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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**Army Day (*dailies*)**

All papers report on Kosovo Assembly’s vote on transformation of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) into an army scheduled for today at 10. ***Koha Ditore*** writes that the decision, which is coming after many years of failed attempts, has been supported by the United States, United Kingdom, and Germany but opposed by the European Union and NATO. At the same time, the papers also writes that Serbia has sound the alarm over the danger of the situation in Kosovo escalating and has called on the international community to prevent Kosovo from forming its army. Leading with the headline, *Historic decision on Kosovo army today,* ***Epoka e Re*** writes that today’s vote will officially make Kosovo with an army and that the initiative has been supported by the U.S. whose ambassador Philip Kosnett said the vote is of historic importance for Kosovo. ***Bota Sot*** meanwhile says on the front page that the army will seal Kosovo’s sovereignty and even refers to it as being “Made in the U.S.” In a front-page editorial, ***Kosova Sot*** writes that Kosovo authorities are expected to finally close today the legal procedure transforming KSF into a Kosovo army and that this landmark vote marks the opening of a new chapter for Kosovo.

**Thaci: KSF built as multiethnic force in line with NATO standards (*Koha*)**

In a visit to the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) barracks a day ahead of the Assembly’s scheduled vote on Kosovo army, President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci said the transformation of KSF is running naturally as a result of everyone’s commitment. “The decision to give KSF competencies is because of you and every citizen of Kosovo. Your journey symbolizes the progress of our country. We have faced many challenges so far but we reached the final goal,” Thaci told KSF members. He said KSF has been built as a professional, multiethnic force and in line with NATO standards. “KSF will always be in the service and protection of our citizens and property, regardless. I can say with full confidence that this force is and remains our pride. Congratulations on new tasks, perform them with responsibility,” Thaci said.

**Rama: Army to deploy throughout Kosovo (*Zeri*)**

In a front-page interview with the paper, Kosovo Security Force Commander, Lieutenant General Rrahman Rama said the new Kosovo army will be in the service of all its citizens and will also have mandate to deploy to the north. He said the KSF transition will not undermine relations with NATO. “NATO is an organisation that is as much political as it is military and we know how they operate. To change a mission, it requires consensus of 29 member states,” Rama said adding that Kosovo has the support of its partners and the formation of the army is in coordination with them.

**Ambassador Kosnett meets KSF Commander Rama (*Koha*)**

The U.S. Ambassador to Kosovo, Philip Kosnett, met Kosovo Security Force Commander, Lieutenant General Rrahman Rama yesterday and reconfirmed his country’s support for creation of Kosovo army. “Today I met with KSF Commander Rama to underscore the U.S. Government’s commitment to the KSF’s evolution as a defensive force serving all of Kosovo’s communities and reflective of the country’s multi-ethnic character,” Kosnett tweeted.

**Kosnett: Kosovo’s Army, a historic decision (*media*)**

The U.S. Ambassador to Kosovo Philip Kosnett has welcomed the planned Assembly vote on Friday that will transform Kosovo Security Force (KSF) into a regular army. “Tomorrow’s vote on KSF transition is a historic one for Kosovo. The U.S. will support the professional development and organizational evolution of KSF, which must play positive role for Kosovo and the region,” he wrote on his Tweeter account.

**O’Connell: Kosovo has a right to army, Serbs should not fear (*Kosova Sot*)**

Ruairi O’Connell, Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Kosovo called on Serbs not to fear Kosovo’s army. He told TV Prva that his country does not consider the army of Kosovo as dangerous and there is no reason to discuss about it. “Kosovo is an independent and sovereign state and if it wants, it can create armed forces. There is nothing negative nor destabilizing about the simple fact of having an armed force. This is a ten year process where from three thousand and five hundred, the number will increase to five thousand soldiers. It is not a major change, I do not believe that someone has the intention to occupy Mitrovica or the north of Kosovo. I do not think that Kosovo Army intends to use its forces against Kosovo Serbs,” O’Connell said.

**Annen: Germany does not question Kosovo’s right for the army (*Epoka*)**

Germany’s Minister of State Niels Annen said at Bundestag that Germany does not question Kosovo’s right for a regular army. In his written response to the leftist MP Sevim Dagdelen, Annen wrote that “Germany has recognized Kosovo and it does not question the basic right of Kosovo for regular forces.” He however added that “the Federal Government considers that transformation of the Kosovo Security Force should not be hastened and it should proceed with an inclusive process. This especially concerns involvement of the Kosovo Serb minority and close consultation with partners such as NATO and NATO ally states.”

**Schieb: Kosovo has right to army, Serbia should recognize Kosovo (*Express*)**

Thomas Schieb, German Ambassador to Serbia, said on Thursday that Germany has recognized Kosovo as an independent and sovereign state and that Kosovo has the right to have its own army. He however added that perhaps this was not the most suitable moment for creation of the army. Asked if Serbia will be conditioned to recognize Kosovo in order to join EU, Schieb said all 35 chapters should be fulfilled, and one of them the last one is about Kosovo.

**Haziri: Government being ungrateful to EU over army (*Telegrafi*)**

Deputy leader of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) Lutfi Haziri said that the government of Kosovo is being ungrateful to the European Union by planning to form army without its support. “14 December is the day of Kosovo Army’s rebirth,” Haziri said adding: “However, without European partners there can be no membership in NATO and the EU. Do not forget, the government not the people is being ungrateful,” Haziri wrote on Facebook.

**Haradinaj presents draft for normalization of relations with Serbia (*Epoka*)**

The Prime Minister of Kosovo Ramush Haradinaj met on Thursday the Ambassadors of the Quint countries, to present the first draft of the comprehensive, legally binding agreement between Kosovo and Serbia. He said that the draft is a supporting document to the existing process of the dialogue as well as the aspects that are related to the acceleration of the process. “Head of the technical dialogue Avni Arifi, presented to us chapters which contain main parameters of the agreement for us, and which would open way to the normalization of the relations between Kosovo and Serbia. The draft-document with attached appeals was submitted to all heads of the institutions and leaders of all political parties. In the following days and weeks, this draft-document will be discussed with all parties of our society, to reach the final document, which would include expertise of all,” Haradinaj said.

**Dobruna: I said no army respected laws more than KLA (*dailies*)**

Sokol Dobruna, former head of the KLA’s military tribunal, was interviewed yesterday in Pristina by specialist prosecutors and said he was asked about the case involving the current MP from the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) Blerim Kuci and that the six-hour-long interview is set to resume today as well, ***Koha Ditore*** reports. Dobruna said he made it clear to his interviewees that no army respected international humanitarian law more than the KLA. Meanwhile, the papers report that another former KLA official was called at the Specialist Chambers. Sabahajdin Cena, former director of the KLA civilian directorate in the Pashtrik zone, has been asked to report on 14 January.

**Explosive device discovered near Gazimestan (*media*)**

Kosovo Police blocked the Pristina-Mitrovica highway yesterday on suspicion that an explosive device was planted along the road. Imer Beka, chief prosecutor with Pristina basic prosecution, told ***Kallxo*** that the police recovered 15kg of explosive near the monument of Gazimestan. Beka said the explosive was timed and ready to go off but that the police managed to deactivate it. He said no arrests have been made so far.

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