

Kosovo

Last update:	2 juni 2020
Population:	1,810,366 (2020)
Prime minister:	Albin Kurti
President:	Hashim Thaci
Governemental type:	Republic
Ruling coalition:	
Last election:	6 October 2019 (parliamentary elections)
Next election:	2023 (parliamentary elections)
Sister parties:	None

On 17 February 2008, the Republic of Kosovo unilaterally called out its independence. The formerly autonomous province of Serbia consists of around 92% ethnic Albanians and has several minorities, mainly Serbs. Kosovo's independence has been recognised by roughly half of UN members while Serbia opposes Kosovo's independence. Five EU member states do not recognise its independence, thus hampering an EU position on the status of Kosovo. Over the past years, the country has been struggling with its official status, its relation with Serbia and integration with the EU. Tensions and incidents remain in Kosovo, especially in the north, where the ethnic Serb majority does not recognise the authority and presence of the government in Pristina. On 19 April 2013, the EU brokered "First agreement of principles governing the normalisation of relations" was signed by Pristina and Belgrade and on 25 August 2015, another important agreement was reached between the two sides that is a "landmark achievement in the normalisation process."

Relations between Kosovo and Serbia deteriorated after Kosovo was denied access to Interpol in November 2018. After the rejection, Kosovo's Prime Minister, Ramush Haradinaj, announced that taxes on import goods from Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina would rise from 10% to 100%. Haradinaj accuses Serbia of launching a successful campaign to boycott Kosovo from entering Interpol. In August of the same year, it was speculated that both countries would agree on a border-correction which would open the way to the recognition of Kosovo. The speculation sparked anger among opposition parties and polls showed that in both countries a majority was against a border-correction deal. The EU-led Serbia-Kosovo talks about reignition of Kosovo broke down after tariffs were put in place. The new government led by Kurti is expected to resume talks with Serbia in an attempt to reach an agreement which could pave the way to more European integration for both countries.

Political Situation

Kosovo is a multi-party parliamentary representative democratic republic, whereby the Prime Minister of Kosovo is the head of government, and the President of Kosovo is the head of state. Until 2012 the EU deployed, in cooperation with the International Steering Group for Kosovo, a special International Civilian Representative in Kosovo who had the "ability to annul decisions or laws adopted by Kosovo authorities and sanction and remove public officials whose actions he/she determines to be inconsistent" with the Ahtisaari Plan. Since 2012 Kosovo has been responsible for overseeing its own governance.

The Kosovo Assembly, which was constituted as part of the UNMIK regulations on the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government, consists of 120 seats of which a maximum of 100 are distributed proportionally among the political parties based on the number of votes. Twenty additional seats are reserved for non-Albanian communities, of whom the Serbs can claim 10. Kosovo is a single electoral district. The Assembly elects the country's President for a five-year term. However, after the 2011 election of Behgjet Pacolli, as president was ruled unconstitutional, he was replaced by outsider Atifete Jahjaga. The Assembly decided to reform the electoral code to allow for the President to be elected by popular vote. As of April 2016, Hashim Thaçi has been appointed President of the country. Meanwhile, relations between Serbia and Kosovo improved in 2015 through an agreement on the normalisation of their relations.

The agreement included deals on energy, telecommunications, the bridge that divides the town of Mitrovica into a Serbian and Albanian part and the Association of Serbian Municipalities (ASM). The ASM will be "a legal entity defined by a statute and will to

promote the interests of the Kosovo Serb community in its relations with the Kosovo central authorities.” According to the plan, 10 municipalities with a Serbian majority will have their own assembly with an elected president, and with their own flag, but will be subject to Kosovo law. The agreement led to tensions in the parliament of Kosovo as the opposition party: Vetevendosje MPs threw eggs at PM Isa Mustafa, and later used tear gas in parliament to express their anger. Vetevendosje has succeeded in mobilising the young urban vote, winning the local elections in Pristina and gaining 14% of the voters at the 2014 general elections. At the same time, they are the only political party of relevance that has made serious work of developing (social) policies. They also organised protests in the street against the Belgrade-Pristina agreement, leading to confrontations between protesters and the police. On August 3rd 2015, parliament amended the constitution to allow the creation of a special EU backed court to examine war crimes allegedly committed by ethnic Albanian guerrillas during the 1998-1999 war. Since then the European Council approved a 1 year budget in June 2016. The Kosovo specialist chambers also adopted its Rules of Procedure and Evidence, which means that the court could be judicially operational from May 2017 onward.

EU - Kosovo - Serbia

As a consequence of the ongoing tensions, the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina was put on hold by the Serbian government, but since Serbia became an EU candidate state in 2013, more EU pressure was put on Serbia to achieve progress. The dialogue between the two countries intensified in 2018. To normalise the relationship, the presidents of Serbia and Kosovo, Aleksandar Vucic (Serbian Progressive Party, SNS) and Hashim Thaci (Democratic Party of Kosovo, PDK), were proposing a so-called land swap, but there is much resistance to that plan, especially in Kosovo.

According to the plan the North of Kosovo would be added to Serbia. Thaci argues that the possible border correction is not about the ethnicity of that area, but about a peaceful border, mutual recognition and EU integration. The land swap along ethnic lines is, however, highly controversial in Serbia, Kosovo, and neighbouring countries, and can potentially destabilise the region. Tensions were again raised after Kosovo was denied access to Interpol, which they blame on Serbia. Serbia expressed their satisfaction with the denial. This was the third time Kosovo was denied accession. Kosovo already applied for membership in 2015 and 2016. A day after the rejection, Kosovo Prime Minister, Ramush Haradinaj, announced that taxes on import goods from Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina would rise from 10 to 100 per cent. The earlier announced 10 per cent was a reaction to what Kosovo considers unfriendly behaviour of Serbia and Bosnia. Haradinaj called the attitude of Serbia and Bosnia towards Kosovo hostile. The EU foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, urged Kosovo to revoke the decision of the import tariff because of it being a violation of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA).

After the tariffs, lawmakers in Kosovo passed legislation to build a full-fledged army; a move that has inflamed tensions with Serbia again. The legislation will double the size of the Kosovo Security Force and gradually transform it into a professional army of 5,000 troops. At a UN Security Council session Serbian President, Aleksandar Vucic, claimed it would jeopardise peace. Kosovo's president Hashim Thaci, however, defended Pristina's decision to transform its security force into an army.

EU - Kosovo relations

Kosovo has expressed a desire to join the EU and welcomed a feasibility study in 2012 to look at the possibilities for joining, but their ties with Serbia and the divide in the EU on accepting Kosovo's independence continuously raise concerns. As unanimity among EU member states is demanded the establishment of contractual relations with a country and not all member states recognise its independence; Kosovo is the only Balkan country without contractual relations with the EU. Citizens of Kosovo are the last people in the region that still need a visa to enter the EU. In 2015 the Group for Legal and Political Studies (GLPS), a Kosovo think-tank, found that it was difficult for Kosovo to reach the requirements of the European Commission because of "much higher benchmarks" than those imposed on other West Balkan states and the fact that the roadmap that Kosovo received is "open to amendments by the European Commission". While the European Commission (EC) has aimed to give the region a real EU perspective through a Stabilization and Association Process, developments concerning Kosovo have remained problematic. The EU is still divided on accepting Kosovo's independence; five EU member states have not recognised its independence.

Tensions in north Kosovo

In July 2011 tensions increased after Kosovo special police forces tried to take control of the two border crossings in Serb-dominated northern Kosovo (north of the river Ibar). Prime Minister at that time Thaci decided to send in the police after EULEX failed to impose Kosovo's government ban on the import of Serbian goods and to establish Republic of Kosovo customs at the border. This was done without the consultation of either Serbia or KFOR/EULEX. One Kosovo police officer got killed and the police retreated from the border crossing after which local Serbs burned down the crossing and KFOR troops took over control of the

border. Serbs from the north of Kosovo decided to set up barricades on the main roads and constructed alternative gravel roads.

Though tensions between the two sides eased somewhat after the intervention of KFOR forces, they continued to remain high amid concerns from the EU, who criticised Kosovo for the unilateral provocation. Throughout 2012 the security situation in the north remained problematic; the Kosovo government was not able to exercise control in the north. By investing money they tried to involve the Serb citizens in Kosovo institutions. However, this has not resulted in an increased willingness of Serbs in north Kosovo to accept Kosovo institutions and, with that, an independent Kosovo. An unofficial referendum in February showed 99% of Serbs in northern Kosovo reject the writ of Kosovo's institutions. In April, hundreds of ethnic Albanians, especially from the north of Kosovo, demonstrated against the ineffectiveness of the institutions and international bodies with the aim of putting a stop to the violence.

Social Democracy in Kosovo

In Kosovo, social democracy has always been overshadowed by the nationalist struggle for autonomy and later for independence. In recent years, a few social-democratic political parties have emerged, such as the Kosovo Social Democratic Party, Reformist Party ORA, and New Spirit (FER). However, due to the political situation, these parties do not have much popular support and have merged with stronger political parties which focus more on territorial integrity and the independence of Kosovo. Politics in Kosovo is often more about personalities than policy, with ideology for the most part reserved to the national question, while social policy is mostly developed without serious political debate. Nowadays Vetevendosje is considered as the best alternative on the left and the only party that is trying to develop and implement social democratic policies. At the same time, international partners are not eager to engage in cooperation with Vetevendosje because of their behaviour in and outside the parliament and nationalistic views; they are still open to the option of Kosovo joining Albania. The Social Democratic Party (PSD) only existed on paper in the past ten years, but in 2018 9 MPs and the Mayor of Pristina reestablished the PSD after they split from the Vetevendosje party. In recent elections, the PSD ran together with the Alliance for Future of Kosovo party. They managed to get 11,57 per cent of the votes resulting in 14 seats in the parliament.

Serbs in Kosovo

About 8 per cent of the population of Kosovo is Serbian. The Serb population of Kosovo is concentrated in its northern and southern areas. Serbs in the south generally live in enclaves that are separated from the Albanian territories by roadblocks and/or bridges. Especially the divided town of Mitrovica experiences tensions, causing a temporary closure of the bridge between the Southern Albanian dominated area and the Northern Serb dominated area. About 18 per cent of the Kosovo Serbs live north of the river Ibar in North Mitrovica. The place has a strong symbolic meaning to Serbs, as it is the only Serbian urban centre in Kosovo with a university and hospital. In March 2004 inter-ethnic violence, leaving 20 dead, further harmed the relation between Serbs and Kosovars. The outburst of violence became a point of reference for the vulnerability of the relations between the ethnic groups. At least 800 mainly Serbian homes and at least 17 Serbian religious buildings were destroyed or damaged. The call for independence in 2008 also led to riots in the north of Kosovo. Kosovo Serbs consider the declaration of independence by Pristina illegal, and a breach of international law.

During the past years, the Serbs in Serbia as well as in Kosovo have harshly criticised the failure of UNMIK and KFOR to protect the Serb population in Kosovo. Especially the removal of control posts has been a reason for fear. Personal security and freedom are the dominant concerns for the Serbian community in Kosovo. Improving the situation of the Serbian communities was one of the main points on the agenda during the status negotiations, and remains an important topic that is held under scrutiny by the international community. The Serb community is mostly concentrated in the north of Kosovo, but there are also several enclaves in the centre and south of Kosovo with a Serb majority. Because the Serbs in these enclaves are more isolated from Serbia and therefore have more connections with the ethnic Albanians they show more willingness to integrate, despite many problems and a reluctance to accept Kosovo authorities remaining.

The Serb political community is represented by the Serb list which is backed by Belgrade. Serb opposition parties have tried to gain support from local Serbs, but intimidation and even the killing of opposition figure Oliver Ivanovic have caused the Serb list to remain dominant, getting all 10 seats reserved for the Serb minority in the last elections. Oliver Ivanovic decided to run in the 2017 Kosovan local elections, with his civic initiative "SDP". During his campaign, he publicly criticised the Serbian government for supporting the Serb list. Four days before the assassination, Ivanovic confessed he feared for his safety. In the recent parliamentary elections, his PSD party announced it would cooperate with the Serb List, sparking anger amongst prominent PSD members, causing many to leave the PSD.

EULEX

With Kosovo's call for independence in 2008 UNMIK ended and a new European Union Rule of Law Mission (EULEX) took over. EULEX aims to assist and support Kosovo authorities in the area of rule of law, specifically concerning the police, judiciary and customs. EULEX is a technical mission which monitors, mentors and advises whilst retaining a number of limited executive powers. The EULEX mission has been hindered in its functioning by the fact that only 23 out of 28 EU member states have recognised Kosovo as independent, leading to internal division. The mission is therefore often criticised for being inefficient in establishing a fully functioning rule of law. In 2014 corruption allegations were made after EULEX prosecutor Maria Bamieh was quoted in a Kosovar newspaper, saying that the EULEX's internal investigation failed to have key suspects questioned and that they were still allowed to work on sensitive cases. Among others, she accused former judge, Francesco Florit, of taking a 300,000 Euro bribe. In 2015 a report reviewing EULEX Kosovo mandate implementation with a focus on the handling of the corruption allegations was published, which found no evidence of corruption. The EU has started to stay committed to its leading role in Kosovo and considers the establishment of the rule of law the top priority. After demands were made for the EU to either withdraw or reform the EULEX mandate, EULEX refocused its efforts in June 2018, bringing its judicial executive part to an end while remaining active in other tasks.

Independence

In an extraordinary parliamentary session in Pristina on 17 February 2008, Kosovo unilaterally declared its independence from Serbia. Kosovo's Prime Minister Hashim Thaci read the declaration of independence, which stated that Kosovo is dedicated to peace and stability in the region, and is looking for a good relationship with its neighbours. The declaration furthermore states that Kosovo is created along the lines of a UN plan drawn up by special representative Martti Ahtisaari, and calls for Kosovo's independence to be supervised by the international community. Serbia was, and remains, strongly opposed against an independent Kosovo. According to the Serbian government, a solution for Kosovo must be found which both Belgrade and Pristina agree upon. As of 20 October 2015, 111 UN states have recognised the independence of Kosovo and it has become a member country of the IMF and World Bank. 23 out of 28 EU member states recognise the independence; Spain, Cyprus, Greece, Slovakia and Romania have not done so, mainly due to issues with minorities and separatist movements in their own respective countries.

UNMIK

The executive rule of Kosovo has, until its call for independence in 2008, been under the guidance of the United Nations, though officially being part of Serbia. Kosovo was administered by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG). The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 placed Kosovo under transitional UN administration pending a determination of Kosovo's future status. This Resolution entrusted UNMIK with sweeping powers to govern Kosovo, but also directed UNMIK to establish interim institutions of self-governance. Since 2001 UNMIK gradually transferred governing power to local institutions.

UNMIK initially brought together four pillars under UN leadership: Humanitarian Affairs under the responsibility of the UNHCR, Civil Administration of the UN, Democratization and Institution-building of the OSCE, and Economic Reconstruction, Recovery and Development of the European Union (EU). With the emergency stage over, pillar I (Humanitarian Affairs), was phased out at the end of June 2000. In May 2001 a new pillar I was created to be responsible for Police and Justice under the UN. To establish and maintain security in Kosovo, NATO-led international forces with a UN mandate were deployed (KFOR).

Kosovo war

Tensions between the Serbian and Albanian communities in Kosovo simmered throughout the 20th century and occasionally erupted into major violence, particularly during the First Balkan War, World War I, and World War II. The Socialist government of Josip Tito systematically repressed nationalist manifestations throughout Yugoslavia, seeking to ensure that no republic or nationality gained dominance over the others. After the death of Tito nationalist feelings became dominant again, especially among ethnic Albanians living in Kosovo, leading to an increasingly poisonous atmosphere between Albanians and Serbs.

Tensions further increased when the autonomy that was given to Kosovo in the '80s was revoked under the rule of Slobodan Milošević. In 1991 an unofficial referendum was held in Kosovo on the creation of an independent republic, 98 per cent voted in favour with a 90 per cent turnout. The denial of Kosovo's independence by the Serb government led to an increase in violence between the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and the Serb authorities and finally to a situation of war in 1997. The international community demanded that the Serbs would end their offensives against the KLA whilst attempting to convince the KLA to drop their bid for independence. Moreover, attempts were made to persuade Milošević to permit NATO peacekeeping troops to enter Kosovo.

The failure of peace negotiations led to a NATO decision in 1999 to end the conflict with military means. Within ten weeks, NATO aircraft flew over 38,000 combat missions with the following aim: “Serbs out, peacekeepers in, refugees back”. On June 3, 1999, Milošević accepted the terms of an international peace plan to end the fighting, with the Serbian parliament adopting the proposal amid contentious debate with delegates coming close to fistfights at some points. According to the Kosovo Memory Book, based on the study of an NGO from both Kosovo and Serbia, around 13,000 people were killed during the conflict.

Elections

The Assembly of Kosovo was established in 2001, by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo. Kosovo's independence was declared on 17 February 2008, after which a constitution came into effect on 15 June 2008.

The Assembly is regulated by the Constitution of Kosovo and has 120 seats. 20 of these are pre-allocated, as follows:

- 10 seats for parties representing the Serbs;
- 4 seats for the Romani, Ashkali and Egyptians;
- 3 seats for the Bosniaks;
- 2 seats for the Turks;
- 1 seat for the Gorans.

Minorities in Kosovo

Between 7 and 12 per cent of the population in Kosovo belongs to an ethnic minority. The flag of Kosovo includes six stars; each representing a minority group. Initially, the aim was to depict Kosovo as a multi-ethnic state, with a strong legal position for minorities.

As part of the efforts to secure minority rights, the Constitution guaranteed political involvement for parties representing minorities. Article 96 of Kosovo's Constitution also regulates the share of power for minority groups in Pristina's executive bodies. However, despite these efforts, the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo are discriminated against, being the poorest and most vulnerable in Kosovar society.

Not only are the laws themselves discriminatory, but implementation is also lacking. Here, it does not help that minorities tend to be grouped together by law. For example, Ashkali and Egyptians might be close as communities, but their heritages are unique.

Parliamentary Elections

On 6 October 2019, snap elections were held in Kosovo after Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj resigned following his summoning to the International Court in The Hague. It was the fourth time in a row that the government of Kosovo collapsed. The main contenders in the parliamentary elections were the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), Vetevendosje, the AAK-PSD coalition and the NISMA-AKR-PD coalition. It was widely believed that NISMA, AAK, AKR and PDK would be punished in the elections for their involvement with the government led by Haradinaj. The elections were focused on anti-corruption efforts and the relationship with Serbia which were at an all-time low during the electoral campaign.

October 2019 parliamentary elections

Party	Votes	% of votes	Seats	Seats in 2017
Self-Determination (Vetevendosje)	221,001	26.27	29	24
Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK)	206,516	24.55	28	23

Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK)	178,637	21.23	24	23
100% Kosovo (AAK-PSD)	96,872	11.51	13	10
Serb List	53,861	6.40	10	9
NISMA-AKR-PD	42,083	5.00	6	10
Vakat Coalition	7,075	0.84	2	2
Turkish Democratic Party of Kosovo	6,788	0.81	2	2
Egyptian Liberal Party	4,887	0.58	1	1
New Democratic Party	3,935	0.47	1	1
Ashkali Party for Integration	3,113	0.37	1	0
New Democratic Initiative of Kosovo	1,755	0.21	1	0
United Roma Party of Kosovo	1,078	0.13	1	1

The parliamentary elections proved to be a major victory for the opposition parties Vetevendosje and the LDK. Vetevendosje won the elections with 25.49 per cent of the votes while the LDK came in second with 24.82 per cent. Coalitions and parties who were part of the Haradinaj government all lost in the elections of 6 October. The Serb list gained all the votes reserved for the Serb minority in Kosovo. Initial results showed that the NISMA-AKR-PD alliance fell only a few hundred votes short of meeting the 5 per cent electoral threshold. However, the Election Complaints and Appeals panel ordered that 3,782 votes from Serbia should be removed from the count since they were delivered by Serbian officials rather than by post. This reshuffle caused the coalition to reach the threshold and win six seats in parliament.

Political crisis

It took four months after the snap elections were held, following the prime minister's resignation, for the two biggest parties to reach an agreement on the formation of a new government. The deal signed on the 2nd of February stated that the leader of the leftist "Vetevendosje" (VV) party Albin Kurti would become president and work together with the centre-right "Democratic League of Kosovo" (LDK) and other smaller groups. What made it difficult to reach consensus lay in the fact that the LDK is a centre-right political party, while the VV is identified as leftist, despite the party having clearly visible nationalist tendencies. However, Kurti's government did not last. The government fell after a vote of no confidence against Prime Minister Albin Kurti on the 25th of March was backed by a majority of MPs.

The vote of no confidence was initiated by the junior partner in Kurti's coalition government, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), and came after the dismissal of the Minister of Internal Affairs and Public Administration, Agim Veliu. Veliu is the deputy leader of the LDK, and was dismissed for "spreading panic" and because he supported President Thaci's proposal for a state of emergency. There have been continuous clashes between Prime Minister Kurti and President Hashim Thaci regarding measures to battle the coronavirus. Their latest clash came on the 24th of March when President Thaci asked the Constitutional Court to rule against new measures implemented by the government restricting people's freedom of movement. He believed it would lead to "great panic, confusion, uncertainty and fear" among citizens. He insisted that citizen's rights and freedoms can only be restricted if a state of emergency is declared by the president and is then approved by the Assembly of Kosovo. The government's power would then shift to the Security Council which is led by President Thaci. The president signed a decree on March 17th to call a state of emergency, all though it was not yet ratified at the time Prime Minister Kurti implemented the new measures. Even though the coronavirus pandemic tipped the dispute over the edge, the no-confidence vote was triggered by a much deeper disagreement about how to resolve a decades-old impasse between Kosovo and Serbia.

Kosovo now faces the question of whether to hold new snap elections or have the President appoint a new Prime Minister to form a new government.

Presidential Elections

Hashim Thaçi was elected as Kosovo's president on 26 February 2016, upon receiving 71 of the 120 MPs votes. He was installed as President on 7 April 2016. Rafet Rama, also from the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), did not receive any votes.

As a result of a deal reached in December 2014 between the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) and the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), the post of president would go to the PDK.

For this reason, some MPs from the LDK party did not vote for Thaçi. Eventually he was elected with a simple majority during the third voting round, after failing to achieve a two-thirds majority in the first two rounds.

(Social) Democratic Parties

Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK)

Party Leader: Kadri Veseli

Number of seats: 24

<http://www.pdk-49.com/>

The PDK was formed by prominent members of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK), among them the former party leader, former prime minister and current President of Kosovo, Hashim Thaçi, and the current president of the assembly - former spokesperson of UCK - Jakup Krasniqi. When Thaçi resigned from the position of head of party to assume the office of the President, Kadri Veseli was unanimously voted to succeed him in the position of head of party.

Upon its foundation, the party stated it wants to adopt a social democratic ideology and contacts with social democratic foundations exist. But although PDK originally had socialist tendencies, its political tendencies have shifted to centre-right over the years.

Like many parties in former communist countries PDK wrestles with the bad image of left wing parties. Also it is obvious the party has to come to grips with their image of being a party of former guerrillas. Nowadays, the party is tolerant and accommodating towards local Serbs, offering them Serbian as an official language, special municipalities, special positions in institutions, right of veto for laws that deal with minority rights etc. Besides full independence for Kosovo, top priorities in the view of the party leadership are the fight against youth unemployment and corruption.

PDK draws its support especially from poor rural, Albanian dominated areas that suffered extremely from violence during the war. For example in the Drenica Valley, in which also a lot of UCK fighters were living, PDK gained 80% of the votes in the first three elections.

In the 2017 parliamentary elections the PDK came out as the biggest party.

Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK)

Party Leader: Isa Mustafa

Number of seats: 28

<http://www.ldk-ks.eu/historiku/ldk/>

The LDK was formed in 1989 by a group of intellectuals headed by Ibrahim Rugova and grew out to one of the main political parties of Kosovo. The immediate goal was to establish an independent Kosovo. The party won the 2001 and 2004 elections and has headed the governments to come out of these elections. In the 2007 elections, the party came in second after the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) and joined a coalition with the PDK. However, after the 2010 elections in which the party became second after the PDK again, the LDK choose to head the opposition.

The leader of the party, Ibrahim Rugova was Kosovo's president from 2002 to 2006, until he died of lung cancer. Rugova embodied for the Kosovars the struggle for independence and was much respected internationally for his moderate position and peaceful methods of resistance. The parliament elected Fatmir Sejdiu, who had been on the presidency of the LDK since its foundation in 1991, as the new president. After the fall of the government in November 2010, Isa Mustafa won internal elections to become the new party leader.

LDK has a liberal orientation favouring a free market economy and privatisation or public-private partnerships. Other priorities are European integration, education (in one's native language), authentic development of culture, fair social policy, accessible healthcare, and guaranteeing minority rights.

In 1991 the party organised a referendum on self-determination of Kosovo in which more than 90% of the Kosovar Albanians voted for independence. The independence declaration was only accepted by Albania. Afterwards Rugova formed an underground government in Kosovo, which was not recognised by Serbia. A number of LDK members have been killed over the past years, which are suspected to be politically motivated assassinations.

Social Democratic Party of Kosovo (PSD)

Party Leader: Shpend Ahmeti

Number of seats: 13 (Together with AAK)

The Social Democratic Party (PSD) was established on 10 February 1990 by Kaqusha Jashari but failed to enter the parliament in the past ten years, but in 2018 9 MPs and the Mayor of Pristina reestablished the PSD after they split from the Vetevendosje party. In the recent elections the PSD ran together with the Alliance for Future of Kosovo party, in which they managed to get 11,57% of the votes resulting in 14 seats in the parliament. The PSD is a social-democratic party positioned on the centre-left, which is focused at promoting effective local governance. PSD's party leader is Shpend Ahmeti who is the current mayor of Pristina, before joining the PSD, Ahmeti was vice-leader of the Vetevendosje party.

Other Parties

Vetevendosje (Self-Determination)

Party Leader: Albin Kurti

Number of seats: 29

<http://www.vetevendosje.org/>

Self-Determination (Vetëvendosje!) is the second-largest parliamentary group in Kosovo, having won 32 seats in the Kosovar Assembly in the June 2017 elections. The movement was well known even before its formal establishment in 2005, especially for their graffiti slogans all around Kosovo, such as UNMIK Jashtë (UNMIK Out), and Jo Negociata, Vetëvendosje! (No Negotiation, Self-Determination).

The party has also organised street protests, which have often turned violent. Combined with its opposition towards UNMIK and international supervision in general, the party enjoys wide appeal amongst the youth, mainly due to its anti-establishment and anti-corruption message.

Moreover, Vetëvendosje! has become a symbol of opposition to the status quo, through its disruptive actions in the previous parliament. Its supporters released tear gas inside parliament and threw firebombs outside it to protest the deals with Montenegro and Serbia, issues that caused the previous government to spark the snap elections of June 2017.

Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK)

Party Leader: Ramush Haradinaj

Number of seats: 13 (together with the PSD)
<http://www.aak-ks.com/>

Like the PDK, former Albanian militants who fought against the Belgrade regime lead the AAK. The leader of the party, Ramush Haradinaj, is a former UCK commander. Originally the AAK was founded for the 2000 municipal elections as a coalition of five nationalist parties. By 2001 two of the parties had withdrawn from the coalition. The parties that withdrew were the more conservative and nationalist members. For the 2002 municipal elections, the remaining parties registered as an independent party under the same name.

AAK has been in government from 2001 until 2007 and has delivered a prime minister for the second governing period from 2004 on. Party leader Haradinaj took up this job, but handed it over to Kosumi as he was indicted for war crimes. In 2006 Kosumi resigned and LDK man and former guerrilla commander Agim Ceku was nominated to form a new government.

The AAK is now known as a more moderate, pro-European party in the centre of the political spectrum, which is in favour of ethnic co-operation. Economic priorities set by the party are the creation of new jobs, promotion of small and medium sized business, infrastructure, and privatisation. Support comes mainly from the Dukagjini region in southwest Kosovo. International and local political observers credit the party with solid organisation and clear, effective and largely democratic internal procedures. In addition, women and youth are well represented in the party, which fits the party's priority to promote youth and a bigger role for women in society.

Serb List

Party Leader: Slavko Simić
Number of seats: 10
<http://www.srpskalista.net>

Serb List is a political party supported by the Government of the Republic of Serbia. It aims at protecting the interests of the Serb people in Kosovo; the party wants to protect cultural and religious heritage, improve human rights, and advocate for the return of internally displaced persons. By doing this, the party hopes to strengthen the institutional and economic capacity of the Serb people in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija.

Serb List supports the process of normalizing the relations between Serbia and Kosovo, and the party is committed to implementing all the agreements that have been and will be ratified by Brussels. The party strives for legal certainty, and wants to carry out its political activities based on the rule of law. Equality and stability are key, and in order to defend these principles the party will constantly seek justice for Serb victims and punish those who committed crimes against them.

New Kosovo Alliance (AKR)

Party Leader: Bahgjet Pacoli
Number of seats: 6 (together with NISMA and PD)
<http://www.akr-ks.eu/>

The Alliance for a New Kosovo (AKR) was founded in March 2007 by Bahgjet Pacoli, a successful businessman and owner of general contracting and engineering company Mabetex. Pacoli is also the main financier of the AKR. The 2007 elections were the first in which the AKR competed, winning 12.3% of the votes, or 13 seats in the assembly. In the 2010 elections the party won 7.3% of the votes, or 8 of the 120 seats. Pacoli was elected President by the assembly on 22 February 2011, but stepped down amidst controversy over the legality of his appointment 4 April 2011. Ideologically, the party is liberal-oriented.

Biographies

Hashim Thaci

President

Hashim Thaçi's rise to prominence in Kosovar politics started during the war against Serbia, when he became the political leader of the Kosovar Liberation Army (KLA). After the war, he led the PDK party, but the party came in second in the first two elections. In 2007, the PDK managed to secure the first position, and thus Thaçi became Prime Minister of Kosovo. One of the promises of Thaçi's campaign was that he would declare Kosovo independent, which occurred on 17 February 2008. The PDK won early elections in 2010, and Thaçi remained as Prime Minister.

A 2010 report by the European Council implicated Thaçi in an organ theft scheme during the Kosovo War in the 1990s. The report, widely known as the Marty report, states that over 300 organs were harvested from Serbian prisoners of war and sold on the international black market in order to raise money for the war effort. The accusations were never conclusively proven. More recently, prosecutor Clint Williamson issued a report declaring that "senior officials of the former Kosovo Liberation Army" were suspected of crimes against humanity. Thaçi may be one of them, although his name was not mentioned.

Hashim Thaçi was elected as Kosovo's president on 26 February 2016, upon receiving 71 of the 120 MPs votes. He was installed as President on 7 April 2016. As a result of a deal reached in December 2014 between the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) and the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), the post of president would go to the PDK. For this reason, some MPs from the LDK party did not vote for Thaçi. Eventually he was elected with a simple majority during the third voting round, after failing to achieve a two-third majority in the first two rounds.

Albin Kurti

Prime Minister

Albin Kurti was born on March 24th 1975 in Pristina which was part of Yugoslavia at the time. His father is from Albanian decent. After scoring 100% in the admission exam, Kurti was admitted to the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Prishtina as a top applicant in 1993. He graduated in 2003 in Telecommunications and Computer Engineering.

He came to prominence in 1997 as the vice-president of the University of Prishtina Student Union, and a main organiser of non-violent demonstrations in 1997 and 1998. The protests, aimed against the occupation of the university campus by the Yugoslav police, were violently crushed but that did not stop Kurti from organising other protests in the following years. In July of 1998 Kurti joined the Kosovo Liberation Army as an assistant to the political representative. This made him a target of the Yugoslav police. He was arrested during the April 1999 NATO bombing of Yugoslavia and was sentenced to 15 years in prison later that year. He was charged with "jeopardizing Yugoslavia's territorial integrity and conspiring to commit an enemy activity linked to terrorism." He however refused to recognise the legitimacy of the court. He was eventually released in December 2001 by Yugoslavia's post-Milosevic government amid international pressure.

He has been a member of the Assembly of Kosovo since 2010 in three consecutive legislatures and is married to Norwegian Rita Augestad Knudsen. They have one daughter named Lea.

On February 3rd 2020, Kurti was elected Prime Minister of Kosovo amid an ongoing political crisis with 66 votes in favour, 10 abstains and 34 MPs boycotting the vote all together. A little over a month later, on the 25th of March 2020, Kurti was ousted by a vote of no confidence. He is currently the interim Prime Minister, designated to last until a new government takes office. He is the leader of the political movement and party Vetëvendosje (Self-Determination).

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