments in an interview to a Sarajevo-based media outlet.

**Cullen: 100-percent tariff is against CEFTA principles (*Koha*)**

David Cullen from European Commission said the tax on imports from Kosovo and Serbia has overshadowed Kosovo’s presidency and as a result of this, not all members are attending the CEFTA Week.  He also conveyed the view of the European Commission against the tax saying it goes against CEFTA rules and principles. “Trade disagreements happen, and we understand there are real barriers that Kosovo is facing but these need to be addressed in adequate forums including the CEFTA framework,” Cullen said.

**KFOS with plan for consensual platform on dialogue (*Koha*)**

The paper reports on page three that the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society (KFOS) has launched an initiative to help ruling and opposition parties to achieve consensus on the final phase of talks with Serbia. The Foundation has chosen publicist Veton Surroi to lead a small group from civil society that will join representatives of political parties to draft the criteria for a joint negotiating platform. As part of this initiative, KFOS Executive Director Luan Shllaku and Surroi met on Tuesday with Assembly President Kadri Veseli and Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, and today they will meet NISMA leader Fatmir Limaj, LDK’s Isa Mustafa, Vetevendosje’s Albin Kurti and PSD leader Shpend Ahmeti. Shllaku said he hopes that by the end of the year they will get the support of all political parties. Surroi said: “I met Kadri Veseli and Ramush Haradinaj today as part of the KFOS project in support of the negotiating team. Tomorrow I will meet Albin Kurti and Fatmir Limaj. This is an initiative by KFOS to support as civil society the ruling and opposition parties in the negotiating process”. He also said that he will provide assistance to the process but that he will not be part of Kosovo’s negotiating team.

**Fajon: EU credibility at stake regarding visa liberalisation for Kosovo (*Zeri*)**

European Parliament rapporteur for visa liberalisation for Kosovo, Tanja Fajon, said Kosovo has met all the necessary criteria and deserves to gain visa liberalisation. Fajon said she was disappointed with the lack of will on the part of EU member states to approve visa liberalisation for Kosovo saying this puts into question the credibility of EU institutions. “Member countries should realise this,” Fajon said in her remarks at a Brussel conference on the Western Balkans.

**MEPs urge European Council to approve visa liberalisation for Kosovo (*Epoka*)**

A group of 22 Euro parliamentarians have sent an open letter to the President of European Council Donald Tusk and the Austrian permanent representative Nikolaus Marschik asking for the visa liberalisation issue to be voted at the Council as soon as possible. “Kosovo remains the only Western Balkans country whose citizens still require visas to travel to the Schengen Zone. This has created the feeling of isolation that affects the daily life of the citizens of Kosovo,” MEPs wrote.

**Assembly session on visa liberalisation fails to take place (*Epoka*)**

The urgent Assembly session requested by opposition parties – the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and Vetevendosje – regarding visa liberalisation has not taken place yesterday as planned. According to the Kosovo Assembly President Kadri Veseli the session was not called because of suspicion that two MPs’ signatures on the request were manipulated.

**Eichhorst: Pristina – Belgrade dialogue has never stopped (*Klan Kosova*)**

Angelina Eichhorst, Director for Western Balkans and Turkey of the European External Action Service, said on Tuesday that dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina has never stopped. During a debate on EU enlargement in Brussels, Eichhorst said she was not pessimistic about the current situation of negotiations for a legally-binding agreement between Kosovo and Serbia. She also said the key role of the EU was to bring Pristina and Belgrade to the table.

**Tahiri: Work of courts in the north has not been suspended (*Koha*)**

Kosovo’s Minister of Justice, Abelard Tahiri, said on Tuesday that courts in the north are going about their work despite protests in Mitrovica North against the government’s decision to introduce a 100-percent tax on Serbian and Bosnian goods. In a report to the Kosovo Assembly’s judiciary committee, Tahiri said the situation in the north is fragile following the resignations of four Serb mayors. “I urge you to continue cooperation so that the judiciary in the north can continue functioning. If one judge resigns, we need to initiate his or her replacement immediately,” he added.

**Kosovo improves standing in Press Freedom Index (*Koha*)**

Kosovo has moved up four places in the Press Freedom Index, from 82 to 78, Pristina-based ***KTV*** reported on Tuesday. Reporters Without Borders, the organization that prepares this index every year, however notes that media in Kosovo still suffer from direct and indirect political interference, financial pressure and excessively concentrated ownership. The organization also notes that “journalists who criticize Kosovar authorities are often accused of being ‘traitors’ or ‘Serbian sympathizers’. A few days after his coalition government was confirmed in September 2017, Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj described journalists as ‘illiterate’ and advised them to ‘go back to school’. Two leading investigative journalists were physically attacked after criticizing members of the government and close allies in articles. Kosovo’s ethnic divisions are particularly visible in the media, where members of the ethnic Albanian majority are rarely seen working side by side in a spirit of cooperation and goodwill with members of the Serbian minority. The current government nonetheless seems readier to talk with journalists and the media as whole, unlike the two previous governments, which were much less open to dialogue”.

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