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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**U.S. respects Kosovo’s sovereignty but says tax should be suspended (*Koha*)**

In an interview with *KTV* aired last night, the U.S. Ambassador to Kosovo Philip Kosnett said that the U.S. respects Kosovo’s sovereignty but noted that the tariff imposed on Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina affects other processes around Kosovo and the region and its suspension is also in the interest of the U.S. “We think that in order to achieve progress in rule of law, in economic development, in regional stability, it’s vital that the Dialogue with Serbia resumes as quickly as possible. That brings us to the issue of the tariff. Now, I have to say there have been some confusing and misinformed stories. Just before I came here today, I read that the United States threatened economic sanctions against Kosovo. I want to reassure people that is not the case. That is not the case with how the United States wishes to deal with its friend, Kosovo. I do believe though, that what we are looking for from Kosovo is courageous leadership. It’s very easy to decide that there are reasons to delay the negotiations with Serbia. We don’t think that is in the interests of Kosovo, of Serbia, or of the United States,” Kosnett said. He added that the U.S. thinks Kosovo should temporarily suspend the tariff for a certain period of time and this would in turn lead to expectations that Belgrade would follow up with constructive measures: “I don’t speak for the European Union, but I do believe that both the United States and the European Union are engaging with the Government of Serbia, to make sure that if Kosovo takes this step to temporarily suspend the tariffs, that Serbia will react in a constructive fashion.” He warned that if the tariff is not suspended, “we run the risk of a complete loss of momentum that would be very harmful for the people of Kosovo as well as the people of Serbia, and the United States and the European Union.” Kosnett also said that the U.S. Government believes 2019 will be the year when a comprehensive agreement between Kosovo and Serbia is ‘achievable’. “What do I mean by a comprehensive agreement? One that not only is focused on the issue you hear about all the time – the possibility of a border adjustment – that is a possibility. But one that addresses the wide range of issues that have separated Kosovo and Serbia. President Trump, as many of your viewers know, has personally engaged in this process. He believes that this is the time. So does the European Union. We think that a comprehensive agreement has to open a path for mutual recognition for Kosovo and Serbia, and for both country’s full participation in the western system. There is a great deal at stake here and delay is not going to be beneficial to anybody,” Kosnett said.

See the full interview: <https://xk.usembassy.gov/kosovo-risks-losing-the-momentum/>

**Meeting of leaders fails to result in suspension of tax (*dailies*)**

Institutional leaders, Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, President Hashim Thaci and Assembly Speaker Kadri Veseli, met yesterday the U.S. Ambassador Philip Kosnett and continued their meeting even after he left but according to the papers they reached no agreement on suspending the tariff on imports from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. ***Koha Ditore*** writes that Haradinaj resisted pressure to lift the tax while ***RTK*** reports that Kosnett demonstratively left the meeting and slammed the door on his way out. At an event after the meeting, President Thaci said that any decision should be taken in close cooperation with the U.S. “This meeting cultivated cooperation with the U.S. Kosovo is and will be a product of the U.S. and no one can ruin this cooperation,” Thaci said. Haradinaj meanwhile confirmed that the U.S. has asked Kosovo to suspend the tax to give dialogue with Serbia a chance to succeed. “We listen to these views carefully,” he said. Haradinaj is reported to not have ruled out the possibility of the governing coalition breakup if political disagreements between partners persist: “Everything is possible in the coming days, weeks.” “What is important is for Kosovo to stand on its feet. I support an agreement with Serbia but not at the price of territory or association. The tax is a sovereign decision of the government, we are not conditioning the dialogue with a decision of the government of Serbia. I don’t understand why the issues are being connected,” Haradinaj said. At the same time, Veseli said partnership with the U.S. needs to be preserved at all cost.

**Thaci: I assured Bolton that Kosovo will remain responsible (*RTK*)**

The President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci informed about his telephone conversation with the U.S. National Adviser, John Bolton. “This afternoon I had a telephone conversation with the Adviser for National Security at the White House, Ambassador John Bolton. We discussed about the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, as well as about the eternal partnership between Kosovo and the U.S. I assured Ambassador Bolton that the Republic of Kosovo remains responsible on continuance of the dialogue and will speak in a single voice, as requested by President Trump. We are convinced that the dialogue will resume soon, and it will conclude with a comprehensive agreement, which ensures mutual recognition and membership in NATO, EU and UN. Kosovo has always walked along the United States of America and the friendship will be eternal,” Thaci wrote.

**Thaci has conversation with U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Mitchell (*media*)**

The president of Kosovo Hashim Thaci discussed on Thursday also with the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Euro-Asia, Wess Mitchell. “I also had a telephone conversation with U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Euro-Asia, Wess Mitchell, about the political situation in Kosovo. We agreed to continue with our commitment in the final phase of the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. All institutions in the U.S. are in support of the Republic of Kosovo to reach a comprehensive agreement, which will ultimately bring long-term peace and stability in Western Balkans. Kosovo is united and completely aware of this historic opportunity,” Thaci wrote.

**Rama and Bolton discuss also agreement between Kosovo and Serbia (*Epoka*)**

The Prime Minister of Albania Edi Rama had on Thursday a telephone conversation with the U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton. Rama took to Facebook to write that they also discussed the Kosovo – Serbia agreement. “Discussion with the White House. In focus, Albania, the region and strategic objective for a peaceful agreement between Kosovo and Serbia, in order to close the historic conflict. Security Adviser J. Bolton, on behalf of President Trump, expressed appreciation for Albania’s consequent position,” Rama wrote.

**Thaci: Partition option was presented to me, I turned it down (*Telegrafi*)**

President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci spoke to Tirana-based media outlet News24 and recalled a meeting with Swedish official Carl Bildt who he said had presented to him the option of Kosovo’s partition. “He came to my office and said this is a lost part for Kosovo and needs to split, I said, I would not discuss such things,” Thaci said. He added that an agreement with Serbia will not be easy and that there is no magic solution to it but that he would continue working for the interest of Kosovo and its citizens. Thaci said Gazivoda, Mitrovica north, and Trepca will at no circumstance be part of the compromise with Serbia. “They are and will remain part of Kosovo. This is a closed issue for me,” he said.

**Ahmeti: I am not certain tax will hold (*Telegrafi*)**

In an interview with ***RTV Dukagjini***, leader of the Social Democratic Party and co-head of the Kosovo Negotiating Team, Shpend Ahmeti, said he was not sure the tax on imports from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina will hold for long but said he opposed it being lifted without conditions being met beforehand. “Our proposal as PSD was to put forward to Serbia a list with conditions,” Ahmeti said adding: “The tax would have to be in paper as part of the dialogue with Serbia so that Kosovo has more leverage in negotiations.” Ahmeti also said institutional leaders need to unify their stance on the tax. “You are not anti-American if you say you will not lift the tax, but we need to understand that the U.S. has interests. The U.S. is saying their interest is to see a Kosovo-Serbia agreement,” Ahmeti said.

**Foggo: KSF to stick to limits, should not act in the north (*RTK*)**

KFOR Commander, Admiral James Foggo met on Thursday with President of Kosovo Hashim Thaci, Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj and Deputy Prime Minister Dalibor Jevtic. “The leaders discussed the current state of security in Kosovo, in the context of KFOR’s mission to provide a safe and secure environment plus freedom of movement for all people in Kosovo, under UN Security Council Resolution 1244. During the visit, Foggo discussed the issue of Kosovo’s plan to transition the Kosovo Security Force. Foggo reminded Mr. Thaci and Mr. Haradinaj that the Secretary General and the North Atlantic Council have consistently said that any change to the mandate of the KSF will mean that NATO will have to re-examine its level of engagement with the KSF. This work is under way now in Brussels. Foggo stated that he expects the transition of the KSF to be a progressive, transparent and inclusive effort that is closely coordinated with NATO and the international community. He reinforced the need for KSF activities to adhere to the limits set out in Mr. Thaçi’s 2013 letter in which he stated the KSF would not operate in northern Kosovo without prior concurrence by KFOR,” stresses a KFOR press release.

**Serbian List calls for a protest in front of EU and EULEX offices (*media*)**

Deputy leader of the Serbian List, Igor Simic, called all citizens to join on Friday their protest in front of the EU and EULEX offices, in order to object to “annexation of Mitrovica North.” Based on Belgrade daily Blic, media report that Simic said Pristina has announced annexation of Mitrovica North and the entire northern part. He added that Serbian List will support all the protesters and called for the protest to be peaceful. He said the protest to oppose plans of Albanian political representatives will commence at 12:00 hours.

**Russian representative at OSCE: Kosovo, the point of instability (*Klan*)**

Russia’s Permanent Representative at the OSCE, Aleksandar Lukasevic, said on Thursday that Pristina authorities have decided to strengthen crisis in Kosovo and made it a point of instability. He said that it has become clear to the OSCE observing mission that Kosovo is become each day more a point of instability, and a potential source of conflict ion the region. “Pristina authorities are leading a policy of intensification of crisis in Kosovo, which threatens escalation of violence and war in Western Balkans,” Lukasevic reportedly said.

**Kosovo to renew Interpol membership bid (*Kallxo*)**

***Kallxo*** is reporting that Kosovo is expected to renew its Interpol membership bid following the failure to join the organisation last November. A number of e-mails that ***Kallxo*** says to have obtained confirm that the Kosovo Interior Minister Ekrem Mustafa and Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj sent a letter to Interpol Secretary-General Jurgen Stock expressing Kosovo’s interest to reapply for membership.

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