

# Collapse of Kosovo government leads to early elections

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Early elections are taking place in Kosovo this Sunday, following the collapse last month of the coalition government of Kosovo Prime Minister Hachim Thaci. Thaci is the leader of the Democratic Party (PDK) and a former Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) commander.

His government wanted to change the Constitution to transform the Kosovo Security Force (KSF), a home for ex-KLA fighters, into an army and reduce the number of Kosovo Assembly seats reserved for ethnic minorities.

Both proposals were considered threats by deputies belonging to the ethnic Serb minority who boycotted the Assembly debate preventing a quorum being reached. As a result, the Assembly was dissolved with Thaci declaring, “a parliament that cannot launch its own army should not continue.”

In 2010, in the last Assembly elections to the 120 seat Assembly, Thaci’s PDK won 34 seats, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) 27 seats, the Self Determination Movement (LVV) 14 seats, the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) 12 seats and the New Kosovo Coalition (AKR) eight seats. Thirteen seats went to Serbian parties and 12 to other minorities (Roma, Ashkali, Bosniak, Turkish and Gorani).

After the election, the PDK formed a minority government with the AKR, created in 2006 by the world’s richest ethnic Albanian, construction magnate Behgjet Pacolli.

Dissatisfaction with the political and economic setup is indicated by voter turnout in the Assembly elections, which has been below 50 percent since 2005. The combined vote for the two main parties—the PDK and LDK—has plummeted from around 80 percent in 2001 to around 50 percent today. This is because they are closely associated in the public’s mind with Kosovo remaining one of the poorest regions in Europe, with unemployment estimated at between 35 and 60 percent and almost 40 percent of people living in poverty. At the same time, a political/criminal network has made a fortune out of the privatisation of public assets, narcotics, human trafficking, corruption and nepotism.

Opinion polls suggest the PDK could struggle to hold onto

power, even though Thaci has attempted to overcome criticisms by promising 500 million euros for agricultural reform and the creation of 200,000 new jobs—promises matched by LDK leader Isa Mustafa and the AAK’s Ramush Haradinaj. Commentators point out that it would require an impossible 20 percent growth rate to achieve these levels of employment.

The polls suggest the main beneficiary of Sunday’s election will be Self-Determination (LVV). Founded in 2004 and led by ex-KLA political officer Albin Kurti, the party describes itself as “left nationalist”, has consistently opposed EU/US intervention in Kosovo and called for a referendum of union with Albania. It has not been tarnished in the same way as the PDK and LDK attacking privatisation as “a corruption model, contributing to increasing unemployment, ruining the economy, and halting economic development of the country”. The 12.7 percent vote the LVV gained in the first Assembly elections it took part in 2010 and the ousting of the LDK’s leader Isa Mustafa as mayor of the capital Pristina last year by LVV candidate Shpend Ahmeti have been described as “historic”.

Two major issues have surrounded the election campaign—how to persuade the Serb minority (10 percent of the population) to vote and what to do about former KLA leaders now facing war crimes charges.

Both issues are linked to the Western campaign to dismember the former Republic of Yugoslavia and counter Russian influence in the Balkans—an objective that remains until this day.

During the 1998-99 Kosovo conflict, Thaci was inserted at the head of the Kosovo negotiating team at the Rambouillet conference, supplanting Ibrahim Rugova, then leader of the “non-violent” LDK. When the 14-week bombardment of Serbia began the KLA—now delisted as a terrorist organisation by the US—was used as a proxy military force on the ground.

Following the defeat of Serbia and the ousting of President Slobodan Milosevic, UN Security Council resolution 1244 was passed and placed Kosovo under the control of a

civilian United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) headed by a Special Representative and a military NATO-led KFOR force.

The resolution was a fudge from the start—removing Kosovo from the practical control of Serbia whilst guaranteeing the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Yugoslav federation.

There was no mention of Kosovan independence in the resolution but this did not stop the Western powers pushing ahead with the secession of Kosovo. The 2005 plan by former Finnish prime minister Martti Ahtisaari for “conditional independence” of the province supervised by an International Civilian Office was adopted as was recognition of Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence in 2008—something which Russia, China, India and most states in Africa and South America still do not accept.

The Western powers continue to dictate what happens in Kosovo with the plans to create a new army included in the Strategic Security Sector Review, the final version of which, according to press reports was “imposed” by the Security Advisory Unit of the International Civilian Office.

Another consequence of the newly-formed western protectorate was the incorporation of many ethnic Serbs, concentrated in the north, who have remained out of the control of the central government. A virtual Serb self-government has operated in the area and protests and outbreaks of violence have occurred whenever Pristina has tried to exert control.

However, with Serbia and Kosovo seeking admission to the EU, NATO and other Western institutions have been increasing pressure on the two countries to “normalise” their relations.

Following the April 2013 EU-mediated Brussels Agreement between the two countries, the majority of Serbian parallel institutions have been dissolved including the police force and judiciary. A soon-to-be created Community of Serbian Municipalities in Kosovo will retain control of economic development, education, health, and planning.

Ministers in Serbia, whilst making the ritual denunciations that they will never recognise Kosovo, encouraged ethnic Serbs to take part in the first local elections in Northern Kosovo in late 2013. However turnout was very low—single figure percentages in some municipalities—and marred by sporadic violence.

To prevent a re-occurrence in the Assembly elections, politicians in Serbia and northern Kosovo have been pleading with ethnic Serbs to vote claiming a high turnout could make them a major political force in the Assembly—especially if they all voted for the single Serb

electoral list Citizens’ Initiative Srpska. This is a distinct possibility given there are over 1,200 candidates from 30 political entities, 18 political parties, seven initiatives and four coalitions contesting the 120 seats.

As a condition of Kosovo’s progress toward the EU, the Western powers have also increased pressure for it to set up a Special Court to try KLA leaders accused of war crimes in the Kosovo war. The allegations were the subject of a 2011 report by Council of Europe investigator, Dick Marty, which described how, after the cessation of the Kosovo conflict, the KLA operated a separate network of makeshift detention centres, which were used primarily for the gruesome practice of trafficking in human organs of abducted refugees.

Marty explicitly named Thaci and other PDK leaders and criticised the US, Germany, Britain and others for helping conceal the KLA’s activities and UNMIK and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia for destroying evidence.

Marty also drew attention to the fact that Washington was able to carve out a permanent military presence in Kosovo as part of its broader geo-political interests with “an Embassy endowed with impressive resources and a military base, Camp Bondsteel, of a scale and significance that clearly transcends regional consideration.”

In April, US Ambassador to Kosovo, Tracey Ann Jacobson, made it clear the demand for a Special Court involved a damage-control exercise. She insisted that “these are individual allegations, not allegations against a group of people, KLA, or against the war in general” and if they were not addressed, they “would inevitably end up in Kosovo being drawn in to a much longer process, possibly with a much broader scope” i.e., an investigation of the role of the US and other Western powers.

Within days, the Assembly, having heard their Master’s Voice and ignored Thaci’s pleas about Kosovo’s “humiliation and injustice”, voted to sacrifice their “war heroes” and create a Special Court.



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