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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**Specialist Chambers invite former KLA commander for interview (*dailies*)**

All media report that the Specialist Chambers have invited former KLA Commander Rrustem Mustafa-Remi to be interviewed by a prosecutor in The Hague on 14 January 2019. The news was confirmed by Mustafa’s attorney Arianit Koci who said his client plans to voluntarily travel to The Hague and is ready to cooperate with the specialist chambers. Earlier ***Koha*** reported that the specialist chambers have already prepared an indictment against a former KLA commander which is expected to be announced in January. “Investigators have been in Kosovo and negotiated possible surrender of the suspect and an agreement for his voluntary surrender is likely,” a source told ***Koha***. Mustafa, member of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), was previously convicted by EULEX on war crimes charges.

**Kosnett: KSF evolution into Armed Forces, positive and natural step (*RTK*)**

The new United States Ambassador to Kosovo, Philip S. Kosnett, said in an interview to ***RTK*** on Thursday evening that the future armed forces of Kosovo should not be viewed as a destabilizing force but rather as a structure for all citizens of Kosovo regardless of their ethnic background. Kosnett said the evolution of the Kosovo Security Force into the armed forces is a positive step and that Kosovo, as a sovereign and independent country, is entitled to have self-defense capacities. Asked on a possible border correction agreement between Kosovo and Serbia, Kosnett said some people in Kosovo might have misunderstood the position of the United States. “I think some people may have misunderstood that the United States are pushing for a shift to the border or exchange of territory. My senior officers in Washington have tried to make clear that we are interested in an agreement negotiated in a good faith by the two sides,” he said. Read full interview at: <https://xk.usembassy.gov/ambassador-kosnetts-interview-for-rtk/>

**Pacolli: U.S. is supporting us for the army (*Bota Sot*)**

Kosovo Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Behgjet Pacolli, said the U.S. support for the formation of the Kosov Army is wonderful news. “In the most critical moments, the support of the United States has always made the difference. Permanent tradition and permanent strategic relations. I am deeply grateful for the U.S. support and the statement of the U.S. Ambassador about the army!” Pacolli wrote in a Facebook post.

**Veseli: Kosovo Army will be an army of peace (*media*)**

Kosovo Assembly President Kadri Veseli, who is visiting the U.S. told RTK this evening that the Kosovo Army will be formed on December 14 and that it will be an army of peace. “This is a day of peace, a day that marks the falling of Kosovo’s martyrs too. It will be a joy for all, for Kosovo and the region. This will be an army of peace … Kosovo will contribute to peace. The Kosovo Army is a guarantee for the stability of Kosovo and the region. We don’t want conflict. Serbia must understand that the Kosovo Army is an army of peace,” Veseli said.

**Haradinaj: Kosovo army will not impair relations with NATO (*media*)**

Prime Minister of Kosovo Ramush Haradinaj said at the Assembly session yesterday that Kosovo army would ‘in no way’ not impair relations with NATO and that its creation is an internal process in line with the Constitution of Kosovo. Haradinaj admitted that they have not managed to reach out to all NATO member states separately to explain the transition of the Kosovo Security Force into an army, he said they did have ‘intensive’ meetings with decision-making countries. He said Kosovo will transform from being security consumer to security provider. Haradinaj also rejected claims that KSF is getting ready to deploy to the north of Kosovo saying the Serb community has no reason to fear a Kosovo army. He said Serbia was trying to portray the creation of a Kosovo army as a source of destabilisation: “We are all trying to state clearly that no one needs instability. We are all working for more peace.”

**Haradinaj: U.S. would defend Kosovo if Serbia sends army (*media*)**

Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj said in an interview to ***Insajderi*** on Thursday that Serbia would not dare send troops to Kosovo but that even if this were to happen “Americans would defend Kosovo”. “Serbia does not dare send its army to Kosovo. A single U.S. soldier here would be enough. The United States will support us in such situations,” Haradinaj was quoted as saying.

**Stoltenberg talks with Haradinaj and Vucic (media)**

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg had a telephone conversation on Thursday with Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj and Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and called on them to show maturity and avoid provocative statements and actions. “With Haradinaj I raised concerns about the plan to transform the Kosovo Security Force into an army. I emphasized that such an action is inappropriate and against the advice of many NATO allies and it could have consequences for Kosovo’s prospects for Euro-Atlantic integration. I reiterated that the KSF mandate must evolve and that NATO must review the level of cooperation with the Kosovo Security Force,” a NATO press release notes. “I also talked with Vucic about the need to reduce the current tensions. I reminded both that the EU-brokered dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina is the only way to bring sustainable peace and stability to the region. NATO remains committed to security and stability in Kosovo through its peacekeeping mission, KFOR”.

**EU: Kosovo Army only in accordance with Constitution (*Lajmi*)**

The news website reports that the Kosovo Assembly Presidency decided to vote on the laws for the transformation of the Kosovo Security Force on December 14. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg however has warned that Pristina could face serious consequences if it proceeds with transforming the KSF into an army. The European Union shares Stoltenberg’s opinion. EU spokeswoman Maja Kocijancic told the news website on Thursday that the KSF mandate should change only in accordance with Kosovo’s constitution. “The EU shares the clear position of NATO that the KSF mandate should change only through an all-inclusive process in line with the Constitution,” Kocijancic said.

**Haradinaj: Kosovo Army will be voted on December 14 (*media*)**

Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj said on Thursday that MPs will vote on the Kosovo Army on December 14. After talking to NATO SG Stoltenberg on the phone, Haradinaj wrote in a Facebook post: “this sovereign decision of Kosovo, which will be voted on December 14, incorporates the vision and will of the citizens of Kosovo to preserve and defend Western values … I also informed Stoltenberg that Kosovo is committed to the transitioning process of the KSF that will result in a professional, multiethnic and credible army serving Kosovo's all citizens of Kosovo”.

**Serwer criticizes NATO’s stance on Kosovo army (*Bota Sot/Epoka*)**

The U.S. Balkans analyst Daniel Serwer has criticized the NATO’s stance against the creation of Kosovo army saying the Alliance should be supporting those who want to lighten its burdens not those who threaten with aggression. In his blog, Serwer further writes that Serbia is threatening to intervene if Kosovo votes to create an army and that NATO is backing Belgrade on this. “This is ridiculous. The Alliance should be telling Belgrade to stuff it. NATO-led forces in Kosovo should be put on alert to underline the point,” he writes. Serwer remarks that Belgrade’s agenda has nothing to do with any threats from a Kosovo army which he says is non-existent but wants to deprive Pristina of one of the vital elements of sovereignty.

**UK supports Kosovo’s Euro-Atlantic perspective (*Epoka e Re*)**

President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci has travelled for a one-day visit to UK where he met the Minister of State for Europe and the Americas Sir Alan Duncan and informed him about efforts to build peace and stability in Kosovo and the region. “We are working for a peaceful, comprehensive and final agreement with Serbia,” Thaci is reported to have said in the meeting. The UK minister on his part said they support the Euro-Atlantic perspective of Kosovo and the region.

**The isolating policies of the Haradinaj-led government (*Koha*)**

The paper reports on its front page that “populist policies” by the Haradinaj-led government are threatening Kosovo’s partnership with international allies. “Kosovo risks going into international isolation as a result of decisions made by the government which are being opposed by the European Union, the United States of America and NATO … Recent actions by the government are in opposition to the principles promoted by the abovementioned organizations. Western diplomats, in their recent visits to Pristina, have told this to government officials. After the EU, NATO too has called for a halt to the initiative to transform the Kosovo Security Force into an army. But the Haradinaj-led government is determined not to back down on its decisions for the 100-percent tax on Serbian goods and the formation of the armed forces,” the paper notes.

**CEFTA meeting cut short after Serbia referred to Kosovo as UNMIK (*media*)**

The meeting of the CEFTA Committee was cut short yesterday in Pristina after the Kosovo and Albanian delegation walked out when the Serbian representative insisted the meeting be chaired by the UNMIK representative, media report. Koha Ditore writes that the Serbian representative also referred to Kosovo institutions as “provisional” and “UNMIK.” Kosovo’s Minister of Trade and Industry Endrit Shala told ***Radio Free Europe*** that he was not personally present at the meeting but had previously advised his staff not to allow Kosovo being treated any other way than its constitutional designation. Shala said the representatives from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina did not attend previous days’ events as part of the CEFTA Week and only came for the Thursday meeting. Serbian government issued a statement accusing the delegations of Kosovo and Albania of sabotaging efforts to resolve problems through peaceful ways.

**Bahtiri: Internationals have failed in opening Mitrovica bridge (*Epoka e Re*)**

In an interview with the paper, Mitrovica Mayor Agim Bahtiri accused the international community of “intentionally” failing to reopen Iber River bridge in the city. He said as a result of this he undertook the initiative for unifying his municipality with Mitrovica North. “No one has a right to stop the opening of the bridge which links the two parts of the city,” Bahtiri said. Asked why he believes the international community intentionally keeps the bridge closed, Bahtiri said the EU wants to use it to condition Kosovo to accept a compromise in the final agreement with Serbia.

**Government blocks actions for eventual elections in the north (*Koha*)**

The Kosovo government has blocked actions that could lead to early municipal elections in the northern part of the country, with the excuse that in their resignation letters, the mayors of the four northern municipalities did not refer to Kosovo according to its constitutional denomination, the paper reports on page two. The government also said it would not introduce sanctions against the former mayors, despite the fact that the law on local self-governance enables the government to dismiss every mayor that violates the Constitution or the laws.

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