

General Elections in Kosovo, a round-up one week before the election

from **Corinne Deloy**

Translated by Helen Levy

D-77 days before
the poll

On 12th December next Kosovo is organising its first general elections since independence (17th February 2008). 1,630,636 people are being called to ballot including 72,288 new voters i.e. 4.4% of the total. 29 political parties, 8 of which are representing the Serbs living in the country were registered by the Electoral Commission. The election is taking place one year early after the adoption of a motion of censure on 2nd November. On 27th September the President of the Republic Fatmir Sejdiu (Democratic League, LDK) was forced to resign after a decision by the Constitutional Court which notified that the Head of State had infringed the Constitution by maintaining his position as chair of the LDK whilst he occupied the highest office in the State.

The election distinguishes itself because of the large number of coalitions that have been formed. Hence the Alliance for a New Kosovo led by businessman Behxet Pacolli joined forces with seven other parties including the Social Democratic Party (SDP) chaired by former Prime minister (2006-2008). *"These general elections will be unprecedented because they will be organised without any international involvement. The world will be watching us and assess our democratic culture as well as our political maturity,"* declared interim President and former leader of Parliament, Jakup Krasniqi (DSK) who called on the parties to *"undertake a worthy campaign void of hate and intolerance."* 150 observers from the European Network of Election Monitoring Organisation (ENEMO) will be visiting 700 polling stations. 4800 local observers including many members of the NGO Democracy in Action will be in the field to ensure that the election takes place correctly.

The Democratic Party (DSK) which holds the majority in Parliament and led by outgoing Prime Minister Hashim Thaci is due to win on 12th December. *"I believe that not only will the Democratic Party, which is the biggest political machine in Kosovo and the best organised*

maintain its percentage of votes won in 2007 (34.3%) but it may even increase the figure slightly which will enable it to rise over the 35% mark of votes" anticipates Editor in Chief of the daily Koha Ditore, Agron Bajrami. If he retains his position the outgoing Head of government, who hopes that the Kosovars will be able to travel without a visa within the EU and that his country will become a NATO member mid-term, may quickly start dialogue with Serbia. *"Hashim Thaci wants to invest his international image and may quickly start negotiations to show that he is truly the victor of the elections and the person who counts in Kosovo,"* indicates political expert Belul Beqaj. Kosovo has been acknowledged by 71 States in the world including 22 EU Member States – except for Greece, Cyprus, Spain, Slovakia and Romania. Belgrade, like Moscow and Beijing has no diplomatic relations with the new State. According to many political observers the DSK may form a government coalition with the Alliance for a New Kosovo as well as with one or several other Serb parties.

The Democratic League, the country's second most important party, formerly that of President of the Republic (2006-2010) Fatmir Sejdiu, and led by the Mayor of Pristina, Isa Mustafa,

believes it has a good chance even though it is lagging behind in the polls. The LDK which may however win a few points back due to the popularity and charisma of its new leader has announced that it was ruling out any chance of governing with the DSK. *"We shall form a government of men with a clean bill so that they can really provide solutions to our problems,"* declared Isa Mustafa who, in order to scare the electorate, points to the fact that outgoing Prime Minister Hashim Thaci is about to join forces with the Serbs in the North of Kosovo.

Many analysts think that Isa Mustafa has committed two strategic errors: after having confirmed his desire to define *"a new programme for a new Democratic League"* he gave up undertaking the expected changes to the party and contented himself with half measures in addition to this he did not succeed in retaining Ukë Rugova, the son of the former President of the Republic (2002-2005) and former LDK leader, Ibrahim Rugova within the party. After failing to come to a *"re-integration"* agreement the latter quit the party on 10th November with members of the Democratic League-Ibrahim Rugova group which he is leading with Bujar Bukoshi. Ukë Rugova is due to join up with the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo whose leader is in prison at present at the ICTY in The Hague. *"We are not joining the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo. We are the Ibrahim Rugova List and we are part of the Democratic League. Unfortunately we have not been able to find our place within our party,"* declared Ukë Rugova.

In spite of the recommendation by the Belgrade authorities (they officially called on the Serbs of Kosovo not to take part in the election) a major share of the political parties in this community will participate in the election. Judita Popovic, an MP for the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) led by Dedomir Jovanovic asked the Serbs to

fulfil their civic duty on 12th December next. *"By participating the Serbs will show that they are prepared to be integrated into society."* Sreten Ivanovic, the leading candidate on the United Serb list believes that these general elections are a chance for the Serb community to solve their most important problems. *"Participation by the Serbs living north of the Ibar in Kosovo institutions is a necessity if we want to continue living here. We boycotted the local and general elections organised by Pristina and finally we have understood that it brought nothing."* However the Assembly of the Town Council Union of Kosovo-Metochia (the name given by the Serbs to the south west part of Kosovo) called on Serbs not to take part in the election and condemned the initiative taken by the United Serb list *"Serbs must not take part in a process whereby they will be acknowledging the independence of Kosovo."* Finally 104 intellectuals and personalities from Serbia sent a message to the Serbs of Kosovo to encourage them to take part in the elections. *"The positive experience of taking part in local elections in 2009 should encourage the Serb community to strengthen its position as an autonomous political entity in Kosovo. We strongly believe that a boycott would be damaging to the Serb community in Kosovo which would only contribute to it becoming a ghetto,"* reads the press release.

According to the polls the DSK is due to win and consolidate its majority in Parliament. The LDK may suffer a setback and lose its place as Kosovo's 2nd most important party. In the absence of its leader Ramush Haradinaj the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo led by Ukë Rugova is well placed in the polls. Two other parties are due to make a breakthrough: the Movement for Self-Determination (Vetvendosje) led by Albin Kurti and New Spirit (Fryma e Re), founded and led by Ilir Deda and Shpend Ahmeti, two young

graduates of American and British Universities who are defending a social programme and a plan to counter corruption. According to the International Institute for Middle East and Balkan Studies in Ljubljana (IFIMES) these two parties may notably attract the youngest voters and the undecided.

Whatever the result, it seems that the general election on 12th December will renew in part the political landscape in Kosovo.

THE FOUNDATION'S LATEST PUBLICATIONS

The British European Policy: is it Moving Towards a «Euro-Pragmatic» Agenda

European Issue n°188 - 06/12/2010 - Philippe Huberdeau

The Crisis over the 2011 Budget : the clash of the intransigent

European Issue n°187 - 29/11/2010 - Nicolas-Jean Brehon

"The Euro does not exist politically, there will have to be a political authority to represent it."

European Interview n°51 - 08/11/2010 - Jean-Paul Betbèze

Presidential "Election" in Belarus - Analysis - 19/12/12

You can read all of our publications on our site:

www.robert-schuman.eu

Publishing Director: Pascale JOANNIN

THE FONDATION ROBERT SCHUMAN, created in 1991 and acknowledged by State decree in 1992, is the main French research centre on Europe. It develops research on the European Union and its policies and promotes the content of these in France, Europe and abroad. It encourages, enriches and stimulates European debate thanks to its research, publications and the organisation of conferences. The Foundation is presided over by Mr. Jean-Dominique Giuliani.