

Main Stories 31 December 2018

* **Thaci: 2019, a year of historic decision (*RTK*)**
* **Assembly President Kadri Veseli’s end-of-year interview to *RTK***
* **Missing persons, first topic to be discussed with Serbia (*Kosovapress*)**
* **EU calls on Kosovo government to reconsider decision on tariffs (*Klan Kosova*)**
* **Veseli: Vetevendosje and LDK’s behavior, regretful (*RTK*)**
* **Hoti responds to Veseli’s accusations (*RTK*)**
* **Haziri: There can be no agreement with Serbia without LDK (*Telegrafi*)**
* **Engel: No EU for Serbia unless war criminals face justice (*Telegrafi*)**
* **Simic: Pressure on Kosovo Serbs continuing (*Zeri*)**
* **Ceremony commemorating missing persons to be held in Pristina today (*media*)**
* **Brnabic: I did not request withdrawal of recognition of Kosovo (*RTK*)**
* **Serbian President fears unification of Kosovo and Albania (*RTK*)**

**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**Thaci: 2019, a year of historic decision (RTK)**

The President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci, believes that the final agreement at the Brussels dialogue with Serbia will be reached in a near future. According to him, political circumstances both in Kosovo and Serbia enable such an agreement. Thaci’s message in an end of the year opinion piece written for the media, is that there is no time to be wasted when reach of a sustainable and final peace with the neighboring country, through an agreement for normalization of the relations is concerned. He hopes that leaders of Kosovo will be ready in 2019 to make difficult but necessary decisions for state interest and peace in the Balkans, while he assured Kosovo people that he will never hesitate to make decisions which are in interest of Kosovo.

**Assembly President Kadri Veseli’s end-of-year interview to *RTK***

The news website carries excerpts from Kosovo Assembly President Kadri Veseli’s end-of-year interview to public broadcaster ***RTK*** on Sunday. Veseli said Kosovo is ready to reach an agreement with Serbia now. “Our objective is very clear: we want Serbia to recognize us, or to stop preventing us from joining the United Nations. We will not allow a third tier of government in Kosovo, or partition. We will advance the rights of communities. In 2019, we will recognize the Montenegrin and Croat communities in the constitution”. Veseli said the Quint countries have expressed full support to Kosovo’s state delegation for talks with Serbia. “We have full support for the final agreement. We expect Serbia to recognize us as an independent country. In certain circles we have been told that Serbia will recognize us,” he added. Veseli said Kosovo will continue to promote the rights of minority communities but that “we will not agree to an Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities with executive competencies”. Veseli said the government’s decision to introduce a 100-percent tariff on products from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina was a natural step. “This was a natural decision after we made assessments about Serbia’s aggressive approach toward the Republic of Kosovo. The plan and idea came from the Prime Minister. I supported him. The tax will not be rescinded … We respected them for the sake of our partnership with the international community. We export only €30 million there. This is a provisional measure. It will remain in force until Serbia reflects and stops using methods against Kosovo. We are an independent and sovereign state”. Veseli said Kosovo has met all the requirements for visa liberalization and that the European Union is to blame for delays in the process. “The values of the European Union are at risk. We are a people of survival,” he added. Veseli said the ruling coalition is doing a good job. “We will confiscate illegally-accumulated wealth. We will implement reforms in the healthcare sector … The people are seeing improvement. We will invest in healthcare, sports, innovation and agriculture … I expect reforms next year in customs and the fiscal system … Our patriotism must be work and unity,” he said. Veseli said parliamentary elections will be held according to schedule, in 2021. “The opposition is calling for elections, but the fear of elections is blocking processes. We want to be part of the United Nations … We need to talk about elections,” he said. Veseli said major challenges await Kosovo in 2019 and added he was confident that the Specialist Courts will confirm the righteous fight of the former Kosovo Liberation Army.

**Missing persons, first topic to be discussed with Serbia (*Kosovapress*)**

President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci reconfirmed that the issue of missing persons will the first to be discussed in the dialogue with Serbia. “From what I was informed by the Kosovo Negotiating Team, the issue of missing persons will be the first topic of discussion. This is already official,” Thaci told ***Kosovapress***. Meanwhile, co-chairperson of the Negotiating Team, Fatmir Limaj, said there can be no final agreement with Serbia without resolving the issue of missing persons. “We will have a relevant committee on the missing persons, it will be a special topic,” Limaj said adding that they expect the issue to be resolved through a special agreement which will be incorporated to the final one.

**EU calls on Kosovo government to reconsider decision on tariffs (*Klan Kosova*)**

The EU Office in Kosovo has reacted to the decision of the government of Kosovo to introduce a 100-percent tariff on international brands importing from Serbia. “We want to reiterate the EU’s message that the imposition of tariffs, does not contribute towards good neighborly relations and it contradicts Kosovo’s past commitments towards regional integration and the commitments subscribed to by Kosovo within the SAA. We therefore urge the Kosovo government to reconsider its decision and to revoke the tariffs. This would be the right decision to take in advancing Kosovo’s and its people European aspiration for the present and the future,” the EU statement reads.

**Veseli: Vetevendosje and LDK’s behavior, regretful (*RTK*)**

Kosovo Assembly President Kadri Veseli criticized the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and Vetevendosje Movement for not becoming part of the dialogue “only to be in power and due to their ego.” He added that just like the other political parties these two have an obligation to the citizens of Kosovo to lead Kosovo to the seat of the UN. “Their irresponsible behavior of not taking over responsibility, not to participate in the meetings by causing abstractions and abuse, is to be regretted and it is a pure political ego, war for power, as they do not know any other argument how to come in power. I call them today again to come and take over responsibility given to them by Kosovo citizens. They will get the seat to govern at the moment the citizens wish, because citizens are the ones that project who will be in power,” Veseli said.

**Hoti responds to Veseli’s accusations (RTK)**

Avdullah Hoti, caucus of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), reacted to the accusations of the President of the Assembly Kadri Veseli, about LDK’s irresponsibility in relation with the dialogue with Serbia. Hoti accused Veseli for failing as Assembly President to functionalise normal functioning of the Assembly and added that Veseli should admit his responsibility for failures that the PAN coalition caused to Kosovo. “Instead of accepting these responsibilities, he bargained to ensure the votes for the budget of the state for 2019 during the first reading, while postponing the second reading for the next year, causing difficulties in executing expenditures for the beginning of the next year. “We are working to unify the political scene to change this sort of governing and we have achieved this. Today’s opposition is much stronger than the PAN coalition, be it in numbers at the Assembly or in citizens’ support. The future governing of this opposition will address structurally all the harms of PAN coalition caused to Kosovo in only one year of governing”. “Kosovo need a governing which works for the next twenty years, and not opportunistic politicians who weight each of their political actions in relation with eventual votes in the future elections,” Hoti wrote.

**Haziri: There can be no agreement with Serbia without LDK (*Telegrafi*)**

Deputy leader of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) Lutfi Haziri said there can be no agreement with Serbia without LDK. In a Facebook post, Haziri wrote: “There is no possibility of a final agreement with Serbia without us. Legitimacy for representation in talks is not given for free, it has to be earned. This is achieved through elections or guaranteed agreements. The sooner the better.” Haziri comments follow those of Assembly Speaker Kadri Veseli who accused LDK and Vetevendosje of being irresponsible for not joining Kosovo negotiating team for dialogue with Serbia.

**Engel: No EU for Serbia unless war criminals face justice (*Telegrafi*)**

The U.S. Congressman Eliot Engel has called on the U.S. State Department to make justice for Kosovo war victims a central element of the country’s relations with Serbia. In a letter to the U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Engel said Serbia cannot aspire to join the EU unless Serbian war criminals are held accountable. “Thousands of civilians were killed, tens of thousands raped, and hundreds of thousands forcibly expelled by Serbian troops. Although the facts are largely known, almost no one has been brought to justice in Serbia for these war crimes – even though, in many cases, evidence indicates that orders came straight from the top. This is deeply disturbing,” Engel wrote. See the letter here: <https://bit.ly/2Su8Ciu>

**Simic: Pressure on Kosovo Serbs continuing (*Zeri*)**

Deputy leader of the Serbian List, Igor Simic, accused authorities in Pristina of continuing to put pressure on Kosovo Serbs complicating their lives and that this is all going under the “absolute silence” of the international community. Speaking to Serbia’s broadcaster ***RTS***, Simic said Albanian representatives in Pristina do not act on their own accord and that all their actions are supported by the international community.

**Ceremony commemorating missing persons to be held in Pristina today (*media*)**

Several news websites report that the Kosovo government’s committee on missing persons and representatives of associations of families of missing persons will hold a ceremony today in Pristina commemorating missing persons. The ceremony will take place in front of a monument dedicated to missing persons, in front of the Kosovo Assembly building at 11:00 hours. Kosovo President Hashim Thaci will also attend the ceremony.

**Brnabic: I did not request withdrawal of recognition of Kosovo (RTK)**

The Prime Minister of Serbia has sent a few days ago a letter to the Prime Minister of Albania Edi Rama, requesting to reconsider recognition of Kosovo. However, she claimed on Sunday that she has not requested withdrawal of the recognition of the independence of Kosovo through those letters but as she put it, she wanted to inform them “about Pristina’s irresponsible, unthought and dangerous actions”. “I did not appeal to the UN member countries to withdraw recognition of the independence of Kosovo. I sent the letter that Haradinaj is speaking about on 16 November after increase of the tax to ten percent. At that very transparent moment, it was the decision of the government to inform the UN member states about Pristina’s irresponsible, unthought and dangerous actions,” Brnabic said.

**Serbian President fears unification of Kosovo and Albania (*RTK*)**

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said on Sunday that the opening of a joint border crossing at Kosovo-Albania border, “shows that Albanians are trying to create international unity”. He claims that Albanians will continue working in this direction, saying that Belgrade has warned about this long time ago. “It is clear that they are working to accomplish their plan. When the borders are removed by the end of March, then the tax for central Serbia will be removed and they will claim that they are ready to discuss but from different positions: Kosovo and Albania united,” Vucic said. Asked if he has contacted the world leaders about Albania’s and Kosovo’s unification, he said that he does not expect any more reactions from western politics.

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