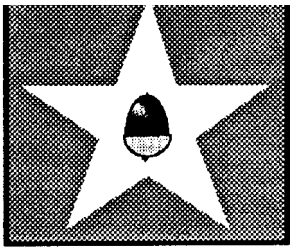
Conflict Studies Research Centre

James Pettifer

Kosovo - A Thanksgiving Election?

20 November 2001



Occasional Brief No 87

Kosovo - A Thanksgiving Election?

James Pettifer

The November 17 election for the first democratic, post-communist Kosovo Assembly was a landmark in the history of the Balkan region, and irrespective of the political outcome, is guaranteed a place in Kosovo history as important as that of the 1974 Constitution, or the abolition of autonomy by Slobodan Milosevic. In general it was held in a very calm atmosphere except for a few minor incidents in the Serbian-majority areas north of Mitrovica, and was commended by NATO General Secretary George Robertson and European Union Foreign Policy head Javier Solana. The organisation of the election by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, with Kosovo as a single constituency, was much better than in the local elections held a year ago, and was praised by most local political leaders and international observers.

As expected, the Kosova Democratic League (LDK) led by Dr Ibrahim Rugova was the victor, and is expected to form a government when the Assembly meets for the first time in January 2002. Dr Rugova will in due course almost certainly be elected as President. The electoral result numbers mean that the LDK will have to form a coalition to govern in the assembly.

The Assembly will have 120 seats, with 100 occupied by people elected through this ballot, and a further 20 reserved for minorities, with 10 Serb seats, and the remainder kept for Bosniacs, the three different Roma groups in Kosovo, and the Turkish minority, centred mainly in and around the city of Prizren.

The participation of the Serb minority was higher than expected, with about half of registered Serb voters exercising their right to vote. The Serbs have gained 22 seats in the new Assembly, at the time of writing

Electoral Statistics

According to the preliminary results issued by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe on 19 November, the total electorate comprised 1,249,987 voters, of whom 722,848 cast valid ballots, a turnout of 63.2%.[1]

These votes were cast as follows:

Kosovo - A Thanksgiving Election?
Conflict Studies Research Centre
ISBN 1-903584-51-5
20 November 2001

Party Name	Votes	% Votes
PGJK - Green Party of Kosovo	2,076	0.29
LKÇK - National Movement for Liberation of Kosovo	7,943	1.1
IRDK - New Initiative for a Democratic Kosovo	3,623	0.5
Xhevdet Rexhaj - (Independent Candidate)	1,228	0.17
PDASHK - Ashkali Albanian Democratic Party	2,958	0.41
LPK - People's Movement of Kosovo	4,008	0.55
PSDK - Social Democratic Party of Kosovo	1,623	0.22
PNDSH - Albanian National Democratic Party	990	0.14
Latif Kryeziu - (Independent Candidate)	1,025	0.14
BK - National Front	2,684	0.37
PDK- Democratic Party of Kosovo	184,603	25.54
Xun Çetta - (Independent Candidate)	1,192	0.16
KII - Coalition Return	79,195	10.96
LDK - Democratic League of Kosovo	334,580	46.29
PREBK - United Roma Party of Kosovo	2,554	0.35
IQK - Citizens' Initiative of Kosovo	560	0.08
PQLK - Liberal Centre Party of Kosovo	2,240	0.31
PLSH - Albanian Liberal Party	393	0.05
PD - Justice Party	4,121	0.57
AAK - Alliance for the Future of Kosovo	56,530	7.82
PSHDK - Albanian Christian Democratic Party of Kosovo	7,061	0.98
PRK - Republican Party of Kosovo	609	0.08
PLK - Liberal Party of Kosovo	3,319	0.46
VTN - Homeland	8,299	1.15
BSDAK - Bosniac Party of Democratic Action of Kosovo	2,662	0.37
KDTP - Kosovo Turkish Democratic Party	6,772	0.94

Total Electorate: 1,249,987
Total Valid Ballots: 722,848
% Turnout: 63.2

Winners & Losers

The result was satisfactory from the point of view of Dr Rugova and the Kosovo Democratic League, but not outstanding. His followers and some in the international community had hoped for an overall LDK majority. Other international figures did not agree and felt an overall LDK majority, while making the politics of Kosovo easier to 'manage', would also have increased the probability of an immediate independence declaration by the Assembly.

Care is needed in the analysis of the election data. The substantial participation of Serb and other minorities in this election give a misleading picture of Albanian voting patterns if a mechanical comparison is made with last autumn's local elections. In the November 17 2001 vote, the LDK share of the Kosovo Albanian vote actually fell by 12.65%, and that taken by

Hashim Thaci's Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) rose, with the AAK of Ramush Haradinaj stagnating on 7.82%. Rugova's party polled well in Prishtine, but fell back quite badly in southern towns such as Gjilan, Prizren and Ferizaj where the PDK made 10% plus advances. Thaci held onto his dominant position in the Drenice region in central Kosovo, his power base, and captured the town of Malisheve, the only LDK majority town there in the local election last year. The LDK also lost ground to the PDK in Mitrovice, although not to the same extent as in the south. The election marks the emergence of the PDK as a genuinely Kosovo-wide political force, with the exception of some towns in the west like Gjakova, where the AAK has taken on the Kosova Liberation Army political heritage, and the PDK remains weak.

The PDK and AAK have a lot of work to do in Prishtine to overcome long-established LDK patronage networks, often encouraged by the international community, media sympathy for the LDK and popular suspicions of the PDK party after the political mistakes made by Thaci and his associates post-July 1999 in the 'Provisional Government' period. The long and strident campaign by advocates in the international community of the 'organised crime' approach to Kosovo politics has made little impression on voting patterns. The international influence on the AAK here, where Haradinaj campaigned under the 'Straight Government' slogan, against corruption, did not bring an increase in his support.

The vote of the AAK is concentrated in the far West, adjoining Albania, but Haradinaj disappointed his strong backers in the international community by failing to cut into the PDK vote over the whole of Kosovo. Strongly nationalist extremist parties such as the National Movement for the Liberation of Kosovo (LKCK) and People's Movement of Kosovo (LPK) held onto their core few thousand votes and did enough to ensure that they obtained an Assembly representative. Western type centrist parties such as the Liberal Party and Social Democratic party obtained desultory votes and will not enter the Assembly. Two of the small non-Serb minority parties, those representing the Ashkali Roma and the Turks are close to the PDK and in practice may well work and vote with the PDK in the Assembly. PDK leader Thaci had a sucessful visit to Ankara shortly before the election. Most observers consider the PDK image was improved considerably by the emergence of Dr Flora Brovina as a party leader and presidential candidate, after her radicalization in gaol in Serbia in 1999-2000. The PDK campaign focussed on social issues more than the other parties, with a large increase in support among target groups such as old age pensioners and public sector workers. The party also polled well among owners of small businesses set up since July 1999. The basis of LDK support remains rural, among the privileged strata working with the international community in Prishtina, and among the managers and workers in the large state enterprises set up under communism.

Thus Kosovo Albanian politics remain dominated by the nationalist aftermath of the 1996-1999 war, with a distinct 'thanksgiving' element of electoral distribution of favours, first to Dr Rugova for keeping the nationalist and anti-Belgrade flag flying during the difficult years of the early

1990s, and secondly to the KLA descended parties for their work in the wartime period. All three major Albanian parties are in stages of political evolution, a process that will be accelerated by the election of Dr Rugova as President of the Assembly in January 2002, and his removal from at least some aspects of party politics. All three parties have similar policies on independence, privatisation, land reform and foreign relations.

In the new Assembly, local competence is reserved only on internal matters such as health and education, and some aspects of finance; security, defence and foreign relations are kept for KFOR and the UN. The degree of autonomy on some matters is actually less than under the period of Kosovo autonomy in the old Yugoslavia, and friction between the International Community (IC) and the Albanian nationalist majority in the Assembly can be expected once the 'honeymoon' period has worn off.

International Community Preoccupations

The IC leaders in the United Nations do not envisage any decision on the final political status of Kosovo as a result of the elections, but it is inevitable that the independence question will arise. The IC is mainly concerned at the moment to open avenues of communication between Kosovo and Belgrade, to prevent any further exodus of Serbs, and if possible to encourage the return of Serb exiles from the 1998-1999 period. The official IC position is that any change of status must be as a result of agreement and dialogue with Belgrade. Current indications are that the Djindjic faction in the DOS leadership in Belgrade might be prepared for talks over Kosovo independence at some point, but the Kostunica supporters are not. Albanians are concerned to cut remaining links with Serbia, particularly in the economic field, where their successful programme of trade with Slovenia (an ideal model for independence in many Kosovar Albanian eyes) has removed many Serbian goods from the Kosovo market. Turkish, Bosnian, Albanian and Montenegrin trade and exchange of services relationships are also involved in this process. The medium term political effect of these changes in trade patterns in undermining the notion of a return of Kosovo to a future 'Yugoslavia' should not be underestimated.

The reasonable Serb electoral turnout is seen as an encouraging sign, with over 55% of the Serbs registered to vote at 'out of Kosovo' polling stations in Montenegro and Serbia exercising their right to vote in this poll, and no security problems for Serbs in voting apart from in the northern enclave of Leposavic and north Mitrovica. Security conditions for Serbs now vary widely within Kosovo, with improvements in some areas after the period of human rights violations and persecution post July 1999. On the central plain some Serb villages which were not involved with paramilitary extremists in the wartime period, or guilty of human rights violations themselves, now live in relative peace, and with modest KFOR security protection, although without interchange with their Albanian neighbours. The 4000 Serbs in the Vushtrri villages are an example. In other places, such as Gracinica, a de facto enclave has developed, but sufficient Serbs

remain to make a viable community with much IC help and protection. North of Mitrovica, a tough frontier atmosphere prevails and a wartime atmosphere lingers on in Mitrovica itself, with the city still divided over the Ibar river.

In practice there has been little real progress in return of Serbs to their original locations, with most returns to Kosovo taking place to what are in essence new settlements, often in remote areas near other surviving Serb settlements, such as recently in Zubin Potok, in northern Kosovo. The return of Serbs who were involved in the old government or security apparatus of the Milosevic period – a large percentage of the Kosovo Serb community between 1989 and 1999 - is totally unacceptable to all Albanians and remains a pipedream. The challenge to the Kosovo communities and the IC at this stage is to keep the current Serb population in Kosovo, and to encourage the newly elected Serb members of the Assembly to play a positive and constructive role in it.

In Tirana the elections were seen by the government as a step towards independence, and in the FYROM Albanian communities, a victory for their own struggle this year, as it was doubtful whether the Kosovo elections would have been held in 2001 before the FYROM violence started and the IC accepted the argument that the unresolved status and lack of democratisation in Kosovo was a factor in the Macedonian crisis.

In Belgrade, the government professed that the 62% turnout on the Albanian side indicated that the Albanian voters did not want independence, but 'a normal life within the FRY and Serbia'. In the context of turnout, it should be noted that many of the Albanians in the diaspora who had registered to vote were unable to return to Kosovo to do so.[2] In practice, in this respect only, OSCE election procedure here considerably favoured the Serbs. The OSCE and IC went to great trouble and expense to operate 'out of Kosovo' polling stations in Serbia and Montenegro, but did not allow a postal vote in the Albanian diaspora, or polling stations in Germany, Switzerland, the USA or other diaspora centres. This discrimination, however understandable in terms of the circumstances of this election, may well encourage further the already strong extremist political underground in these diaspora communities.

The New Assembly & The Future of the FRY

The Assembly offers all Kosovars an opportunity to improve the image of Kosovo in the international community. UNMIK head Hans Haekkerup stated on 15 November that, 'We should develop our political maturity and establish democracy in Kosovo, where all communities will participate and this will open the way to a final solution. I therefore believe that Kosovo's new government and assembly has the important job of creating the necessary trust. Together, we can do this.'[3]

It remains to be seen what the result will be of the election in terms of security issues. The head of the Kosovo Protection Corps, General Agim Ceku, limited himself to calling for people to vote in the elections, and saying that they will 'create a basis for Kosovo's final status' without giving any timescale for this event.[4] The decision of the IC and NATO to allow the Yugoslav army fully back into the Ground Security Zone on August 17 undoubtedly increased Albanian insecurities and was a significant factor in the increase in the share of the vote for the ex-KLA parties of Thaci and Haradinaj. The perception of major change and benevolent reform in Serbia that is put forward by the IC in Kosovo is not shared by Albanians, who are aware that many of the local leaders of the Kosovo Serbs were involved in Slobodan Milosevic's Socialist Party of Serbia in earlier days, and that an ex-minister of a Milosevic government was allowed by the UN to campaign in Kosovo in the election period.

NATO and KFOR can now look forward to a period of change in Kosovo, with the UN moving out of many central government buildings in Prishtine they currently occupy, and their transfer to the new Assembly and its officials. The difficulty and challenge will be to find ways of an accompanying evolution in security policy, based on a realistic evaluation of the nature of the DOS regime in Belgrade, the lack of reforms in the leadership and orientation in the Yugoslav army, and the security problems of the different communities in Kosovo. It is likely that there will be widespread pressure in the Kosovo Albanian community for an enhanced security role for the Kosovo Protection Corps, and in the anti-crime campaign, for more intelligence sharing between KFOR, the Kosovo Protection Corps and the Kosovo Police Service, something so far strongly resisted by KFOR.

Important regional factors are likely to be the still tense situation in FYROM, the very slow progress in implementing many aspects of the Presheve (Kosova Lindore) valley agreements and concern in the international community that the process of fragmentation of the old Yugoslavia may not yet have run its course.

ENDNOTES

1 OSCE first results announcement, 19 November 2001.

2 It is generally believed that the diaspora voters in the Albanian community are more radical and more likely to support the KLA-descended parties, so the low turnout from the diaspora was a hidden blessing for the LDK leadership. A high diaspora poll would probably have further reduced the LDK vote and increased the PDK and AAK totals. The LKCK and LPK also have significant support in the diaspora, probably much more than Haradinaj's party if evaluated in terms of active members.

3 Kosova Sot newspaper, Prishtine, 15 November 2001.

4 Koha Ditore newspaper, Prishtine, 16 November 2001.

Disclaimer

The views expressed are those of the Author and not necessarily those of the UK Ministry of Defence

ISBN 1-903584-51-5

Published By:

The Conflict Studies Research Centre

Directorate General Development and Doctrine
Royal Military Academy Sandhurst
Camberley
Surrey
GU15 4PQ
England

Telephone : (44) 1276 412346
Or 412375
Fax : (44) 1276 686880
E-mail: csrc@gtnet.gov.uk
http://www.csrc.ac.uk

ISBN 1-903584-51-5