

European
Elections monitor

from **Corinne Deloy**
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Presidential Election in Kosovo, 22th February 2011

Atifete Jahjaga is the new President of Kosovo

On 7th April Atifete Jahjaga became the new President of the Republic of Kosovo. Her election puts an end to the political crisis caused by the decision made by the Constitutional Court which, on 28th March, declared the election of Behgjet Pacolli (New Kosovo Alliance, AKR), contrary to the Constitution. The 9 members of the Court, to whom the case was referred by an opposition party, held that article 86-4 of the fundamental Law had been violated since the quorum (at least 2/3 of members present) had not been reached when the election was held (only 67 of the 120 members of parliament were present). Also, the absence of a 2nd candidate opposite Behgjet Pacolli violated article 86-5 of the Constitution, which indicates the presence of at least 2 candidates for the organisation of a presidential election. As a consequence of the invalidation of the election of Behgjet Pacolli, the Kosovan parliament had 25 days in which to elect the new Head of State. A new ballot therefore had to be held before 22nd April, failing which Parliament would have been dissolved and another general election organised.

On 7 April Atifete Jahjaga collected 80 votes. 100 members were present in the Assembly when the vote was held. Her rival, Suzana Novoberdaliu (AKR), won 10 votes. The 16 members representing Albin Kurti's Self-Determination movement (Vetvendosje), the left wing opposition party, boycotted the vote, accusing the authorities of having rushed into the organisation of this presidential election with the sole aim of holding onto power.

The government coalition in power, including Prime Minister Hashim Thaci's Democratic Party (PDK), the New Kosovo Alliance and the Independent Liberal Party (SLS), the country's leading Serbian community party and the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), the main opposition party, had reached an agreement on the candidacy of Atifete Jahjaga on 6th April as well as on several constitutional reforms. Another presidential election should take place 6 months at the latest after the introduction of amendments to the Constitution, with general elections 18 months at the latest after the reform of the electoral system, i.e. probably at the same time as

the next municipal elections, planned for 2013.

Until her election Atifete Jahjaga, 36, was an unknown on the Kosovan political scene. She began her career as an ordinary police officer and until 7th April was the deputy chief of the Kosovan police service. She studied law at Pristina University and trained with the FBI and the US Justice Department. She does not belong to any political party; her responsibilities in the police service did not allow her to make any political commitment. She is the first woman to be elected President of Kosovo.

«Until yesterday I had never even thought of holding any kind of high political position, but I was willing to serve my country», declared Atifete Jahjaga after her election to presidency of the Republic. She is committed to gathering more international recognition of Kosovo's independence, which would lead her country towards UN membership. *«The ideal of all Kosovo is membership of the European Union and a permanent friendship with the United States. I am convinced that our dreams will come true»,* declared the new President.

Atifete Jahjaga stated her confidence in the results of

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talks with Serbia, which still considers Kosovo as one of its provinces. «*We cannot change history but we can build a future, learning from the errors of the past. Dialogue will succeed. It will bring peace and stability to the region*» she said.

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