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Kosovo: a change with a view

Snap parliamentary elections were held in Kosovo on the 6th of October. Results could mark a historic change, since parties born from the ashes of the KLA, the guerrilla who rose up against the Serbian rule in 1998-1999 war, seem to be ousted from power after a long time. The Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), the most influential among “war parties”, has ruled the country in the last 12 years. Its leader Hashim Thaci, the guerrilla political leader, is now the President.

The great winner of the vote, Self-Determination (Vetevendosje, VV), a faction that supports unification with Albania and promotes Social-Democratic recipes in economy, wishes to form a coalition with the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), that has its roots in the non-violent resistance against Serbia in the Nineties.

VV got 25,5% of the votes, obtaining 31 seats. LDK took 24,82%, securing 30 seats in the new Parliament. Together, they can have a slight majority in the 120-seat assembly. In order to make it more stable, they will try to include in the coalition the parties representing Bosnian, Egyptian and Roma minorities. They have 10 reserved seats in the Parliament, as many as those awarded to Serbian parties. The Srprka List, a Belgrade-controlled faction, won all of them.

After parliamentary elections in June 2017, the PDK, the real loser of last week’s elections, agreed a coalition deal with the Alliance for the future of Kosovo (AAK), headed by Ramush Haradinaj, a prominent KLA commander, who was then picked as prime minister.

A parliamentary majority was secured only through the support of the New Kosovo Alliance (AKR), led by Behjiet Pacolli, a controversial tycoon who then became the minister of foreign affairs, and by some independents. In last week’s elections, it engineered an electoral list with the Social Democratic Initiative, whose leader Fatmir Limaj was another well-known commander of the KLA. However, the Pacolli-Limaj faction failed to reach the 5% threshold.

The Haradinaj government collapsed in July, when the prime minister resigned after he was summoned by international justice as a suspected of war crimes. In snap elections, the AAK got 11,5% and 4 seats, while the PDK took 21,2% and 25 seats. Both Haradinaj and Kadri Veseli, the PDK front-runner, he himself a top KLA commander, admitted defeat.

The Haradinaj government has not delivered any of the great promises made when it took office, among them free-visa regime for Schengen area. Little has been done also to tackle corruption, a plague for this country, the poorest and the youngest in the Balkans. Half of the population is under the age of 25. Most of the young people voted VV or LDK, that campaigned to push war parties out of power. Both Albin Kurti and Vjosa Osmani, the VV and the LDK front-runners respectively, accused the former KLA commanders for having failed Kosovo, spreading corruption at any level of the administration.

Albin Kurti, whose political journey began in the Nineties when he headed Kosovar students' protests against the discriminations imposed by the Serbian rule, is seeking to make a coalition deal with Vjosa Osmani, the first woman to run for the top government post.

It will not be an easy task. VV and the LDK diverge on many issues, especially in the economic field. VV has a leftist approach, while the LDK has a pro-market approach. Another potential rift concerns policy towards Serbia. VV is rather ideological and opposes the creation of an autonomous association of Serb-majority municipalities, a provision included in the Brussels Agreement, signed by Pristina and Belgrade in 2013 under the aegis of the EU. The LDK backs the package, aimed at normalising relations, and as junior partner in the PDK-led government (2014-2017), worked to implement it.

Dialogue with Serbia collapsed last year due to several reasons, among them the 100% tariffs imposed by the Haradinaj government on Serbian exports to Kosovo. The US and the EU are pushing Belgrade and Pristina to restart negotiations. This topic will give to the new Kosovar government a headache, whatever it may be, and some problems to the international community, if the government formation is not quick enough.

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