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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**Veseli tells Quint Kosovo is ready for agreement with Serbia (*media*)**

Kosovo Assembly Speaker Kadri Veseli hosted a meeting yesterday with ambassadors of Quint countries and President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci, Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, as well as members of the Kosovo negotiating team. He said at the opening of the meeting that Kosovo is ready for the final stage of dialogue with Serbia which he said will result in Kosovo’s recognition by Serbia, its UN membership and acceleration of Euro-Atlantic integrations. Veseli said Kosovo has built unity for dialogue with Serbia and expect the unreserved support from partner countries. “I have a clear message today, we are ready and united,” Veseli said. Media meanwhile report that the meeting was boycotted by representatives of opposition parties, the Democratic League of Kosovo and Vetevendosje.

**Quint ambassadors call for tax suspension to give chance to Agreement (*Koha*)**

The Kosovo government’s decision to introduce a 100-percent tax on goods from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina dominated Thursday’s meeting between Kosovo’s leaders, the state delegation for talks with Serbia and Quint ambassadors, the paper reports on its front page. Citing sources from the meeting, the paper notes that the main request of international diplomats was that Kosovo and Serbia should agree on a “truce” in order to give a chance to a final settlement in the first half of next year. The diplomats called on Kosovo authorities to suspend the 100-percent tax at least until April next year and said they would ask Serbia to stop its campaign of convincing countries to retract their recognitions of Kosovo’s independence. The paper however learns that Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj has shown no signs of backing down from the decision on the 100-percent tax.

**Kosnett: 2019 should be the year of unity for Kosovo (*Kosova*)**

The U.S. Ambassador to Kosovo Philip Kosnett, wrote in an editorial for the paper that he hopes to see the leaders of Kosovo working in partnership and undertaking courageous steps such as suspension of the tax for the goods from neighboring countries, and giving negotiations a chance to move forward. “Such role of courageous and certain leadership by both parties at the negotiating table will be necessary in order to move forward and break the current stalemate,” Kosnett wrote.

**President Thaci holds end-year press conference (*media*)**

President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci held an end-year press conference where he spoke about main developments in 2018, including dialogue with Serbia. He said he will work in reaching a “balanced” agreement with Serbia in the interest of peace and stability and confirmed that the issue of missing persons will be among the issued to be raised in the dialogue: “The issue of missing persons will be the first item to be discussed and this is already official,” Thaci said. He said the negotiating team has his full support and that Kosovo is ready for dialogue: “The delegation has legitimacy of the citizens and the responsibility entrusted by the representative of the people. It would be of interest to have broader involvement.” He also said that he would not be joining the team in its upcoming trip to Brussels in January. “The negotiating team has agreed for me to be skiing in Brezovica on 8 January while they are in Brussels,” Thaci said adding: “I will support their work when they seek clarification, advice, and I will always be at their disposal.” Kosovo president said he continued to support rights of Albanians in the Presevo Valley: “I believe in the coming months their right to join Kosovo will be formalized.” Asked to comment on whether he is fearful of the Specialist Chambers, Thaci replied that anyone invited by this institution should positively respond. “The Assembly has taken its decision on this court and I support it. Kosovo has nothing to hide. The black cloud over Kosovo needs to be cleared. The KLA war was pure and righteous, it is a period all my former fellow fighters and I are the proudest of.” He also spoke about the investigation into the murder of Kosovo Serb political leader Oliver Ivanovic calling on authorities in Belgrade to cooperate. “The main suspects are in Belgrade so it should be more cooperative,” he said.

**Thaci: Year of a big finale (*Zeri*)**

In an op-ed for today’s New Year edition of the paper, President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci writes that Kosovo’s steadfast road to progress continued this year though 2018 was not an easy year. “At this time when the world is facing an increased dynamic of developments, Kosovo continues to enjoy the support of traditional international allies in its journey towards Euro-Atlantic integrations,” Thaci writes. He says Kosovo has proved it has what it takes to stand united on crucial issues and that it has all the necessary capacities to successfully overcome the final hurdle with Serbia. “The new year is a year of big opportunities for Kosovo, for a better future for us and the generations to come,” Thaci writes.

**Veseli on tax: Serbia must stop their aggressive approach (*Telegrafi*)**

Kosovo Assembly President, Kadri Veseli, said on Thursday that the 100-percent tax on goods from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, was a decision by an independent and sovereign state. In an interview to Pristina-based ***Telegrafi***, Veseli explained what he told Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj about the decision to introduce the tax. “When the idea for the tax was born, the first thing I told the Prime Minister ‘can we keep it up, do you have a plan?’. He assured me there is a plan in place and that he can keep up his decision. So, I supported him, not for 30 percent, but for 100 percent, and this is an independent and sovereign country. Serbia must respect Kosovo, the same way we respect Serbia. Serbia expresses hatred towards us, not respect. So, in this case, we did nothing more than make a state decision, which is neither permanent nor provisional. Serbia needs to reflect now,” Veseli said. “We are an independent and sovereign state and we don’t do nothing out of spite. Serbia should stop its aggressive approach towards Kosovo, otherwise it will hear about the state of Kosovo every day. We want peace and normalization of relations with Serbia”. Veseli also criticized the refusal of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and Vetevendosje to cooperate with other parties on dialogue with Serbia. “Today we had an excellent meeting with the Quint ambassadors who gave us strong support for the process of dialogue. The behavior of the opposition is regrettable. I am talking about the LDK and VV, an unreasonable spite. Kosovo cannot move forward with a blocking, spiteful and cowardly mindset. This is irresponsible behavior. Neither the government nor the opposition can block processes … we cannot block our own path,” Veseli said.

**President Thaci to sign today the Laws on the army (*RTK*)**

The President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci will decree today the laws for the change of the mandate of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF). The signing of the laws will occur at 10:00 hours at the cabinet of the President. The Assembly of Kosovo approved on 14 December the three laws which changed the mandate of the KSF.

**Haradinaj: Formalisation of defence mandate of our army (*Zeri*)**

In an opinion piece, Prime Minister of Kosovo Ramush Haradinaj writes that the vote to form Kosovo army is a ‘historic act’ and that the Kosovo army will never be used against its people, be it in the north or the south. “If yesterday others used the army to annihilate us, we have an army today that brings hope. If the others used the army yesterday to humiliate us, we are forming the army today to encourage everyone to keep their heads high and be proud of what they are and what they represent,” Haradinaj writes.

**KSF and KFOR commanders agree to deepen cooperation (*Epoka*)**

Commander of the Kosovo Security Force General Rrahman Rama, hosted on Thursday an introductory meeting with the new KFOR Commander Major General Lorenzo D’Addario. Rama congratulated KFOR commander and informed him with the recent developments on endorsement of the laws for the new mission of the KSF. Both generals valued highly KSF’s cooperation with KFOR and expressed readiness to continue deepening this cooperation in the future.

**“No EU for Kosovo and Serbia without resolving bilateral problems” (*Kosova*)**

Austria’s President, Alexander Van der Bellen said that Serbia’s and Kosovo’s membership in the European Union is not possible without resolving bilateral matters. “After a phase of approximation between Belgrade and Prsitna which happened during the summer, a raise of tension occurred,” Van der Bellen told the news agency APA. “It is clear that EU membership is possible only if the bilateral issues between the two countries are resolved,” he stressed and added that it is with a major interest for Belgrade and Pristina to find a solution while the EU could support the process.

**Kurti: Thaci cannot make deal with Serbia, 2 million people will rise up (*Koha*)**

Vetevendosje leader Albin Kurti said in an interview to ***KTV*** on Thursday that Kosovo President Hashim Thaci is at the lowest point of his political career. “I don’t move in panic, only Thaci moves in panic. Panic leads to mistakes. We need to move quickly, but not make mistakes. The President is at the lowest point of his 20-year career. The President cannot make a deal with Serbia, because 2 million people will rise up,” Kurti was quoted as saying.

**Kosovo leaders express condolences to family of killed policeman (*media*)**

Kosovo leaders have been expressing condolences to the family of Izet Demaj, police officer from Istog who died in the line of duty while trying to prevent a bank robbery. President Hashim Thaci said Kosovo lost a hero yesterday, Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj said Demaj is an example of how the lives of the citizens should be protected while Assembly Speaker Kadri Veseli said he was deeply saddened and that the whole of Kosovo shares the grief of the police officer’s family.

**Trendafilova: Specialist chambers don’t try corruption, bad governing (*Kosova*)**

The message of the President of the Specialist Chambers Ekaterina Trendafilova in opinion piece for the paper is not to trust speculation with names of potential suspects. “Only information deriving from our Chambers are authentic, reliable and true.” She added that the Specials Chambers organize in regular basis activities and seminars in the region to inform representatives of the civil society and population in general about the work and mandate of the Chambers. “Such actions also intend to assure everyone that our trials will be open, just and safe. They will also correct the incorrect but widely spread notions that we will try cases of general corruption or bad political governing, which is not true. We will prosecute only individuals, alleged to have committed crimes under our jurisdiction between 1998 and 200, in accordance with the decision of the Assembly of Kosovo in 2015,” Trendafilova wrote.

**Gashi: Sylejman Selimi not invited by Specialist Chambers (*Bota Sot*)**

Tome Gashi, attorney to former KLA commander Sylejman Selimi, rejected media reports that his client has been summoned by the Specialist Chambers. In a Facebook post, Gashi said no such invitation was delivered to Selimi.

**Safehouses for victims of gender-based violence to close on Monday (*Kallxo*)**

***Kallxo*** reports that centres that provide shelter for women and children victims of domestic violence will be closed on Monday as a result of no funding being provided by the Ministry of Laour and Social Welfare. Director of one of the safehouses in Peja/Pec, Ardita Bala confirmed that the lack of budget is the reason why shelters in several municipalities in Kosovo will close as of Monday.

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