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The parliamentary elections in Kosovo, June 2014



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1. Background to the election

In May 2014 90 MPs from both government and opposition in the 120-member Kosovan parliament voted in favour of ending the term of the fourth legislature of Kosovo, bringing about early elections that were held on 8 June. The legislature's duration of three and a half years makes it the longest since the first parliamentary elections were held in 2001. The largest coalition partner, the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), led by prime minister Hashim Thaçi, in a government that also included the New Kosovo Alliance (AKR) and minority parties, justified its action in terms of the need to preserve legislative functionality and institutional stability, following parliament's reluctance to back the government's proposal to transform the Kosovo Security Forces into the Kosovo Armed Forces. Some of the ethnic minority parties made their approval for this proposal conditional on parliament's support for retaining reserved seats for those communities (10 for the Serb community, and 10 for a number of other specified communities), a provision that the constitution stipulates applies only to the first two electoral mandates of the Assembly of Kosovo. However, the larger, ethnic-Albanian, parties, such as the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and Vetëvendosje! (Self-Determination!), refused such a compromise. As the constitution (Article 81) requires a double majority (a majority of votes of all deputies, and of

the minority community MPs) for changes to legislation that are of 'vital interest' to communities, the proposed change was unachievable.

This was the second consecutive parliamentary election to be called before the expiry of the parliament's full term as a result of disagreements between political parties. In October 2010 the LDK had pulled out of its government coalition with the PDK, following the stepping-down of the President of the country, Fatmir Sejdiu (then the leader of the LDK) after a ruling by the Constitutional Court that he had violated the constitution by being simultaneously head of state and leader of his party. The LDK stated that a coalition between the two parties – the government had entered office just before the country declared its independence in February 2008, and also included a number of ethnic-minority parties – was no longer sustainable.

2. The electoral system

The electoral system used to elect the 120 members of the Assembly of Kosovo is open-list PR (Sainte-Laguë formula) in a single nationwide constituency. This was adopted in 2007, after the political parties, mainly in response to pressure from civil society, agreed to move away from closed-list PR, which had been in use since 2001. The closed-list aspect of the pre-2007 system had been thought to be favourable to female representation in parliament, but this consideration became less relevant after the introduction in 2004 of a gender quota (at least 30 per cent of each party's candidates and MPs must be of the less-represented gender). As in 2010, voters were able to cast up to five preference votes (it had been ten in 2007) for individual candidates on their chosen party's list. The

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system is truly open, and the party-ordered list of candidates does not, in principle, matter much since the list is re-ordered based on the number of preference votes candidates receive – though higher positions are usually seen as the most desirable on the assumption that these make candidates more visible to those voters who know little about any of the names on the list. In cases where several parties run on a joint list the top positions are shared out among the various participants, but there is no guarantee as to how many seats each party will win.

The very high degree of proportionality that would be achievable with a 120-member nationwide constituency is attenuated in two ways. First, as already mentioned, 20 seats are reserved for parties representing designated minority communities, regardless of how few votes they win, and secondly there is a 5 per cent threshold for parties (other than those representing the minority communities) to gain representation. After 2010 there were several attempts to change the electoral system again, but no agreement could be found and hence it remained the same in 2014.

3. The electoral campaign and election issues

The campaign largely focused on economic and social issues, such as creating new jobs, increasing salaries for public sector employees, and investing in the agricultural sector, although issues such as obtaining visa-free travel, securing recognition of Kosovo's statehood from more countries, and other European- and international-related issues also featured in the public and media debates. All the opposition parties alleged that the PDK-led government had been responsible for corruption and mismanagement of the economy. Most of Kosovo's parties operate extensive patronage networks but have no very clear ideology, and the campaign was dominated by claims, often of dubious feasibility and considerable vagueness, from each party about how many new jobs they would create. The PDK stated that its main focus was in creating new jobs for young people, a priority given that the unemployment rate, especially among the youth, remains high. The party pledged to invest 1.5 billion euros in order to create 200,000 new jobs, a promise which by many was considered unattainable for the country's small economy. It also pledged to further improve Kosovo's position in the World Bank's ranking of countries in terms of how easy it is to set up and operate a business (the 'Doing Business' Report), on which Kosovo had made some progress during the last government's term.

Similarly, the LDK promised that, among other things, it would create 120,000 new jobs and invest in the agricultural sector as well as reduce the amount of agricultural produce imported from abroad. The AAK (Alliance for the Future of Kosovo) also campaigned mainly in economic terms, by promising to create 200,000 new jobs, raising the average monthly salary to 1000 euros and doubling the state's budget. The Vetëvendosje! (VV) movement placed great emphasis on the social welfare aspect of economic development as well as pressing its strongly nationalist and anti-privatisation agenda. All these parties campaigned throughout the country, apart from the Serb-majority

populated Northern Kosovo, where election activities were suspended for a while and local leaders threatened to boycott the elections, though in the end they participated.

Open-list PR systems are usually seen as empowering voters, but in Kosovo this method of filling seats has sometimes been accused of facilitating fraud and corruption. A common allegation has been that the number of preference votes with which some candidates are ultimately credited may owe as much to the size of the bribe they have paid to those responsible for counting and declaring the votes as to their actual popularity among the voters. However, the 2014 elections were considered to mark an improvement in this regard, consolidating progress made in the 2013 local elections, and the EU observer mission, which was invited to oversee the elections, gave the counting process a clean bill of health (EUEOM, 2014, pp. 8–9). Allegations of vote theft and of impropriety in the way votes are counted have persisted, however, as candidates filed 60 complaints to the Election Complaints and Appeals Panel (ECAP). It is apparent that by no means all of these were groundless. For instance, if we focus on the ten candidates who received the highest number of preference votes, there were significant differences between the first preliminary results and the final official figures published two weeks later (for the official figures, see [Central Election Commission, 2014](#) site). There were also concerns about the electoral register, the EU mission commenting that confidence in its accuracy 'remains low' and that an estimated 500,000 people who do not reside in Kosovo still remain on the register (EUEOM, 2014, p. 5).

Shortly before the campaign officially began, the Central Election Commission (CEC) banned the use of posters by political parties on the grounds that these damage the environment (parties have generally failed to remove their posters in a timely manner), a decision overturned by ECAP. Other than that, the parties reached the electorate through paid coverage (including sponsored programmes) on the main television channels, door-to-door canvassing, both small-scale and large rallies, and use of social media platforms. The EU observer mission concluded that political entities were able to campaign freely. There were a few opinion polls during the campaign, but these were regarded with some scepticism, as polls are typically conducted at the behest of specific parties and usually show the sponsoring party in a favourable light.

4. Election results

The CEC took two weeks to announce the official results, claiming that that was the time it took to count all 731,248 votes. Turnout, at 41 per cent, was exceptionally low for a European parliamentary election, and represented a slight decline since 2010 (see [Table 1](#)) – though given the inflated nature of the electoral register, as mentioned above, turnout among those actually resident in the country may have been around 56 per cent. The most striking feature of the results was the absence of significant changes in the parties' fortunes, possibly a sign that the shape of the party system is stabilising. Despite the difficulties of the previous four years, the main component of the incumbent government, the alliance led by the PDK, headed the poll,

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