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**Kosovo** Media Highlights

**U.S. warns of sanctions against Kosovo (*media*)**

The U.S. Deputy Assistant of State Matthew Palmer, Deputy Assistant Laura Cooper and Principal Director for European Affairs John Erath authored a letter addressed to Kosovo leaders - President Hashim Thaci, Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, Assembly Speaker Kadri Veseli - recalling the statement of the U.S. President Donald Trump that Kosovo needs to seize this moment to reach an agreement for normalisation of relations with Serbia. “We have since expressed our concerns with certain actions, including the imposition of tariffs on Serbian and Bosnian products, could threaten this goal. These actions undermine the United States' ability to continue to collaborate with you on a wide range of shared objectives,” the letter reads. The U.S. officials adds that since the requests for suspension of the tariffs were unheeded, “We have decided to take steps to show our concern, including with regard to our security partnership.” To this end, the planned visit of the Iowa National Guard General Timothy Orr was cancelled: “Given the unhelpful actions your government has taken, it would be inappropriate for such a visit to occur. We will be looking carefully at other aspects of our cooperation and reviewing if they should also be curtailed.” The letter goes on to state that Kosovo has no better friend than the U.S. and it continues to stand ready to support Kosovo in reaching a comprehensive agreement with Serbia “centered on mutual recognition, which is durable, implementable and benefits both sides.” “Our intent is to see that Serbia, as well as Kosovo, acts responsibly to get the Dialogue back on track. The first step on this road must be suspending the tariffs. Until you have done so, we cannot restore our relationship to our previous robust level,” the letter concludes.

**Kosovo leaders meet after U.S. officials’ letter (*Klan Kosova/Telegrafi*)**

Kosovo leaders – President Hashim Thaci, Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, Assembly Speaker Kadri Veseli, Deputy Prime Minister Behgjet Pacolli – met last night following the letter by the U.S. State Department officials warning of further deterioration of relations with Kosovo if it does not suspend the import tariff on products from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. ***Telegrafi*** reports that the meeting was also attended by Deputy Prime Ministers Fatmir Limaj and Dardan Gashi as well as by the Minister of Trade and Industry, Endrit Shala. Following the meeting, Haradinaj told ***Klan Kosova*** that they had an informal discussion and that the meeting was initiated by Minister of Infrastructure Pal Lekaj. He said the tariff is related to recognition of Kosovo by Serbia. He also spoke of the meeting he had earlier in the day with the U.S. Ambassador Philip Kosnett: “We explained our position, that I love America but I will not yield to Serbia. The tax is not about America or the latest developments in the dialogue. We seek a final Kosovo-Serbia agreement with mutual recognition. I want to lift the tax but has to be linked to recognition,” Haradinaj said. He asked decision-makers in the U.S. to understand the position in which Kosovo is with “Serbia is playing jokes on us, by revoking our recognitions. It is disputing our border points.”

**Haradinaj ready to leave decision on tax to government cabinet (*Koha Ditore*)**

The paper reports on the front page that in the government led by Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj there are more members that support the idea of suspending the import tariff on Serbian and Bosnian products than there are against but so far none of the ministers have taken the initiative to put the issue up for discussion at the government. To the paper’s question of whether PM would permit a decision-making process at the government based on applicable rules of procedure if a member of cabinet initiates suspension of the tax, government spokesperson Donjeta Gashi told the paper that so far PM Haradinaj has forwarded for discussion all issues relating to the agenda.

**Haradinaj: U.S. is requesting lifting of tax, but the tax will remain (*Epoka*)**

After the meeting of the government, the Prime Minister of Kosovo Ramush Haradinaj held a press conference, where he spoke about the tariff on the products from Serbia. He said the U.S. are continuously suggesting suspension of the tax and to open way to the dialogue. He added that this request was repeated also during the meeting with the U.S. Ambassador to Kosovo Philip Kosnett, however he stressed that resumption of the dialogue should not be conditioned with removal of the tax. “Our position is clear, and I want to suspend the tax completely, but this is related with recognition by Serbia. Also, my suggestion is not to relate the issues. The dialogue has started prior to the tax, and it was never conditioned. The same should happen now,” Haradinaj said. According to him, the dialogue can continue with the tax policy in power. “If President Trump or some other senior authority calls both delegations for an agreement, we would not impede it. We plead them to work for an agreement, in order not to waste time. However, the tax will not be lifted. It is a mistake to make wrong promises by anyone, be it to Serbia or to anyone else,” Haradinaj said.

**Haradinaj on Mogherini: She is Kosovo’s enemy (*RTK*)**

The Prime Minister of Kosovo Ramush Haradinaj said that the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Frederica Mogherini, with her positions in the dialogue with Serbia, is listed among the enemies of Kosovo. “Kosovo’s success is not related with the dynamics of Ms. Mogherini, nor with the agenda for the dialogue. Kosovo exists. It is sovereign. No one can be more useless for Kosovo than Mogherini,” Haradinaj said. “She has deviated the discussions. Instead of talking about an agreement with Serbia for recognition, she has deviated the discussion on territories and borders. She is the enemy of my country,” Haradinaj said, adding that he considers an aggression any opening of discussions for territory or borders. “These Ms. Mogherini’s discussions about have affected the EU and in fact destroyed EU’s opportunity for an agreement. She has returned the process back,” he said. He praised the ‘unshakable’ position of the German Chancellor Merkel and added that Albania’s PM Edi Rama and Kosovo’s President Hashim Thaci, have joined a wrong agenda.

**Germany with a request for Haradinaj (*Bota Sot*)**

The paper reports that one of the most trusted aides to the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, David McAllister, has called on the government of Kosovo to annul the 100-tariff on Serbian and Bosnian goods. “The decision of the government of Kosovo to apply the 100 percent tariff on goods from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, is a clear violation of CEFTA and Stabilisation/Association Agreement. I appeal on the government in Pristina to annul this decision, in order to hopefully, continue with the dialogue,” Mc Allister said. He added that the EU has already made it clear that a legally binding agreement between Kosovo and Serbia cannot be reached without suspension of the tax.

**Kosovo FM Pacolli writes to UN SG Guterres (*media*)**

Kosovo’s Foreign Minister, Behgjet Pacolli, announced in a Facebook post that he has written a letter to the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres saying that the political dialogue with Serbia aimed at reaching a comprehensive, legally binding agreement has reached the stage of Kosovo and Serbia recognising one another as two independent countries. Pacolli said Kosovo was encouraged by the decision to have less frequent meetings on Kosovo at the Security Council. “I informed the Secretary-General Guterres that membership in the UN is now particularly possible for the fact that Serbia, though with difficulties, has begun to show early signs that it is interested in moving forward and accepting the truth acknowledged by the opinion of the International Court of Justice of 22 July 2010 confirming that the statehood of the Republic of Kosovo is in full accordance to the international law. In addition, I drew the attention of the Secretary-General Guterres to the ICJ opinion as the highest UN judicial institution, an opinion that implies Collective Recognition as the basis on which the UN General Assembly called for the dialogue facilitated by the EU. It is therefore acknowledged that the UN General Assembly Resolution 64/298 of 9 September 2010 strongly affirmed our statehood. I stressed in the letter that the ICJ opinion has enabled Serbia to see this truth, especially with regards to its diplomatic position on our independence needing to change accordingly. I informed the Secretary-General that the political dialogue aimed at reaching a Comprehensive, Internationally Legally Binding Agreement has reached the stage of mutual recognition as two independent states. I informed Secretary-General that the Republic of Kosovo aspires to UN membership and to this end we are always ready to invest our potential to support UN initiatives and missions in the function of peace and stability for all,” Pacolli wrote.

**Stoltenberg: Some allies think decision to create army was ill-timed (*media/NATO*)**

In a press conference ahead of the meeting of NATO defence ministers, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said the level of support for the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) following the change of its mandate will be one of the issues to be discussed. Asked by ***KTV*** reporter on what will be the future cooperation between NATO and Kosovo security forces and whether the tariffs on Serbian products will affect the decision, Stoltenberg replied: “I think it is important to distinguish between two types of NATO presence in Kosovo. We have the KFOR operation – that will not be affected at all. Because the KFOR operation, with three or four thousand troops has been there for many years, for 20 years, and is based on a UN Security Council Resolution. That will continue because it contributes to stability, it protects all people in Kosovo, and it contributes to stability in the wider region. So that will continue unchanged. What we will assess is the activities we have outside the KFOR mission, which is different kinds of capacity-building. We have not made any decisions, but we have made clear that we will assess the level of NATO engagement, because several Allies have expressed that they think it’s ill-timed, the decision to transform the Kosovo security force into an army, and several Allies have also expressed their disappointment with the new tariffs. And they have also clearly stated that the security forces in Kosovo must respect all their international obligations, including the agreement, the Brussels Agreement that they will not move to Northern Kosovo without concurrence, or the support of the NATO Commander of KFOR. So all these issues will, of course, be on the table, and then it’s too early to say exactly what kind of adjustments that will take place, but this is now something we are addressing.”

**Thaci talks for first time about meeting Vucic behind cameras (*Indeksonline*)**

Kosovo President Hashim Thaci for the first time has talked about his meetings, behind cameras, with Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic. “I have met him behind cameras in Brussels, Vatican, in different ceremonies, also in Paris, Vienna and New York. We discussed openly about developments in the Western Balkans, on issues that I didn’t mention at press conferences. The final phase of dialogue is meaningful for Kosovo only if there is mutual recognition and membership to the United Nations,” Thaci said in an interview to ***RTSH***. He added that reaching an agreement with Serbia would be as noble and majestic as the independence of Kosovo. Thaci also said that Kosovo would remain isolated if it does not join the leading international organizations. “We cannot become the Palestine of Western Balkans. I will not accept any agreement that does not guarantee mutual recognition and UN membership. I will not allow an Association [of Serb-majority municipalities] with executive competencies that would create a Republika Srpska and make the state of Kosovo dysfunctional. I will not even allow discussions on such matters.”

**Leaders and opposition parties to receive draft platform on talks today (*media*)**

Several news websites report that the draft platform on dialogue with Serbia will be submitted today for discussion to the heads of state and opposition parties. Fatmir Limaj, co-head of Kosovo’s state delegation for talks with Serbia, said a final decision on the platform would be made after consultations with the leaders. After addressing possible suggestions, the delegation will vote on the platform and then submit it to the Kosovo Assembly.

**Serwer: No need for correction of Kosovo-Serbia borders (*RTK*)**

The U.S. expert on Western Balkans, Daniel Serwer, considers that change of the border between Kosovo and Serbia should not happen. "There is no need for a border correction. Any change of boundaries, except small ones, is dangerous. Everywhere where there are border changes, there is trouble. I think wherever there is border change, it is clear that countries are not able to do the proper treatment for minority citizens. This immediately disqualifies them from EU membership. Why do you want to start a process towards the EU when you disqualify yourself? But it also causes regional problems," he said.

**Citizens do not want return of fighters in foreign wars to Kosovo (*Epoka*)**

Kosovo Center for Security Studies (KCSS) published a report which says that Kosovo citizens do not want return of the fighters in foreign wars as they consider that they endanger security in Kosovo with their fighting capabilities and connections with terrorist groups. “More than 65 percent of the citizens of Kosovo consider that return of fighters from conflict zones represents danger for the country,” said Vesa Kelmendi from KCSS.

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