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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**Haradinaj: If government falls, tax remains in force until summer (*media*)**

Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj told reporters in Pristina today that even if the government falls and new parliamentary elections are announced, the 100-percent tariff on Serbian and Bosnian goods will remain in force until summer. “As far as the breakup of the ruling coalition and eventual new elections are concerned, the tax will remain in force until June. It would take 45 days to hold the new elections, another 30 days for the formation of the Assembly, and some more days for the government to resign. This means we would enter summer with the tax in force,” Haradinaj was quoted as saying. Haradinaj said he saw the proposal of Assembly President Kadri Veseli to suspend the tariff for 120 days but added that his position and that of the government remains the same. Haradinaj did not reply to questions by reporters if he feels betrayed by the partner of the ruling coalition. Commenting on the list of conditions he mentioned in a letter to the EU and the U.S., Haradinaj said whoever has problems with those conditions is against Kosovo’s right. “I don’t believe the U.S. have problems with these conditions. But if there is someone else that minds these conditions, then we know what relations we have with them,” he added.

**Haradinaj to world’s PMs: Dialogue is between two sovereign countries (*media*)**

Prime Minister of Kosovo Ramush Haradinaj has written a letter to all the world’s prime ministers saying that dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia is between two independent and sovereign countries and that the status of Kosovo has been sealed on February 2008. In a Facebook post, Haradinaj said the letter is intended to end Serbian propaganda suggesting that the status and territory of Kosovo is still on the table.  He said Kosovo and Serbia are preparing to embark on a process aimed at ending the historical and political differences and that Kosovo strongly desires to conclude a comprehensive and legally binding agreement in 2019. This agreement, according to Haradinaj, “will address all outstanding issues including war reparations, the rights of minorities in both countries, as well as various economic, social and cultural matters – leading to mutual recognition and Kosovo’s membership of the United Nations.” “It is important to understand that Kosovo will enter into this process as a sovereign and independent state. The negotiations will deal with the relationships between the two countries: the principles of mutual recognition and reciprocity of obligations will not be open for discussion.”

**Thaci writes to President Trump: I pledge for agreement with Serbia (*media*)**

The President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci, informed on Tuesday about a letter that he has sent to the U.S. President Donald Trump on 8 January, in which he pledged that Kosovo is ready for a compromise deal with Serbia to resolve long-standing issues between the countries. “As we discussed in Paris – and as I explained in further detail to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and National Security Adviser John Bolton during my recent visit to Washington DC – I agree with you that and agreement that will resolve all the outstanding issues between Kosovo and Serbia is now within reach,” Thaci wrote. “To this end, let me give you my personal assurances that as Kosovo’s President I will be ready and willing to make compromises necessary to reach a comprehensive and balanced settlement that will encompass all outstanding issues, thereby ending the century-old conflict with Serbia, and bringing peace to the whole region,” he noted.

**Veseli: Kosovo to show understanding towards U.S. views (*Telegrafi*)**

The president of the Assembly of Kosovo Kadri Veseli said told ***RTV Dukagjini*** after his statement that the 100 percent tax for Serbian goods should be suspended for 120 days, that it is an ethical issue for Kosovo to express understanding for the U.S. Kosovo is always in side with America. He stressed that it must be analyzed if tax is as important as to endanger partnership with the U.S. “We have to think what will happen two weeks or two years later,” Veseli said. He added that Kosovo has no better mentor or powerful supporter than the U.S. Veseli said Ramush Haradinaj has won the mandate for prime minister but that he had some suggestions for him. “What I would ask from Haradinaj is more focus on economic reforms and more attention to relations with the U.S. and other partners," he said. Veseli also spoke about future elections saying his party will run alone and that he would also be in the running for the post of Kosovo prime minister. “We will go alone with a very clear platform of a centre right leading towards conservative,” Veseli said.

**Split between ruling coalition partners deepens (*Koha Ditore*)**

The paper reports on the front page that the split between Prime Minister of Kosovo Ramush Haradinaj and Assembly President Kadri Veseli has most recently deepened because of the differences of views on the tax on imports from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Haradinaj has rejected Veseli’s proposal for suspending the tax for a period of 120 days insisting that the views he expressed in a letter to the Quint countries are those of the government he leads. Yesterday, Haradinaj also wrote a letter to world’s prime ministers underlining that dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia is between two independent countries and that the status of Kosovo can not be negotiated. At the same time, President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci sent a letter to the U.S. President Donald Trump pledging to make necessary compromises to reach agreement with Serbia. The paper also writes that PM Haradinaj is increasingly talking about the prospect of early elections but he also warned that if the government falls at this time, the tax would remain in force until new institutions are constituted which, according to him, will take at least until June.

**Limaj and Ahmeti meet with EU officials (*Epoka e Re*)**

Fatmir Limaj and Shpend Ahmeti, co-heads of Kosovo’s negotiation team in dialogue with Serbia, met during their visit to Brussels on Tuesday with senior officials of the Office of the EU foreign policy chief, Federica Moherini. The Kosovo negotiation team briefed the EU officials on recent developments related to dialogue, including drafting of a Law on dialogue and the work the team is doing to draft a platform on dialogue. The EU officials stated after the meeting that they have reviewed the progress reached so far on normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia. “The EU welcomes their efforts to move forward the mandate of the Assembly of Kosovo, towards a unifying position in close coordination with all constitutional bodies,” an EU official said after the meeting. Limaj and Ahmeti have not addressed the media after their second meeting with the EU officials in Brussels.

**Kurti meets Kosnett: Tax should not be lifted (*Zeri*)**

Vetevendosje leader Albin Kurti met the U.S. Ambassador to Kosovo Philip Kosnett and discussed recent developments in Kosovo. According to a press release issued by Vetevendosje, the meeting took place in a very constructive atmosphere and Kosnett is reported to have spoken about importance of Kosovo in the U.S. foreign policy and the need for Kosovo to parallelly cultivate very good relations with the EU. They also discussed Kosovo-Serbia dialogue and the tax on imports from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina with Kurti speaking about importance of Kosovo having a platform for dialogue and for the negotiating team to guarantee a serious representation. Kurti also spoke of reasons why the government of Kosovo should not rescind the tax.

**Matoshi explains importance of tax and why Haradinaj would not lift it (*RTK*)**

Halil Matoshi, adviser to the Prime Minister of Kosovo took to Facebook to write that the tariff on Serbian goods does not affect eternal friendship with the U.S. and called the fear expressed on the matter as irrational. He noted that relations with the U.S. would be affected if Kosovo gave up western values and long-term strategic orientation. According to Matoshi, the 100 percent tariff returned civic, national and institutional dignity to the people of Kosovo. “And finally, President Trump himself said he is a man of tariffs, speaking about tax on Chinese goods,” he wrote adding that U.S. economy also profits from the tax on Serbian goods.

**Bahtiri: Unification of Mitrovica to happen soon (*media*)**

Mitrovica Mayor, Agim Bahtiri, said unification of two Mitrovica municipalities will happen very soon as there is no other alternative of running the city except from it being a single entity. Responding on Facebook to statements from Serbian leaders that unification will not come about, Bahtiri said: “We have given the Serbs the opportunity to run the northern part of Mitrovica through the decentralization process but they misused this chance by not taking any action for the good o the citizens. The state of Kosovo gave them the opportunity to govern justly through development goals and free of discrimination but they did the opposite. The time for when we lead the fate of our citizens in the hand of criminal gangs is over.”

**Ministry of Agriculture unlawfully grants €3 million (*Koha Ditore*)**

The paper publishes an extensive account of what it claims is evidence that the Ministry of Agriculure, Forestry and Rural Development has unlawfully granted €3 million to businesses owned by people close to political parties run by both Albanians and Serbs. In a two-month long research, the paper says it has discovered that of four groups that benefited from the funds, only one met the eligibility criteria. Officials at the Ministry deny any wrongdoing and said the programme and the selection of beneficiaries were implemented in line with applicable legislation.

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