

Main Stories 31 January 2019

* **Leaders of ruling parties meet, decide to continue coalition (*dailies*)**
* **Serious phone call from Washington: Bolton personally addressed leaders (*Metro*)**
* **PDK expresses concern over lack of institutional cooperation (*media*)**
* **Haradinaj: U.S. view was not heeded in efforts to overturn special court (*media*)**
* **Veseli: The session on budget, on 2 February (*RTK*)**
* **Limaj: Kosovo can find unity for the interest of the country (*Koha*)**
* **EU states its position on tax remains unchanged (*Zeri*)**
* **U.S. Ambassador Kosnett to meet Kosovo leaders today (*Klan/Lajmi*)**
* **Haliti: Government will not fall, we will reach compromise on tax (*RTK*)**
* **Rikalo to be dismissed Saturday, budget to be approved soon after (*Zeri*)**
* **Haziri: New elections or government reshuffle (*media*)**
* **Molliqaj: Tax should remain in power (*Klan*)**
* **Another U.S. criticism for Kosovo institutions (*RTK*)**
* **Nomination of CEC members, after completion of documentation (*Epoka*)**

**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**Leaders of ruling parties meet, decide to continue coalition (*dailies*)**

Leaders from the ruling coalition parties – Kadri Veseli from the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), Ramush Haradinaj from Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK), Behgjet Pacolli from New Kosovo Alliance (AKR), and Fatmir Limaj from Social Democratic Initiative (NISMA) – met yesterday to discuss the most recent developments, in particular following divergence of views on whether to rescind tax on imports from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. While none of the leaders made any statements to the press after the meeting, the Government of Kosovo issued a statement saying that the topics discussed among coalition leaders included the functioning of institutions, implementation of legislative agenda with focus on approval of 2019 budget, dialogue platform, and the tax. “Coalition partners agreed to intensify actions and activities in the coming days toward harmonising decision making on above mentioned topics,” the statement reads. It goes on to say that the leaders mainly discussed aspects relating to the platform for dialogue with Serbia which is expected to be approved by the Assembly of Kosovo. “The dialogue platform will reflect the unified position of the country’s institutions to achieving a Comprehensive Legally Binding Agreement which should result in mutual recognition and Kosovo’s UN membership. Coalition leaders also pledged to intensify steps and coordination of actions with Kosovo’s strategic partners, U.S. and EU. It was a joint conclusion that the coalition is functional and stable,” the statement reads. Under the caption, *Tax shook them but did not break them,* ***Zeri*** on the front page comments that after a three-hour meeting, coalition partners agreed to continue their joint governance but did not decide on the future course of action. ***Koha Ditore*** meanwhile writes that the relations within coalition partners have reached a new level after each accusing the other of taking unilateral actions. Prime Minister Haradinaj, adds the paper, has come out against his coalition partner, Kadri Veseli, in insisting that the conditions he set out relating to the tax are those of the government he leads.

**Serious phone call from Washington: Bolton personally addressed leaders (*Metro*)**

Citing unnamed sources, Pristina-based ***Gazeta Metro*** news website reports that John Bolton, National Security Advisor to U.S. President Donald Trump, called Kosovo’s leaders on the phone on Wednesday, specifically Prime Minister Haradinaj, in what the news website describes as “a very serious call with negative tones”. “Leaders will meet tomorrow again, and the tax is expected to be suspended the latest by next week,” sources from the ruling coalition told the news website.

**PDK expresses concern over lack of institutional cooperation (*media*)**

The Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) issued a statement yesterday stating that it was concerned of the lack of institutional cooperation and interaction on issues of state interest. “The Democratic Party of Kosovo considers such a practice is damaging partnership with United States of America and Kosovo’s international standing,” the statement reads. PDK said unilateral political protagonist approach is plunging Kosovo into a crisis at a time when it needs national unity. “Personal viewpoints are legitimate but the official position and decision making for the country should be stately, at all times. The Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo is the highest state institution and no decision is valid without the endorsement of its deputies. The Democratic Party of Kosovo calls for an end to statements on border correction. The Democratic Party of Kosovo calls for an end to statements about an International Conference on Kosovo. This idea constitutes a real threat to the reopening of the final status of Kosovo, definitely resolved through the declaration of independence of Kosovo on 17 February 2008 and the danger of Russia’s involvement in the process. Kosovo goes to Dialogue only to fully normalise relations with Serbia, mutual recognition, UN seat and acceleration of membership to EU and NATO.” PDK further called on opposition parties to take on their responsibilities towards Kosovo: “The Democratic League of Kosovo should end use of its officials’ denigrating language and avoiding of state responsibility while Vetevendosje Movement should distance itself from the anti-state discourse and recognise the state of Kosovo.” “The position of the Democratic Party of Kosovo is clear and firm: Kosovo is an independent and sovereign country and any decision should derive and be legitimized by the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo,” PDK said concluding that any agreement reached between Kosovo and Serbia should be legitimized by the direct will of the people of Kosovo through a referendum.

**Haradinaj: U.S. view was not heeded in efforts to overturn special court (*media*)**

Prime Minister of Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj, confirmed today that the tax on imports from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina will remain in force. He also commented on accusations that the tax is impairing Kosovo’s relations with the U.S.: “It is good to be honest with the U.S. and EU. When we were afraid of the Specialist we tried to overturn it. We didn’t care that Americans were saying it would be a stab in the back. Now when it’s about gaining the recognition, it is being said it will ruin partnership with the U.S.” He added: “We will not give our market to Serbia without acquiring recognition in exchange. This is not against the U.S.” Haradinaj said it would not make sense to suspend the tax for a period of 120 days as proposed by Kosovo Assembly President and leader of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) Kadri Veseli. “If we open the door for 120 days we might as well not reapply it anymore. The goods that would enter during those 120 days would last for ten years.” He said that calls for concluding an agreement with Serbia is also something Kosovo wants but not at the price of giving away land or agreeing to the creation of a republic in the form of the Association of Serb municipalities.

**Veseli: The session on budget, on 2 February (*RTK*)**

Kosovo Assembly President Kadri Veseli told reporters on Wednesday that the plenary session on the budget will be held on February 2. Following the meeting of the assembly presidency, Veseli was asked about the firm position against removal of the tax on Serbian goods, and said that that was Haradinaj’s personal position. “Any decision, any action of the institutions should be legitimate, it should be transparent. The Assembly of Kosovo is the place where positions which concern our country should be presented. I believe that we will very soon have even a better coordination at the Assembly on the dialogue and state responsibilities that belong to the Assembly,” he said. He said that they represent the interest of the citizens and that that is territorial sovereignty and integrity. “No association with executive competencies, which means no third executive power and I believe that we will gain our seat at the UN. We expect from Serbia to recognize Kosovo during 2019,” Veseli said. He further called on opposition political parties to take over their responsibilities instead of avoiding them.

**Limaj: Kosovo can find unity for the interest of the country (*Koha*)**

Leader of the Social Democratic Initiative (NISMA) and co-head of the Kosovo Negotiating Team for dialogue with Serbia, Fatmir Limaj, said in a Facebook post that Kosovo has shown in the past that it can find compromise and unity when it comes to the interests of the country. “Today we need unity for big issues such as dialogue. I will continue to invest all my contribution for unification of positions in the interest of the country and in close coordination with our partners, the U.S. and EU, to conclude open issues with Serbia and achieve mutual recognition and Kosovo’s membership in the UN and European Union,” Limaj wrote.

**EU states its position on tax remains unchanged (*Zeri*)**

EU High Representative spokesperson Maja Kocijancic told the paper that the EU has seen the letter sent by Prime Minister of Kosovo Ramush Haradinaj laying out conditions under which the tax on Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina would be suspended and that the EU’s position on the tax is well-known and remains unchanged. “EU has proposed the two parties focus on issues relating to trade in a special forum in order to find clear and quick solutions. This proposal of ours was continuous,” Kocijancic said adding that European Commissioner Johannes Hahn presented the parties the proposal during his visit to Belgrade and Pristina. “This offer was reaffirmed through a letter by the High Representative Mogherini and commissioners Malmstrom and Hahn addressed to Prime Minister Haradinaj,” Kocijancic noted.

**U.S. Ambassador Kosnett to meet Kosovo leaders today (*Klan/Lajmi*)**

***Klan Kosova*** is reporting that leaders of coalition parties along with President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci are expected to meet today the U.S. Ambassador Philip Kosnett to discuss the 100-percent tax on imports from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Sources said the meeting is expected to take place at President Thaci’s office. Meanwhile, ***Lajmi.net*** news website quotes sources saying that Prime Minister of Kosovo Ramush Haradinaj is expected to meet the U.S. Ambassador to Kosovo Philip Kosnett today.

**Haliti: Government will not fall, we will reach compromise on tax (*RTK*)**

Xhavit Haliti, Deputy President of the Assembly of Kosovo and member of the leadership of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) told TV Dukagjini that the governing coalition remains stable and insists that a compromised solution to suspend the 100 percent tax on Serbian goods, should be found. “I do not know what Kosovo has benefited with this famous tax set to Serbia,” Haliti said. He added that many Serbian goods can be found in Kosovo stores with the production date after the tax came in power. Haliti said that his political party has made it clear that that Kosovo will move along with the U.S. “Kosovo will pay a higher price than PDK for anything that slides from these lines,” he said, to add that all the ideas that put under question mark relations with the U.S. should be opposed. According to him, such actions are a national treason where the prosecution should intervene.

**Rikalo to be dismissed Saturday, budget to be approved soon after (*Zeri*)**

The paper reports that Prime Minister of Kosovo Ramush Haradinaj is expected to dismiss the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development Nenad Rikalo on Saturday to pave way for the approval of the 2019 budget. Rikalo’s removal from post has been set as a condition by the Social Democratic Party (PSD) in exchange for its pro vote on the budget. A source from PSD told the paper that the budget will be approved Saturday as soon as Rikalo’s dismissal is confirmed.

**Haziri: New elections or government reshuffle (*media*)**

Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) deputy leader, Lutfi Haziri, said on Wednesday that regardless of the positive effects the 100-percent tariff brought to Kosovo, the latter cannot threaten to ruin relations with the U.S. “Under such circumstances, we should either go to early parliamentary elections or have a government reshuffle,” Hazri was quoted as saying. “The LDK is surely in favor of a government reshuffle, where all parliamentary parties would assume responsibility and that government would conclude dialogue with Serbia”.

**Molliqaj: Tax should remain in power (*Klan*)**

Kosovo Assembly MP from the Social-Democratic Party Dardan Molliqaj, told ***Klan Kosova*** that the tax on Serbian goods should remain in power for now. According to him, the tax is more an instrument to reach certain results. “I do not consider that Kosovo was offered a solution by the international factor, in order to suspend tax. Tax is an instrument, it can be suspended today, it can be returned tomorrow. The international factor should offer a clear platform of deadlines and subjects with regards to the dialogue,” he said. He said the moment the tax becomes non-beneficial, it is legitimate to suspend it. “That momentum is not today,” he said. According to Molliqaj, not only Serbia but a part of the western powers, have transformed the tax into means for continuance of the dialogue.

**Another U.S. criticism for Kosovo institutions (*RTK*)**

Except for the criticism on the 100 percent tax on Serbian goods, Philip Kosnett, Ambassador of the U.S. to Kosovo, took to twitter to criticize Kosovo institutions for failing to combat corruption in Kosovo. “The CPI2018 is out, and perceptions of public sector #corruption in #Kosovo in 2018 were worse than in 2017. This should concern every citizen of Kosovo. How can you help demand accountability from your government in 2019? UnitedAgainstCorruption,” Kosnett wrote.

**Nomination of CEC members, after completion of documentation (*Epoka*)**

Nominations of the new members of the Central Election Commission (CEC) by the President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci, will commence very soon. The Office of the President informed the paper that some documentation of the nominees was not completed and that immediately after that, the President will nominate the new CEC members. However according to the candidate of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) Florian Dushi, this does not justify the more than one-year delay. He said the President is acting in contradiction with the law and his constitutional obligations.

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