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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**Germany maintains position against border changes (*Koha*)**

Citing reliable sources, the paper reports on its front page that German Chancellor Angela Merkel told Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic during their meeting in Davos on Wednesday that eventual changes to Kosovo’s borders are unacceptable. The source said, “the border correction or the land swap is unacceptable for the German government”.

**Veseli: Tax will not be removed until Serbia reflects (*media*)**

Kosovo Assembly President and Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) leader, Kadri Veseli, said on Wednesday that the 100-percent tax on Serbian goods will not be lifted “until Serbia reflects and stops its actions against Kosovo’s statehood”. Veseli further said that Serbia should respect Kosovo as an independent country.

**Haradinaj: Tax serves Kosovo’s national interests (*media*)**

Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj said on Wednesday that the 100-percent tax on Serbian goods serves Kosovo’s national interest. During a visit to Peja, Haradinaj was quoted as saying, “Our relations with Serbia are fragile. I said the snow will one day melt, it will melt on both sides, but we are in no hurry … The tax was not introduced to spite someone but to protect our national interests”.

**Vucic: Tax will be removed sooner or later, but we paid a high price (*media*)**

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic told ***RTS*** on Wednesday that Kosovo’s authorities will sooner or later remove the 100-percent on Serbian goods, “but Serbia has already paid a high price”. “Whether they will remove or suspend it, or find another option, it is the same. We have suffered great damage and it caused great tension,” Vucic said.

**Thaci meets Hahn at the sidelines of WEF in Davos (*media*)**

President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci met at the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos the European Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn and discussed dialogue with Serbia and visa liberalisation. Speaking to Kosovo public broadcaster ***RTK*** from Davos Thaci said he discussed with Hahn future steps in Kosovo’s relation with the EU and the resumption of dialogue with Serbia. “Commissioner Hahn was recently in Pristina and had meetings with Kosovo state leaders and I believe Kosovo will respect European criteria to move forward in particular to facilitate the decision of the European Council for visa liberalisation,” Thaci said. He added that Hahn reaffirmed that certain EU countries still have dilemmas regarding visa liberalisation which he said need to be overcome through efforts from the Kosovo institutions and accurate and timely information to EU authorities. As for dialogue with Serbia, Thaci said it will resume in the coming weeks and that he fully supports Kosovo’s negotiating team. Commissioner Hahn meanwhile tweeted after the meeting: “We discussed the European perspective of Kosovo and the way forward in the dialogue with Serbia. It’s in the EU’s geopolitical and economic self-interest to draw the whole region of SE Europe closer.”

**Vucic meets Merkel in Davos (*Kosova Sot*)**

The President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic, met on Wednesday at the Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, with the German Chancellor Angela Merkel. After the meeting he said that a compromise for Kosovo has to be found. “Compromise is something which leads to good results and people should try to reach compromises, not to humiliate and destroy their opponents. We will understand this in Serbia,” Vucic said. He explained that during most of the meeting with Merkel, they discussed Kosovo and Serbia’s EU integration. “The discussion was not simple, but we have an opinion on how to resolve this problem in Serbia. The countries which have recognized Kosovo have a bit different position, I think Merkel values and respects our will to discuss and reach a compromise,” he said.

**Kosovo delegation to travel to Bosnia to discuss import tax (*RFE/Kosova Sot*)**

Kosovo’s Minister of Trade and Industry, Endrit Shala, told ***Radio Free Europe*** that a delegation from Kosovo will be travelling to Bosnia and Herzegovina to discuss the import tax introduced by the Kosovo government. “In this meeting the delegation will explain before CEFTA and Bosnia authorities as to why Kosovo has decided to take this measure and why it will remain in force,” Shala said.

**Hoxhaj: Import tax to remain in force (*media*)**

Kosovo’s Deputy Prime Minister Enver Hoxhaj said in an interview with Bosnian media outlet ***Avangarda*** that Kosovo was driven more by political than economic motives when it decided to impose a 100-percent tax on imports from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. “When you are a young and small country and a neighbour like Serbia continuously strikes at Kosovo’s external sovereignty with anti-recognition campaigns and blockades for membership in international organisations, we need to use what is at our disposal to exercise internal sovereignty by introducing economic measures and conveying clear message in relation to Serbia,” Hoxhaj said adding that the tax will remain in force for as long as the reasons that led to its introduction exist. Hoxhaj noted that the EU and its member states have failed to use their influence on Serbia to prevent it from continuing its campaign against Kosovo which they were obliged to do by the terms of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA). “European Union should treat Balkan countries in a balanced manner,” he underlined.

**Kurti: Government must fall, tax must remain (*media*)**

Most media quote Vetevendosje leader Albin Kurti as saying that the Haradinaj-led government must fall as soon as possible and that the 100-percent tax on Serbian goods must remain in force. “The 100-percent tax on Serbian goods must not be removed. We have insisted on the principle of full reciprocity with Serbia, both politically and economically. Serbia owes us a lot, we don’t owe anything to Serbia,” he said. Kurti also added that he will not support the draft budget for 2019 “because it does not support Kosovo’s economic development”. “We want parliamentary elections as soon as possible. This government must fall, but the tax must remain in force,” Kurti said.

**Ahmeti: Platform will be submitted to Assembly in spring session (*media*)**

Shpend Ahmeti, co-head of Kosovo’s state delegation for talks with Serbia, said on Wednesday that the negotiating team will submit the platform on talks to the Assembly in the spring session. Ahmeti told reporters in Pristina that the platform will be ready before January 30. “The platform is based on the Constitution of Kosovo. The process of dialogue has one objective: mutual recognition. If there is no recognition, then dialogue is meaningless for us and we shouldn’t even waste any time, because it is clear that Kosovo went through several waves of compromises,” he said. Ahmeti also said the negotiating team has created six committees: on missing persons, properties, cultural heritage, minority rights, war crimes and economy. Ahmeti said he was skeptical about an agreement with Serbia, “as the positions are too far from one another”. “It seems that Serbia expects more concessions, while we consider that we have made all concessions, and we think that Serbia needs to move on from Kosovo problem,” he said.

**Hoxha says visa liberalisation lobbying to begin shortly (*Zeri*)**

Kosovo’s Minister of European Integration, Dhurata Hoxha, said that visa liberalisation lobbying campaign will begin in the coming days and that there are no additional criteria Kosovo has to meet. In a Facebook post, Hoxha said as part of lobbying efforts, Kosovo institutions plan to hold meetings with officials from EU member states to convince them to support visa liberalisation for Kosovo.

**Kukan to Mogherini: More work, less philosophy (*Kosova Sot*)**

The European Parliament MP, Eduard Kukan addressed on Wednesday harsh criticism towards the European Commission and European External Action Service (EEAS) led by Frederica Mogherini. He said these two institutions should be working more on the discussions between Kosovo and Serbia. “European Commission and EEAS should work more and phylosiphise less when discussions with Pristina are concerned,” Kukan said. These statements come after resistance of the Kosovo PM Ramush Haradinaj to lift the tax on Serbian goods. He also criticized Romania’s intention to remove Balkans from the agenda during its presiding.

**Mitrovica cannot be united without Serb vote (*Koha*)**

The unification of the municipalities of Mitrovica South and Mitrovica North cannot happen without the votes of Serb MPs, the paper reports on page three. According to the Constitution of Kosovo, changes to municipal boundaries is a legislation of vital interest that requires the majority of votes of minority communities. Kosovo government representatives did not want to comment on Wednesday on the initiative for unification launched by Mitrovica South Mayor Agim Bahtiri and supported by Kosovo President Hashim Thaci. Albanian representatives from the Mitrovica North municipality said they have no position yet on whether the unification should take place. On the other hand, Serbian List officials said they will never allow the unification.

**Kosovo recognises Venezuelan self-declared president (*Zeri*)**

Kosovo’s Foreign Minister Behgjet Pacolli has announced on Twitter that Kosovo officially recognises Juan Guaido as the Interim President of Venezuela and wished him success on the path to restoring democracy. “Kosovo looks forward to establish diplomatic relations with Venezuela. We will share our state-building experience,” Pacolli wrote.

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