

Nov 29 2014

Petrit Selimi: 'all political parties in Kosovo or in the wider region have rotten apples'

LSEGE2017

The June 2014 [parliamentary elections](#) in Kosovo [led to a deadlock](#). Almost six months later, political leaders have finally agreed on a new government, which will be formed by the two largest parties: the Democratic Party of Kosovo, PDK, and the Democratic League of Kosovo, LDK. Deputy Foreign Minister **Petrit Selimi** of PDK answers questions on the way this unlikely partnership is going to work. We are publishing an interview largely based on the English translation of statements Mr Selimi gave to the Serbian newspaper [Danas](#).



DFM Petrit Selimi with incumbent PM Hashim Thaci / Photo from media.lajmi.net

Who is participating in the final coalition agreed in Kosovo for the next government?

This week, the leaders of the two biggest political parties in Kosovo, PDK's Hashim Thaci and LDK's Isa Mustafa, have met and signed a coalition agreement in the presence of President Atifete Jahjaga and US Ambassador Tracy Jacobson. This is the final step of a 5 month process aimed at establishing institutions in Kosovo after the June elections. Together with the minority parties, this coalition has over 80 MPs, which equals to a comfortable 2/3 of the parliamentary seats and presents a very stable platform of governance for the next 4 years.

You said that the US Ambassador was present – is this another government created with the intermediation of US diplomats?

Not really, actually the opposite is true – this is a genuinely locally owned process and both leaders invited the US Ambassador to be a witness to this final deal, but she had neither a direct nor an indirect role in the creation of the new grand coalition.

How come Prime Minister Thaci ended up entering a coalition? For a long time it seemed that the entire opposition was united against the PDK and Thaci. And does this new coalition now have the support of Kosovo Serbs?

Well, PDK was the clear winner of the national elections and was about to start the creation of the institutions, when the opposition united in an agreement to stop PDK from its third mandate. But this blockade had some problems. Firstly, this post-election agreement was not constitutional, as the Kosovo Constitution reserves the Speaker of the Parliament to the winning party. Secondly, the opposition agreement also failed to provide guarantees of continuing the dialogue and the implementation of agreements in Brussels, which is one of the most important tasks that awaits the future government of Kosovo. We thus found ourselves in a stalemate where one party won the elections and had the legal right to initiate the creation of the institutions, but the other parties refused to even talk to the PDK for 5 months. In the end, rationality prevailed and a

compromise was found between the two biggest parties in Kosovo which are now in a grand coalition, just like in Germany. This coalition consists of parties that are both supporting dialogue, privatization and economic reforms, fight against corruption and organized crime. It's a good coalition as it ensures that both the LDK, originating from Rugova's pacifist policies, and the PDK, headed by the pragmatic and pro-European Hashim Thaci who led the guerilla movement, are now together. This is very good news for the internal cohesion of Kosovo as well as for the process of reconciliation between Kosovars of Albanian and Serbian origin.

Who will be the new Prime Minister and who will lead the Serbia-Kosovo dialogue? There were fears that under the previous opposition agreement Mr Albin Kurti, who was publicly against talks with Serbia until it recognized Kosovo, would be leading the dialogue.

The agreement reached this week between PDK and LDK is a principled one, but the posts will be decided next days by the bipartisan working group. Three main positions will be discussed: the Speaker of Parliament, the Prime Minister and the President; the latter will become vacant in 2016 and will be voted in the parliament. The parties will also divide the ministerial posts and will work on the governing programme with immediate and medium-term priorities. The leader of the dialogue will also be decided in the next days. All the new coalition parties are strong supporters of the Brussels agreement as it has cemented territorial integrity of Kosovo, but has also created space for the Kosovar Serb voice to be heard.

Kosovo media have circulated the news that Thaci will not be PM and the new Kosovo government will be led by Isa Mustafa, former mayor of Prishtina.

I believe that in the next days the entire architecture of the new government will be discussed and decided. LDK, PDK but also Srpska Lista and other minority parties will meet and agree on the names of the top leadership. Prime Minister Thaci has now served two consecutive mandates overseeing the declaration of independence, the end of supervised independence and the talks that led to the Brussels Agreement. It's an impressive, historic list of accomplishments that will provide a tremendous pool of experience for the next PDK-LDK-minorities government, whatever top leadership position Thaci takes.

Which are the immediate priorities of the new government?

In terms of laws, we need to adopt laws for the creation of a Kosovo Special Court with a chamber in a foreign country, which will deal with the Dick Marty allegations. We also need to approve the budget for the next year and the Law on Foreign Fighters. We need to pass few more remaining laws for the Schengen visa liberalization and the Law on Kosovo Armed Forces. Some of these laws will make it necessary to amend the constitution, which requires a 2/3 majority of both the Parliament and of the minorities specifically. However in Kosovo, just like in Serbia or elsewhere in transition countries, people's main concerns are jobs and the economy. Kosovo has had some solid growth of late and has potential to achieve several new economic milestones if prompt decisions are taken in the fields of energy, infrastructure and on the completion of projects such as Brezovica and Kosova e Re power plant. Kosovo is now moving from state-building to development of economy and this has driven the discourse in both parties, but also minorities. Economy is probably the most important issue to be dealt with.

Corruption is a major issue across the region. Do you accept the LDK's view that corruption is present in the political institutions of Kosovo, even at very high levels? Secondly, are you happy with EULEX's work in fighting against corruption, and particularly against political corruption?

I think all political parties in Kosovo or in the wider region have rotten apples. Kosovo is not more corrupt than its neighbours – even some EU members in the region. I think there are allegations of corruption against every single political party in Kosovo and we must be able to deal with alleged criminals in our midst in a decisive manner. Kosovo's freedom and independence is only worth if there is social equality and economic opportunity for all Kosovars. I think, all considering, EULEX has also brought a positive experience to Kosovo in times of transition. It was a necessary mission to bridge the gap between the UNMIK period and the new independent judiciary.

Do you have the impression that Kosovo's image was damaged during this crisis? The Serbian government is blaming your parties for slowing down the dialogue and European integrations while many international analysts have wondered whether it is a failed state.

I have not heard these claims of Kosovo as a failed state and I don't recognize Kosovo in that description. We had a political crisis in Kosovo but our political class dealt with constitution and lawyers instead of going to street protests or disrupting the institutions. In all Balkan countries you had crises in recent years, from hunger strikes of the opposition in Belgrade to protests in Tirana or Skopje. The stalemate of the past 5 months in Kosovo showed how mature the democracy is in the country, the respect there is for independent institutions such as the Presidency and the Constitutional Court and it also showed that Kosovo political parties are able to overcome differences for a greater good. Kosovo is the country with highest economic growth in all of South East Europe; we built 1,500 km of roads and 120 schools during PDK mandate, we normalized relations with Serbia and we are recognized by majority of UN members. Now we are also becoming members of international organizations and sports federations so Kosovo's image is better now than it was 5, 10 or 15 years ago.

What are the expectations of the new government regarding the Special Court? Will the parties ban from ministerial posts those suspected of war crimes against Serbs?

Kosovo will set up a Special Court to deal with the alleged war crimes in the Clint Williamson report, with international staff and a trial chamber outside Kosovo. The new government will have clean hands, a progressive agenda and will deliver on the international obligations of Kosovo. No one knows the names of the suspects yet, if there are any, but as Kosovo has shown in recent years when it came to ICTY cases, the government will provide full support for justice to take place.

You have received attention in regional media with your prolific Twitter feed and digital diplomacy and you are also rumoured to be close to the Prime Minister. Will you have a role in the new government?

I am generally very happy we have managed to create such a stable and pro-European government coalition. I will continue with my social media coverage regardless of my future position as I believe times have changed and direct contact with global audiences is an important element of political interaction. Kosovo is demographically the youngest nation in Europe, politicians are generally young and this reflects in the way we conduct politics and implement policies.

Note: This article gives the views of the interviewee, and not the position of LSEE Research on SEE, nor of the London School of Economics.

This entry was posted in [Interviews](#), [Kosovo](#) and tagged [corruption](#), [Elections](#), [Hashim Thaci](#), [Kosovo](#), [Petrit Selimi](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).