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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**Negotiating team to travel to Brussels on 8 January (*Epoka*)**

Kosovo’s negotiating team will travel to Brussels on 8 January of the next year. This was announced on Wednesday after the meeting of the team with the President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci, Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj and President of the Assembly Kadri Veseli. The most senior officials of Kosovo and the team pledged that they will be transparent about the process of the dialogue with Serbia. They also called on the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and Vetevendosje Movement, to join the negotiating team. Veseli, as the host of this meeting said at the press conference that the intention of the dialogue is recognition of Kosovo by Serbia. “It is a process of freedom and sovereignty, process about the territories of our independent state, process of recognition by Serbia and ensuring the seat at the UN,” Veseli said. According to President Thaci, coordination of the political specter will make this process successful. PM Haradinaj said the government of Kosovo will always support of the negotiating team. He also said that he welcomes any idea or suggestion on the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, however, he added, exchange of the territories will never be on the table of the discussions.

**Thaci’s holds annual speech before Kosovo Assembly (*media*)**

President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci held his annual speech before the Kosovo Assembly yesterday but media report that this was boycotted by opposition as well as some representatives of the ruling coalition parties. MPs from the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), Vetevendosje, Social Democratic Party (PSD), Social Democratic Initiative (NISMA) and the Serbian List did not attend the session where Thaci spoke of Kosovo being ready to reach a final agreement with Serbia providing for mutual recognition. Thaci said agreement will not be easy but that it was time to look to the future and to peace. “This agreement must be final, inclusive, achieved in a peaceful and mediated process by the European Union and fully supported by the USA. This agreement should bring to Kosovo the recognition from Serbia and membership in the United Nations,” Thaci said.

See the full speech: <https://www.president-ksgov.net/en/speeches/president-thacis-annual-speech-to-the-deputies-in-the-assembly-of-kosovo-5648>

**Quint Ambassadors today at the meeting of the negotiating team (*Express*)**

The Assembly of Kosovo invited on Wednesday for a meeting the negotiating team for the dialogue with Serbia, President Hashim Thaci, Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, Assembly President Kadri Veseli, as well as the two opposition political parties, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and Vetevendosje Movement. Ambassadors of the Quint countries and representatives from the EU Office in Kosovo were also invited at this meeting which will be held today at 10:00 hours.

**Kosovo delegation with monitoring role in dialogue (*Koha Ditore*)**

Quoting experts, the paper reports on the front page that the draft law on the tasks of the Kosovo negotiating team leaves the decision on who will go to Brussels under the EU High Representative Federica Mogherini’s discretion and the Kosovo delegation is only seen as a monitoring mechanism of the process. Perparim Kryeziu from the Group for Legal and Political Studies (GLPS) said the draft law does not limit President Hashim Thaci’s scope of activity in the dialogue and that the negotiating team does not serve as a leading unit but more of a complementary one.

**Collaku: The only pressure by Trump is agreement with Serbia (*TV Dukagjini*)**

Bekim Collaku, adviser to the President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci, said Kosovo cannot expect membership in the European Union if it rejects dialogue with Serbia. “Kosovo is in a status quo in the aspect of the Euro-Atlantic perspective. We cannot expect Kosovo to become an EU state without concluding this process with Serbia,” Collaku said. “We did not have any pressure and we do not have any kind of pressure from anyone today either. The only pressure on us by partner states, including President Trump and the U.S. is to use this unique opportunity and reach an agreement. This is the only pressure,” Collaku said. He added further that the deadline for reach of the agreement between the parties is close. According to him, Kosovo has reached the maximum of international recognitions and only the final agreement and avoiding Russian veto, could lead to the UN membership.

**Assembly fails to hold session on draft agreement with Serbia (*media*)**

Kosovo Assembly has postponed for an indefinite period the extraordinary session scheduled to take place yesterday as a result of MPs from the ruling coalition parties not being in attendance. Avdullah Hoti, head of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) parliamentary group accused the ruling coalition oh behaving irresponsibly and ignoring the Assembly while Glauk Konjufca from Vetevendosje said the absence of the coalition MPs shows the level of esteem they have for the role of the Assembly. LDK and Vetevendosje had called today’s session to discuss the draft comprehensive agreement with Serbia recently presented by the government of Kosovo.

**France supports the dialogue and state delegation (*RTK*)**

Shpend Ahmeti, leader of the Social-Democratic Party and deputy leader of this political party Visar Ymeri, hosted on Wednesday a meeting with the French Ambassador to Kosovo Didier Chabert. Ahmeti, recently nominated also co-head of the Kosovo team for negotiations with Serbia, said Kosovo is proving to have capacities and political responsibility with regards to the dialogue process with Serbia, with the intention of reaching a final agreement and mutual recognition. Reconfirming support of the French state for the process of the dialogue, Ambassador Chabert hailed establishment of the state delegation at the Assembly of Kosovo.

**Dacic: Kosovo-Serbia dialogue in another format in 2019 (*Nedeljnik/Express*)**

Serbia’s Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic said Serbia will certainly deal in a more intensive manner with Kosovo issue in 20019, and ‘perhaps in another format.” No one can say, we will resolve the Kosovo issue next year, at least none of the serious politicians in our country or in the world. As far as I am concerned, I would want to reach an agreement tomorrow, but this is not realistic, many more things have to conclude,” Dacic told ***Nedeljnik***.

**Arifi: Serbia provoking and inciting new tariffs (*Bota Sot*)**

Avni Arifi, chief of staff to Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, has reacted to the call the Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic made to countries that have recognised Kosovo to reconsider their position. In a Facebook post, Arifi said such actions on the part of the government of Serbia provoke introducing new tariffs. “Another evidence that tariffs should be lifted right after the mutual recognition,” Arifi said.

**Bahtiri and Rakic meet COMKFOR (*Zeri*)**

Mitrovica Mayor Agim Bahtiri and Mitrovica North Mayor Goran Rakic met yesterday separately KFOR Commander, Major General Lorenzo D’Addario. Bahtiri hailed cooperation with KFOR and briefed COMKFOR on the political and security situation in the municipality which he said was peaceful. D’Addario on his part said cooperation between Mitrovica Municipality and KFOR will be intensified. The meeting with Rakic also focused on the security situation in the north.

**Rasic: Belgrade is using Kosovo Serbs as an instrument (*RFE, Epoka*)**

Nenad Rasic, Leader of the Democratic Progressive Party and former Minister of Social Welfare, told Radio Free Europe that the voice of Kosovo Serbs has vanished and that all mechanisms are in service of a political group, Serbian List, which “does nothing positive for Serbian population.” He said that official Belgrade is using Kosovo Serbs as an instrument to position prior to the dialogue, and for other reasons. Rasic, expressed hope that the final phase of the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia will start soon.

**Visa liberalisation, unlikely under Romanian EU presidency (*Zeri*)**

The paper reports on the front page that as Romania prepares to take over presidency of the EU in January, chances for Kosovo to get visa liberalisation decision during this period will be highly unlikely. Romania is one of the five EU countries that has not recognised independence of Kosovo and prevents it from joining international organisations by siding with Serbia, the paper adds. As a result, visa liberalisation decision is hoped to be gained during the Finnish presidency starting from July 2019. Kosovo Minister for European Integration Dhurata Hoxha said she didn’t expect Romania to set visa liberalisation for Kosovo as a priority but that it will also not present any new barriers to the process.

**Lluka: New power plant to begin construction in 2019 (*Zeri*)**

In an interview with the paper, Minister of Economic Development Valdrin Lluka said that the construction of the new power plant will begin in April of next year but did admit that they faced difficulties after the World Bank pulled out of the project. Lluka however said that two potential investors have stepped forward to help with the project – OPIC, a U.S.-based company, and the Japanese International Bank. “I believe by March the boards of these two organisations will vote for the financial package. If all goes well, we will approach the Assembly of Kosovo in April to vote on the project,” Lluka said.

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