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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**Haradinaj and Hahn focus on EU agenda, do not mention tax (*dailies*)**

The EU Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn visited Kosovo on Thursday. The Prime Minister of Kosovo Ramush Haradinaj told Hahn that Kosovo has fulfilled all visa liberalization criteria and expects the EU to take actions in lifting visas soon. Even though Haradinaj and Hahn discussed the 100 percent tax on Serbian goods, Haradinaj has not addressed media following the meeting, and he took to Facebook to issue a formal statement of what was discussed with Hahn. “During the meeting with Hahn I reiterated Kosovo’s firm position towards EU integrations path. Progress has been marked in fulfilling the European agenda as well as visa liberalization criteria and we expect a prompt decision on waving visas,” he wrote. Johannes Hahn on the other hand wrote in a Tweet that he had a good and open discussion with Haradinaj and Ministers. “Looking forward to working closely in all open issues this year, so Kosovo can advance on its EU path,” Hahn wrote. Following the meeting with Haradinaj, Hahn travelled to Tirana to meet Albanian Prime Minister, Edi Rama.

**Thaci: There is no signed agreement with Serbia (*RFE*)**

In a reply to Radio Free Europe, President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci said there is no signed agreement with Serbia as some politicians in Kosovo claim. He said that he is at present on holidays and will meet the Kosovo Negotiating Team on Monday. “I have in continuity briefed the two chairpersons of the Negotiating Team of all the topics discussed so far in Brussels as part of the final stage of dialogue for normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia,” Thaci said adding: “I have also made it clear to them that there is no official written document or draft agreement  prepared by the EU.” “Despite this, as soon as I finish my leave, I will meet on Monday the Negotiating Team and provide them with a written form the general information about the course of talks so far. In this historic process, we will work together and in coordination with one another,” Thaci said.

**Haradinaj reiterates: No one can take land from Kosovo (*media*)**

The Prime Minister of Kosovo Ramush Haradinaj stressed on Thursday that no one take land from Kosovo. “Kosovo and Albania are in border only with their own lands. If there is a God’s right, we must tell everyone that we do not have foreign land in our state, we have our lands in other states. I believe that I belong to the generation that will stop this practice towards Albanians. No on will be taking land from Kosovo and our fatherland,” Haradinaj said. He added that Albanians are the only ones that have not taken land from anyone.

**In Belgrade, Putin accuses Kosovo of stirring tensions (*dailies*)**

In a visit to Belgrade, Russian President Vladimir Putin accused the government of Kosovo for undertaking a number of provocative steps including that on establishment of Kosovo army which he said has tensed relations with Serbia and could also destabilise the region. ***Reuters*** news agency quoted Putin as saying at a joint press conference with Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic that Kosovo’s decision to set up an army was illegal. Putin also said that Russia’s position on Kosovo is well known: “We accept that an mutually acceptable agreement in line with UN Resolution 1244 is necessary.” ***Deutsche Welle*** meanwhile cited Vucic saying it was clear an agreement with Kosovo will not be possible without Russia.

**Ahmeti: Putin’s visit shows urgent need for region’s democratization (*Bota Sot*)**

Leader of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and co-chair of Kosovo negotiating team for dialogue with Serbia, Shpend Ahmeti said the visit of the Russian President Vladimir Putin to Serbia confirms urgent need for the democratization of the region. “Glorification of authoritarian regimes by Serbia which is also facing mass citizen protests against authoritarianism is an indicator that the region, Serbia in particular, need to urgently prioritise democratization,” Ahmeti wrote in a Facebook post. He said EU integration ought to be the end-goal for the region not only because of economic perspective but because of its democracy values and human rights.

**Bosnia and Herzegovina expect Kosovo to lift import tax (*Koha/Zeri*)**

Bosnia and Herzegovina Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations, Mirko Sarovic, said that on their request the government of Kosovo has agreed to take part in bilateral negotiations concerning the 100-percent tax on goods from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bosnian media outlet Klix.ba quoted sources saying that preparations are underway for a bilateral meeting between Bosnian and Kosovo officials in an effort to find adequate solution to the current situation. “We cannot predict the process but it is important we have managed to open negotiations at the level of experts. Instead of applying counter measures that would serve no one, we have created conditions for problems to be resolved at a professional level,” Sarovic is quoted.

**Government denies it is negotiating tax removal with Bosnia (*Koha*)**

Kosovo government spokesperson Donjeta Gashi cofnrimed the Kosovo side has positively responded to the request made by Bosnia and Herzegovina for a meeting within the CEFTA framework in regards to the tax on its imports but said the talks will not focus on Kosovo rescinding the measure. “We will listen to their demands but we will also defend our positions and principles,” Gashi said adding that most likely Kosovo’s Minister of Trade and Industry Endrit Shala will meet officials from Bosnia and Herzegovina by the end of the month.

**Shala: Tax to be lifted when reasons for its introduction are eliminated (*Zeri*)**

Kosovo’s Minister of Trade and Industry, Endrit Shala, told the paper that the tax on imports from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina will not be lifted as the reasons for its introduction have not yet been eliminated.

**Isufi: Measures against Serbia should increase (*Epoka*)**

Ahmet Isufi, caucus of the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo, told the paper that the government of Kosovo should increase measures against Serbia instead of removing the 100 percent tax on import of Serbian goods. He added that the tax should remain in force despite the U.S. pressure to Kosovo. According to Isufi, this tax cannot bring the government down neither can it affect the relations between Kosovo and the United States.

**Apostolova, O’Connell meet LDK leader Mustafa (*Zeri*)**

The Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) said in a statement to the press that its leader Isa Mustafa had meetings with the Head of the EU Office in Kosovo, Nataliya Apostolova, and the United Kingdom Ambassador to Kosovo, Ruairi O’Connell. In meeting with Apostolova, Mustafa is reported to have spoken about LDK’s positions on recent developments in Kosovo including dialogue with Serbia. Apostolova encouraged the party to continue playing a constructive role in Kosovo’s continuous progress. Dialogue with Serbia was also discussed in Mustafa’s meeting with Ambassador O’Connell.

**Konjufca: Thaci, the least transparent person (*T7*)**

Vetevendosje Movement caucus Glauk Konjufca, said that Kosovo’s President Hashim Thaci’s secret trips are becoming more frequent. He said that Thaci is the least transparent person in Kosovo. “I was not aware that he is not in Kosovo for ten days now, according to information, he is in winter holidays,” Konjufca said. He added further that holidays or official trips are usually made public, however, according to him, “the President is keeping his trips secret very often.”

**Secret procedure for funds allocated for Specialist Chambers (*Koha Ditore*)**

The paper reports on the front page that Kosovo institutions have spent almost half a million euro on two international firms hired to support potential Specialist Chamber indictees. Ministry of Justice revealed that the funds have been spent on implementation of a government decision and receiving advice on how to approach Kosovo obligations towards the Specialist Chambers. However, the Ministry did not make the names of the two firms public citing confidentiality reasons.

**OSCE: In ten years, 34 women died as a result of domestic violence (*Koha*)**

In a report about the state of shelters for the victims of domestic violence the OSCE found that 400 victims of gender-based violence sought out shelter over the last year. OSCE called for the increase of the number of safehouses and secure sustainable funding for them. Head of OSCE Mission in Kosovo, Jan Braathu, said that in ten years, 34 women in Kosovo died as a result of domestic violence. He said safehouses are more than necessary to offer the victims possibility to leave abusive situations.

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