Kosovo elections: what we know so far
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On Sunday, 8 June 2014 Kosovo went to the polls to elect a new government. Good news: the Serbian community has participated in a much higher number, and the elections were praised as relatively free and fair by local and international observers. Two days on, results are in and speculations on the formation of a new government can start. Kosovo electoral law makes it virtually impossible for a party to rule on their own – a coalition is needed. Who will team up? Our experts discuss.

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Sunday elections mark an important turn: the whole society was mobilised

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Sunday elections marked two important steps for democratic consolidation of Kosovo. Firstly, the state institutions as well as the whole society was mobilised to guarantee free and fair election. Unlike the 2010 parliamentary elections, when we witnessed an industrial scale fraud, the June 8 elections met the highest international standards, making it one of the best election organised in the region. From the Central Election Commission, police, state prosecutors, to political parties, media and civil society observers, the whole society was mobilised to make sure every incident would be reported and analysed. Even verbal tensions between voters were televised. Secondly, they were the first election with a solid participation of Kosovo Serbs living in the north of the country, who traditionally boycotted Kosovo institutions. Thus, Sunday elections mark an important turn when it comes to representation of the Serbs in the institutions, boosting in this way the legitimacy of the parliament.

Early results show that the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) of Prime Minister Hashim Thaci won the elections with more than 30% of the votes. The Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) received 26% while Vetevendosje (Self-determination) movement, which was considered a more radical party until this election, ended up third with 13.5%. Mr Thaci will most likely receive his third mandate as a prime minister, after having promised increase of public wages and creation of hundreds of thousands of jobs.

Thaci's victory comes at the time when the dissatisfaction of the people with the government has reached its ceiling and mainly owing to a weak and uncoordinated opposition. Both LDK and Vetevendosje ran a campaign focusing their criticism towards
offices. PDK won, but the jury will remain out on their judgment unless they usher in real change.

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despite corruption, poverty and abuse of power having been the main election issues. His win, however, will be seen as support for his involvement in the normalisation process with Serbia.

The PDK came in only one percentage point lower than in 2010 and that was despite the split caused by Thaci’s former close KLA colleagues, Fatmir Limaj and Jakub Krasniqi. Their newly-founded party, Nisma per Kosoven, has probably gained 5% and hence crossed the threshold. It was anticipated that the more-nationalistic and effectively active Vetevendosje would do better this time but they have increased their vote by a mere one percent.

The other echo these parliamentary elections have had of previous ones was the calls for a boycott in the north and the awaiting instructions from Belgrade as to whether the Serbian electorate should vote. Ever since the first elections in post-conflict Kosovo those issues have always been present. It was only five days before Sunday’s poll that Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic told his fellow nationals that not voting “… would not be very smart”. This throws up questions about people’s civic readiness to make decisions for themselves.

The turnout in the north has, according to official figures, been higher than in the 2013 municipal elections but these figures are being questioned. They would have included a large number of out of country voters. The ‘Srpska List, representing Kosovo Serbs, polled about four percent of the vote. The elections were supposed to mark a new stage in community integration but that was probably an over-optimistic expectation. Voting is entirely on ethnic lines.

No boycott calls and no waiting for instructions from Belgrade would have made the elections more historic.

To lead to economic reform, parties will first need to fight against corruption – if they are serious about it, they will need to start from their own ranks

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After 15 years in politics and six years in power, Prime Minister Thaci remains strong and popular. No opposition candidate could challenge him. Thaci’s PDK won Sunday elections, thus securing a third term. The largest opposition party, Isa Mustafa’s LDK, lost three elections in a row and failed to promote change. If LDK fails to reform, Vetevendosje (VV), which is currently growing, may take the leading opposition role. AAK of Ramush Haradinaj failed to make up for the devastating loss the party suffered during the last November local elections.

The elections took place in a much improved democratic environment compared to 2010 and the administration of the process and the tabulation of results has been efficient. Incidents were addressed timely and parties are likely to accept the results. And yet, there are some serious issues remaining: the voters’ lists, the electoral law and the administration of the elections being the most pressing. Once again, the difference between ballot papers and voters’ signatures is around 20,000, and the Central Electoral Committee will have to investigate how this came to happen.

Most important for Kosovo is – what happens next? Thaci got 36 seats out of 120. Until now, his government depended on minority parties, and he is committed not to repeat that. To avoid that, PDK would prefer a coalition with LDK, whose leader Mustafa may not want a coalition with Thaci (but many party members do not share his view). After losing his third elections, Mustafa knows he has few choices: he can either join a Thaci-led government or resign. If LDK refuses to join, Thaci will have to invite Haradinaj’s AAK and the minorities to form a coalition.

Be it with LDK or AAK, Thaci will have to share some of the most important seats with its minor partners, who are likely to ask for ministerial posts. Thaci wants to keep the post of prime minister, finance and foreign affairs (the last one is reserved for his closest ally Enver Hoxhaj, whose job is to keep Kosovo in the global agenda). Not much will be left for the new governing partners.

The key issue is to find an agreement on the government’s programme. Thaci wants to establish a fund for economic development and focus on subventions and job-creation. Haradinaj has a similar view, but first wants to focus on improving the rule of law and on fighting against the endemic corruption – something the outgoing government failed to tackle, and which is utterly needed if Kosovo wants to conclude SSA and visa liberalisation agreements. LDK insists on the same issues but feels handicapped by their bad legacy in Pristina.

Coalition partners will easily agree on the overall programme but will likely disagree on where to start from. If they want to facilitate investments and develop the economy, the first battle they need to fight is the one against corruption. This means, however, that they would need to start from their own ranks.

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