

Main Stories 6 December 2018

* **NATO chief criticizes Kosovo for army and import tax (*Koha*)**
* **Russia alarms UN over Kosovo Army (*media*)**
* **Haradinaj: Our army is not for the north (*media*)**
* **Berisha: We cannot wait indefinitely to have an army (*Zeri*)**
* **Hoxhaj: EU ignored Kosovo on visa liberalisation (*media*)**
* **Brnabic: I hope we won’t have to use our army, it is one of the options (*media*)**
* **Shala: Kosovo shouldn’t fear Serbia’s statements for war (*KTV*)**
* **China: There will be no war in Kosovo (*Koha*)**
* **Shala: Tax will remain in force (*Klan Kosova*)**
* **Assembly resolutions will not strip Thaci of his role in dialogue (*Koha*)**
* **Limaj calls for broad consensus on dialogue with Serbia (*Zeri*)**
* **Molliqaj says PSD will not join Haradinaj-led government (*media*)**
* **Trajkovic: Thaci and Vucic, joint mission to divide Kosovo (*media*)**
* **Tahiri writes to EU commissioners over visa liberalisation (*Epoka*)**

**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**NATO chief criticizes Kosovo for army and import tax (*Koha*)**

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said the timing of Kosovo’s initiative to transform the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) into an army is wrong while with regards to Kosovo imposing a 100-percent import tax on Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, NATO chief said the move has made the dialogue “even more difficult.” Speaking to reporters in Brussels following a meeting of NATO foreign ministers, Stoltenberg said the KSF transformation should be inclusive and the timing of KSF transformation is in conflict to the advice of many NATO allies. He said this could have “serious consequences on Kosovo’s Euro-Atlantic perspective.” Stoltenberg further encouraged Belgrade and Pristina to refrain from provocations and make necessary compromises to enable them to move towards a better future.

**Russia alarms UN over Kosovo Army (*media*)**

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement on Wednesday saying that Pristina’s announcement that it will form its armed forces on December 14 is in violation with Resolution 1244 and represents a destabilizing and provocative act. “The action of Kosovo authorities to form the army (violating their own constitution as well) could lead to the most serious consequences, not only in areas inhabited by the Serb population, but also for the security of the entire Balkans … We expect that Kosovo Forces implement their mandate and undertake comprehensive measures for neutralization and disarmament of such formation if it is created,” the statement noted.

**Haradinaj: Our army is not for the north (*media*)**

Kosovo’s Prime Minister, Ramush Haradinaj, said on Wednesday that Serbia is making false claims by saying that Kosovo is forming its armed forces for the northern part of its territory, all media report. Haradinaj said the future armed forces will have no differences from the south and the northern part of the country and he called on Serbs to join the Kosovo Security Force. “Our army is not for the north, this is a pure lie. Our army is to preserve peace in countries like Afghanistan and Iraq and to help other countries and not to invade its territory in the north,” Haradinaj said.

**Berisha: We cannot wait indefinitely to have an army (*Zeri*)**

Kosovo Security Force Minister Rrustem Berisha commented on the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg’s remarks about the “wrong timing” of the initiative to transform the KSF into an army saying the KSF cannot remain with the current mandate indefinitely. “If now is not the right time, then when is the right time?” Berisha asked. He said he didn’t believe the establishment of a Kosovo army would hamper relations with strategic partners. “NATO functions on the basis of consensus and within NATO there are four countries that have not recognised independence of Kosovo. To take any decision to downgrade level of cooperation, there needs to be consent of all NATO countries. We have the support of the most powerful countries in NATO,” Berisha said.

**Hoxhaj: EU ignored Kosovo on visa liberalisation (*media*)**

Kosovo’s Deputy Prime Minister, Enver Hoxhaj, said on Wednesday that Kosovo has done everything in meeting the requirements for visa liberalisation but that its allies were few and silent in the process. “If we would have to name this, then it is typical European ignoring of Kosovo … we were told that the process is technical and that we would be rewarded if meet the criteria … The supporting countries were few and somewhat silent. They hesitated to speak in favor of visa liberalisation for Kosovo,” he said. Asked to comment on the formation of Kosovo’s armed forces, Hoxhaj said Kosovo has consulted key NATO member states throughout the process. “We must maintain our strategic relationship with NATO. I also call on our state officials to be careful with their statements … December 14 will be a historical day. The process of forming the army is unstoppable. The Kosovo Army will be a partner of NATO,” Hoxhaj said.

**Brnabic: I hope we won’t have to use our army, it is one of the options (*media*)**

Asked to comment on Pristina’s announcement that it will form its armed forces on December 14, Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic said she hopes Serbia would not have to use its army. “I hope that we will never have to use our army, but at the moment it is one of the options on the table, because we cannot watch a new ethnic cleansing and new storms,” Brnabic told reporters in Belgrade. She also said she would ask all European leaders what they would do in her place.

**Shala: Kosovo shouldn’t fear Serbia’s statements for war (*KTV*)**

NISMA MP Haxhi Shala said in an interview to ***KTV***on Wednesday that Kosovo should not fear statements by Serbian leaders that they will use the Serbian Army to prevent Pristina from forming its own armed forces. Asked to comment on Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic’s, Shala said these were usual statements by Serbian politicians aimed at excusing themselves in the eyes of the Serbian people. “They tried to stop the tax and now they will try to stop the army. These are excuses and to talk about a second war is abnormal … There is no reason to be concerned or afraid from their statements … The arrogant behavior of Serbian leaders toward Kosovo has brought us to this point … There will be no unrest. There could be small protests in the north because they are tired of the demagogy of politicians and they have started accepting the new reality in Kosovo,” Shala said. He also argued that the transformation of the Kosovo Security Force into an army is happening in accordance with the legislation in power and in full cooperation with internationals.

**China: There will be no war in Kosovo (*Koha*)**

The Chinese Ambassador to Serbia, Li Manchang, said during a meeting with Belgrade University students on Wednesday that there will be no war in Kosovo. Asked if China will aid Serbia in the event of a conflict in Kosovo, he said “why should we fight when we can talk?”. “There is going to be no war. Why should we fight, when we can sit down and talk. China’s foreign policy is aimed at peaceful solutions,” Li said. “Taiwan is part of China. It is our province and we thank the Serbian government and its people for supporting China in this respect. At the same time, we don’t recognize Kosovo and we think that this issue needs to be resolved through Resolution 1244 and dialogue”.

**Shala: Tax will remain in force (*Klan Kosova*)**

Kosovo’s Trade and Industry Minister, Endrit Shala, said on Wednesday that the Kosovo government introduced the 100-percent tax on Serbian and Bosnian goods as a result of the approach these countries had toward Kosovo. “For 18 years after the war in Kosovo and ten years since the declaration of independence, Serbia and Bosnia have tried every day to hamper Kosovo’s economic development. Their steps were aimed against us and we were forced to take these measures in response, primarily toward Serbia but also toward Bosnia,” Shala said in a debate with Bosnian Trade Minister Mirko Markovic and Nenad Djurdjevic, from the Serbian Chamber of Commerce.

**Assembly resolutions will not strip Thaci of his role in dialogue (*Koha*)**

The paper reports on the front page that none of the documents presented at the Assembly of Kosovo regarding dialogue with Serbia cannot strip President Hashim Thaci of his role in the process. Prime Minister of Kosovo Ramush Haradinaj has confirmed that President’s “constitutional duties” cannot be removed through acts like the draft law on competencies of a state delegation or the draft resolution sponsored by the Social Democratic Party (PSD). “We in politics know that the president’s functions are embedded in the Constitution and no specific acts can undermine them,” Haradinaj said yesterday during a visit to the village of Plemetin.

**Limaj calls for broad consensus on dialogue with Serbia (*Zeri*)**

Kosovo’s Deputy Prime Minister and nominated chief negotiator in dialogue with Serbia, Fatmir Limaj, met yesterday publicist Veton Surroi and executive director of the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society (KFOS) Luan Shllaku and discussed the dialogue with Serbia and the need for a broad consensus. “Dialogue is a national issue and requires inclusiveness and broader consensus,” Limaj said in the meeting. KFOS has recently launched an initiative to help ruling and opposition parties to achieve consensus on the final phase of talks with Serbia and 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.

**Molliqaj says PSD will not join Haradinaj-led government (*media*)**

Dardan Molliqaj, senior member of the Social Democratic Party of Kosovo (PSD), said in an interview to ***T7***on Wednesday, that his party would not join the Haradinaj-led government. Molliqaj said that ever since the formation of the PSD, they have said that neither the government nor the opposition would not be able to do anything without the votes of PSD MPs. “We have managed to restore the power of the Assembly in the process of dialogue [with Serbia]. Before going to the Assembly, the agreement will go through a referendum. There is no more fear in the process. The responsibility is now shared by the government and the opposition. We will not become part of a whining opposition. We will also not join this government, under no circumstance,” Molliqaj said.

**Trajkovic: Thaci and Vucic, joint mission to divide Kosovo (*media*)**

Rada Trajkovic, former member of the Kosovo Assembly and leader of the NGO “European Movement in Kosovo”, said in an interview to *N1* that Kosovo and Serbia Presidents, Hashim Thaci and Aleksandar Vucic, are working on their joint mission to divide Kosovo and that this could threaten the whole region. Trajkovic said Vucic was using Kosovo Serbs “to resolve other issues and to conceal his inability and loss of authority among international circles”. According to Trajkovic, Thaci and Vucic “are in daily contact, they coordinate their activities and use all means to support one another. This is a team on a mission”. She also argued that Milan Radojicic, one of the suspects in the murder of Kosovo Serb politician Oliver Ivanovic, decides on the appointment of mayors in all ten Serb municipalities in Kosovo, and also decides on Serb ministers in the Kosovo government.

**Tahiri writes to EU commissioners over visa liberalisation (*Epoka*)**

Kosovo’s Justice Minister Abelard Tahiri has written a letter to European Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn and the Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris Avramopoulos informing them of the legislation Kosovo recently adopted in the field of justice reform. Tahiri said Kosovo has met all visa liberalisation requirements including adoption of necessary legislation.

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