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**LUXEMBURG MEETING, COUNCIL WAITING FOR THE EC ASSESSMENT ON VISAS FOR KOSOVO**

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Gazeta Express (27 June 2018)

The Council welcomes the ratification by the Kosovo Assembly of the border agreement with Montenegro in March 2018, which constitutes the fulfilment of one of the key criteria for Kosovo's visa liberalisation and an important achievement in the spirit of good neighbourly relations. The Council takes note of the Commission's intention to present an assessment of the final benchmark on the strengthening of the track record in the fight against organised crime and corruption and invites the Commission to report on whether the other benchmarks continue to be met, it is stated in the report.

As regards the EU facilitated Dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade, the Council welcomes that both sides have committed themselves vis-à-vis the High Representative to work on a comprehensive normalisation of relations, including in the form of a legally binding agreement, which is key for their respective European paths and essential for sustainable regional stability.

The Council has also welcomed the start of the work of the Management Team to draft the statute of the Association of Serb-majority Municipalities in accordance with the 2013 Brussels Agreement and the 2015 August Agreement and expects both sides to engage constructively in the process in order to rapidly fulfil this longstanding commitment. The Council also expects fulfilment of other agreements such as agreements on energy, revitalisation of Mitrovica Bridge, mutual recognition of diplomas and others. The Council urges Kosovo to swiftly implement in good faith its part of all past agreements and to engage constructively with Serbia in formulating and implementing future agreements, it is stated in the report.

The Council calls on Kosovo to urgently intensify its efforts to improve the rule of law, including judicial independence and due process of law. The Council notes that the context in the north of Kosovo poses particular challenges, particularly the fight against criminal networks which requires urgent and efficient cooperation of all actors involved, and remains deeply concerned about the murder of Oliver Ivanović in northern Mitrovica in January 2018. It stresses the necessity that the perpetrators are brought to justice. Kosovo also needs to continue to intensify its fight against organised crime and corruption. The Council expresses concern about the deportation of six Turkish citizens without respecting their guaranteed rights. The Council notes substantial progress in fighting radicalisation, extremism and terrorism and encourages further efforts. In this context, the Council particularly underlines the need for effective and intense regional and international cooperation, including with Europol and Eurojust, with full respect to their regulation and without prejudice to Member States' positions on status.

The Council further reiterates the need to handle domestic war crimes cases without discrimination, addressing impunity and ensuring accountability, including through meaningful regional cooperation and full cooperation with and support to the work of the Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals and the Specialist Chambers. Outstanding disputes and issues should be solved in line with international law and established principles, including the Agreement on Succession Issues. The Council also welcomes the agreement reached on the extension of the EULEX mission until June 2020. It urges Kosovo to continue to cooperate closely and effectively with EULEX and contribute actively to the full and unhindered execution by EULEX of its mandate.

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