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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**Veseli says tax will remain but needs to be suspended (*media*)**

Kosovo Assembly President Kadri Veseli said today that import tariff on Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina was introduced as a way to protect Kosovo’s interests and should not be used against them. Speaking to reporters during a school visit in Ferizaj, Veseli said: “We have introduced the 100-percent tax on Serbian goods because Serbia imposed such a measure and the tax will remain.” Nevertheless, referring to his recent proposal to suspend the tax for a period of 120 days, Veseli said this was a concrete proposal and in line with what the U.S. is requesting. “Kosovo and the U.S. cannot have different positions on Serbia,” he added.

**Ismaili: PDK wants to suspend not remove the 100-percent tariff (*Klan Kosova*)**

Kosovo’s Minister of Healthcare and deputy leader of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), Uran Ismaili, said in an interview to ***Klan Kosova*** on Monday that the PDK wants to suspend and not completely remove the 100-percent important tariff on Serbian and Bosnian goods. “The United States of America have a very clear position on the tariff … The U.S. tells us to make a strategic step and does not want us to remove the tariff, because they view it as a decision of the state of Kosovo. They tell us suspend it for 120 days so that together we can have an advantage in dialogue with Serbia. This is why we need to reflect because this will only strengthen Kosovo’s position,” Ismaili said.

**EU: Time is now for a Pristina - Belgrade agreement (*RFE*)**

European Union officials involved in the facilitation of the Pristina-Belgrade dialogue are carefully following developments in Kosovo and hoping that the pressure on the government to lift import tariff on Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina will soon bear fruit and enable the continuation of dialogue for normalisation of relations, Radio Free Europe in Albanian reports. It quotes sources from the office of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, saying that the moment authorities in Pristina lift the tariff, as early as the next day they would be ready to resume the dialogue through intensive talks which could be held on weekly basis. The unnamed officials admitted that the EU has never drawn a ‘formal connection’ between the tariff and dialogue but said this link nevertheless exists since the Serbian side cannot be convinced to return to the negotiating table for as long as the measure remains in force. The EU therefore is hopeful that the joint EU-U.S. pressure on the government of Kosovo will produce results. They also added that the prospect of fresh elections in Kosovo would be the “worst-case scenario.” “New elections mean new obstacle to dialogue. No one wants this because we are under immense time pressure,” an unnamed source told RFE. To this end, Pristina and Belgrade are being told that now is the right time for an agreement. This warning is also related to EU upcoming elections. “We don’t know what the outcome of European elections will be and who will take over functions relating to the Western Balkans. We can’t be sure if the future EU representatives will be as committed as the current commissioners,” the source said.

**Three months on, import tax causes millions of euros losses to Serbia (Zeri)**

The paper writes that tomorrow, 6 February, it will be three months since the Kosovo government introduced the import tax on products from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and that the measure has caused around €100 million of losses to Serbia. According to the Kosovo’s Statistics Agency, while in November of 2017 Serbia had exported goods valued at €36.9 million in November of 2018 Serbia’s imports had dropped to €15.3 million. At the same time, while Serbia’s imports to Kosovo for the period of December 2017 reached €46.7 million in contrast to December 2018 when the value of Serbia’s imports was €5.3 million.

**Osmani: Draft law on dialogue endangers statehood and territory (*Dukagjini*)**

Vjosa Osmani, MP from the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) said if the draft law on dialogue gets approved as such, it leaves space for negotiation of territories and leaves space for President Hashim Thaci to maneuver. “To us as LDK, the law is unnecessary and vain. However, if it gets approved as it is in the second reading, it will reach dangerous impact as it leaves space to negotiate the statehood and the territory,” Osmani said. She added that the negotiating team will be supporting President Hashim Thaci, because the EU has stressed that the discussions will be held at the level of presidents. She further accused the Social-Democratic Party from withdrawing from the initiative to bring down the government. “PSD withdrew in order not to go with elections, and decided to make low political bargaining, while trying to present them as positive,” Osmani said.

**Ahmeti to Vucic: Your opinions have no legal impact (*RTK*)**

Shpend Ahmeti, co-head of the negotiating team responded to the second condition that Serbia’s President Aleksandar Vucic mentioned in order to resume with the dialogue. “It appears that the President of Serbia has added a new condition for participation in the dialogue: when Kosovo stops provoking, as he appears to have understood endorsement of the status of Trepca enterprise at the Assembly. Vucic and all the others should understand one thing: the Republic of Kosovo is an independent and sovereign state, which brings decisions in a democratic manner and in accordance with institutional procedures. Vucic can think whatever he wants about Kosovo, but his opinions do not have any judicial weight. Therefore, he is wasting time. Such decisions can even spoil his plans, but again, this is not and can be not Kosovo’s concern,” Ahmeti said.

**Former KLA commander confirms invitation from Specialist Chambers (*media*)**

Sylejman Selimi, former general commander of the Kosovo Liberation Army, said in an interview to Pristina-based ***T7*** on Monday that he has received an invitation for an interview from the specialist prosecutor’s office. Selimi said he believes the interview will be held next week and added that he does know yet in what capacity he will be interviewed.

**Kurti: We need to prepare for an “Albanian spring” (*Telegrafi*)**

In an interview with a Tirana-based news outlet ***Ora News***, Vetevendosje leader Albin Kurti said both Kosovo and Albania should start thinking and making preparations for an “Albanian spring”. “In circumstances where we are economically weal and our armies are almost inexistent, we’re at a time and space crossroad, as the Balkans as well, and in 2019 it is necessary for the Albanian people to emerge and democratize itself in protection of its national duty for unification and its state interest for European integration,” Kurti said.

**Bahtiri “threatens” with war (*Kosova Sot*)**

Agim Bahtiri, mayor of Mitrovica south, said while speaking about the petition for unification of Mitrovica that if Mitrovica is touched, there will be a war. “Serbia’s plan is to reach at the Iber River bridge, but I guarantee you that if Mitrovica is touched, there will be an unseen war,” Bahtiri said.

**Rakic reacts to Bahtiri (*RTK*)**

Goran Rakic, leader of the Serbian List, said Serb population in Kosovo has received the recent statements of the Mitrovica South mayor Agim Bahtiri, with concern. Bahtiri said on Monday that if Mitrovica is touched, there will be a war. “I expect KFOR and EULEX, in accordance with their mandate, to increase readiness and preventing action in order not to disturb peace and security of the citizens, because such dangerous threats for peace at the time when tensions are high, could impede in an irreversible manner stability, which we as representatives of Serb population, have built with responsibility under impossible conditions,” Rakic said.

**Constitutional Court rejects LDK’s complaint in Pristina (*dailies*)**

Dailies report that the Constitutional Court has rejected the complaint filed by candidate of the Democratic League of Kosovo, Arban Abrashi, claiming irregularities during the 2017 local elections process in Pristina. The Constitutional Court upheld a previous decision of the Supreme Court which ruled in favour of then Vetevendosje candidate for Pristina mayor, Shpend Ahmeti. LDK leader, Isa Mustafa, commented on the Constitutional Court ruling saying Ahmeti’s victory in the case comes after his new party, the Social Democratic Party (PSD), helped save the government by voting for the 2019 budget. Ahmeti slammed Mustafa’s allegations as being “anti-academic”.

**NISMA asks Decan Monastery not to prevent road construction (*Kallxo*)**

The Social Democratic Initiative (NISMA) branch in Decan has asked the Orthodox Monastery not to prevent the construction of the Decan-Plave road and expressed concern over the recent developments in the project. NISMA called on the Managing Council of the Decan Special Zoning Area to reach a fair decision in their meeting today and not cause prevent implementation of the project. NISMA also called on Decan mayor not to accept any compromise and not reroute the planned road as a result.

**Kosovo applies again for INTERPOL membership (*Epoka*)**

Mentor Tahiri, senior political adviser and chief of staff at the cabinet of the Minister for Internal Affairs, told the paper that Kosovo has once again applied for the membership at INTERPOL. He said that the request was submitted on 31 January and added that Kosovo has fulfilled all the conditions to become a member of this international organization.

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