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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**For U.S., end goal of Kosovo-Serbia dialogue is mutual recognition (*Koha*)**

A senior U.S. official spoke to the paper on condition of anonymity and said that the country does not support any particular outcome from the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, including territorial exchange. The unnamed source said the U.S. supports the option of the two sides coming to an agreement that would result in mutual recognition even if this entails land swap. However, this would be something that the two sides would have to agree on and that ultimately, the U.S. would review any agreement reached to ensure it does not go against its interests and values. As for the timing of the agreement, the source said the U.S. administration has not set any specific timeline, but it does believe that 2019 would be historic for a Kosovo-Serbia deal. The official further said that an agreement would pave way for Kosovo joining the UN and the EU although these processes would also depend on external factors. Hailing the establishment of the Kosovo negotiating team, the source said it should build up on the work already done by President Hashim Thaci and called on the opposition, in particular the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), not to be bystanders.

**U.S. seeks suspension of import tax, warns of consequences (*Klan Kosova*)**

Several media outlets have republished a story initially reported by ***Klan Kosova*** saying that the U.S. National Security Council and the State Department have worded out their position on current developments in Kosovo, namely with regards to the import tax Kosovo government has imposed on products from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The position of the U.S. administration has been presented in the form of list containing several items, sources said. The first states that the import tariff was introduced without any consultation with the United States. Second, the U.S. expresses “deep disappointment” that even after the President Donald Trump’s letter there was no positive reflection on the part of the Government of Kosovo and that, on the contrary, the tariff’s scope was expanded. “We request immediate suspension of the tariff. The same can be reintroduced in case agreement with Serbia fails,” the third item is reported to state. Under item four, the U.S. says its support to Kosovo is not unconditional and that at present, Kosovo is carrying the burden of dialogue’s failure. “If the tariff is not urgently revoked, the U.S. will suspend assistance in the field of security, respectively support for the KSF,” the following item reads. It also notes that Kosovo-Serbia agreement is not related to the role of the EU and its High Representative Federica Mogherini: “Agreement is a strategic interest of the U.S. and it is therefore unacceptable to put into question this strategic goal by irresponsible actions on the part of Kosovo leaders.” The message concludes by saying that “Kosovo is seriously risking friendship with the U.S. with its irresponsible actions.”  Klan Kosova also reports that it has confirmed the message has been conveyed to relevant institutions of Kosovo through diplomatic channels.

**Arifi: There is no ultimatum from U.S. on tax (*Express*)**

Avni Arifi, chief of staff to Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, told ***Gazeta Express*** that the Government of Kosovo has not received any official request from the U.S. regarding the tax on Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. “The Government can confirm it has not received anything official from the U.S.,” he said.

**Haradinaj hints at toning down position on import tax (*Koha/RTK*)**

According to ***Koha Ditore***, Prime Minister of Kosovo Ramush Haradinaj has hinted yesterday at the possibility of toning down his position on the tax for goods from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although he said the tax will remain in power, he also added:

"Without a pre-agreed contract and international guarantee that the final agreement resulting with recognition will be signed, the tax remains in force.” Haradinaj added further that the tax on Serbian goods does not intend to impede and prolong reach of the comprehensive and legally binding agreement with Serbia, which would result with recognition. “On the contrary, the government of Kosovo would suspend the tax temporarily, only after an international guarantee that we will sit to sign the final agreement, which should result with mutual recognition. The guarantee means that there is a substance, agreed contract in principal and it is only awaiting signing of this agreement, which results with recognition,” Haradinaj said. Before this statement, Haradinaj was adamant that the tax would be lifted only once Serbia recognised Kosovo as an independent country.

**Because of tax, Haradinaj faces troubles in obtaining U.S. visa (*Al Jazeera/Koha*)**

***Al Jazeera Balkans*** originally reported that Prime Minister of Kosovo Ramush Haradinaj is facing challenges in obtaining a U.S. visa because of the tax the government of Kosovo introduced on products coming in from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Haradinaj has been invited to a conference on the Western Balkans set to take place early February in the U.S. but as per reports, he has not yet been issued travelling visa. Meanwhile, spokesperson for the government of Kosovo Donjeta Gashi told ***Koha Ditore*** that the Office of the Prime Minister has not yet received a response from the U.S. Embassy but she did clarify that Haradinaj was planning to travel to the U.S. to attend the National Prayer Breakfast event and not for a Western Balkans conference.

**Thaci: No one should hesitate to take responsibility for dialogue (*RTK*)**

The President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci said Kosovo is building with difficulty the necessary unity on the issues of state interest. “I welcome and support today’s coordinating meeting for the dialogue, as a necessary action to align our steps in the final phase of the dialogue. Kosovo is building the necessary unity for the interests of the state with difficulties. However, if we are united, we will conclude this chapter of the state building successfully as well. As the President of the Republic of Kosovo, I value highly the efforts of the President of the Assembly Veseli on inter-institutional coordination as well as among the parliamentary groups to strengthen the political unity. Despite the eventual reasons, escaping political responsibilities and boycotting of this process is in contradiction with our state interest and that of our strategic partners. Therefore, no one should hesitate to take responsibility in this final phase of the dialogue, which is expected to conclude with a peaceful and comprehensive agreement, which will ensure Kosovo’s recognition by Serbia, and membership at the UN, NATO and EU,” Thaci wrote on his Facebook account.

**Negotiating team: Kosovo will not make serious compromises in Brussels (*Epoka*)**

Kosovo’s institutional leaders and members of the negotiating team for the dialogue with Serbia assured on Monday Kosovo people that they will not make mistakes in this process in Brussels. Assembly President Kadri Veseli and co-head of the delegation Shpend Ahmeti, said they will respect the Constitution of Kosovo and will not make serious compromises in Brussels. According to them, a serious transparency will be following the entire process. Institutional leaders agreed during this meeting also on creation of six commissions on the issues expected to be raised in the dialogue.

**Ahmeti: No taboo topics in dialogue with Serbia (*media*)**

Shpend Ahmeti, co-chair of the Kosovo’s negotiating team for dialogue with Serbia, said after a meeting with Kosovo leaders, Assembly President Kadri Veseli and Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, that the final stage of dialogue with Serbia will not be easy and that there will be no taboo topics. “It will not be an easy process but we will try to end a conflict that was not only armed but also diplomatic. We will listen to every idea offered to us and discuss with citizens,” Ahmeti said adding that missing persons, property, displaced persons, communities, Serb Orthodox Church, return of Kosovo artifacts will be some of the topics that they plan to raise at the dialogue.

**Limaj: Kosovo interested to reach comprehensive agreement (*RTK*)**

Deputy Prime Minister of Kosovo and co-head of the Kosovo delegation for discussions with Serbia, Fatmir Limaj, said after the meeting of institutional leaders on Monday that he has informed them about the meeting of the state delegation with the EU High Representative Federica Mogherini. He said that Kosovo has expressed at this meeting clear commitment for dialogue and added that Kosovo is committed to reach a comprehensive agreement, which would include mutual recognition, Kosovo’s membership at UN, recognition by five EU countries and opening of clear European perspective for Kosovo. “It was a good, fruitful meeting and our impressions are good. Kosovo state delegation will give its utmost for complete alignment with the other constitutional institutions in the country,” Limaj said. He added that institutional leaders and the Assembly of Kosovo will be informed after each meeting in Brussels.

**“LDK on the verge of joining Haradinaj’s government” (*Kosova Sot*)**

Isa Mustafa, leader of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) which is also the biggest opposition political party, said his party will not become part of the negotiating team for the dialogue with Serbia. He however added that that LDK could be involved in the dialogue if new elections are organized or if a complete reconfiguration of Kosovo institutions happens. “LDK has its platform and base document on the dialogue. Our orientation in that document is that new elections are required in order to gain political legitimacy. If elections are not held, a total reconfiguration of the governing or of the current institutions of the country should be considered, in order to ensure the necessary representation that would enable ratification of the agreement,” Mustafa said.

**Mustafa, first suspect to be interviewed by Specialist Chambers (*Koha*)**

Rrustem Mustafa-Remi is the first person to be interviewed in the capacity of a suspect by the Specialist Chambers, Koha Ditore reports on the front page today. Just before entering the offices of the Specialist Chambers in the Hague yesterday, Mustafa told reporters that he stands ready to answer all the prosecutors’ questions. The Specialist Chambers did not give any information on the interview citing confidentiality and neither did Mustafa’s lawyers. However, the paper reports that Mustafa’s testimony yesterday went on for seven hours and is also expected to resume today.

**Tahiri: Financial aid only for persons indicted by Specialist Chambers (*Telegrafi*)**

Minister of Justice Abelard Tahiri has explained that only persons actually indicted by the Specialist Chambers will be provided with financial aid. “There will be a definition of what sum will be covered by the state of Kosovo for defence counsel to these persons,” Tahiri said yesterday at a press conference. His remarks follow media reports that the government of Kosovo would act unlawfully if it were to provide financial aid to the persons so far called for interview by the Specialist Chambers as no one has been officially indicted.

**KLA Association: Special Court, discriminating (*RTK*)**

The Association of the Kosovo Liberation Army has issued another press release on the process of the Special Court, assessing it a discriminating, for “accusing only former KLA members and not Serb criminals who committed crimes in Kosovo.” “Unfortunately, creation of this court was voted by the Assembly of Kosovo and it will function in accordance with the Constitution and laws of Kosovo, and despite our criticism, the invited have to respond and during judicial processes prove their innocence. KLA Association objects interviewing of KLA warriors by the Special Prosecution without defining their status, with the intention of ensuring evidence through these interviews to accuse KLA warriors,” says the press release.

**Vagueness about resignations of northern mayors continues (*Epoka*)**

The paper reports that even two months after the resignation of the municipal mayors of Mitrovica North, Zubin Potok, Leposaviq qnd Zvecan, there is an institutional vagueness on the matter. Opposition political parties consider that lack of dismissal of the resigning mayors, and lack of announcing new elections in these municipalities could be a preparation for division of the north of Kosovo. However, experts of the political processes claim that hesitation to proclaim new elections comes from the fear that Serbs could boycott the process.

**Pacolli supports Bahtiri on his initiative to unite Mitrovica (*Express*)**

Deputy Prime Minister of Kosovo Behgjet Pacolli said that initiative of the citizens of South Mitrovica Municipality to change and complement the Law for Administrative Borders of Municipalities, initiated by mayor Agim Bahtiri and municipal assembly, is a constitutional right which derives from their will to exercise sovereignty which belongs only to the citizens. “I believe that no one is against civic initiatives, based on Constitution and Law, especially when they are a mechanism to exercise sovereignty which derives from the citizens and belongs only to them,” Pacolli said.

**GLPS: Border change discussion undermines Kosovo statehood (*media*)**

In a recent report, the Kosovo-based Group for Legal and Political Studies warned that even discussion of the possibility of border changes as part of the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue undermines Kosovo statehood. GLPS suggests Assembly of Kosovo review all agreements reached so far and conduct a deep analysis of what has been achieved. At the same time, GLPS argued, the platform on dialogue should clearly set out Kosovo’s objectives and red lines.

See the report: <https://bit.ly/2RumXz1>

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