



Kosovo

2004 Central Assembly Elections

Kosovars went on October 23 to vote for their representatives in the Central Assembly. This was the second parliamentary election since 1999, and 100 of the 120 seats in the Assembly were at stake with the remaining 20 seats reserved for ethnic minorities. Voter turnout was 52 percent in the closed list, single district system and less than one percent of Serbian voters cast their ballots. Preliminary results suggest that President Ibrahim Rugova's Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) was the highest vote-getter with 47 percent. The new members of parliament will have more responsibilities than their predecessors, as the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) transfers more unreserved competencies to the provisional institutions of self-government (PISG). Deputies will begin the discussion on Kosovo's final status process, expected to begin in mid-2005.

Background

This is the fourth election in Kosovo since 1999 but the first partly organized by Kosovar institutions. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) retained control over finalizing voter lists; setting the number and location of polling stations; organizing the mail-in voting and out-of-Kosovo polling stations; and financing the election. Kosovar-run Central and Municipal Election Commissions took responsibility for certifying political parties and civic initiatives; designing the ballot; and preparing and training poll workers. The Central Election Commission (CEC) also counted the ballots, including the conditional and mail-in ballots, and will certify the final results (with OSCE approval).

The ballot listed 33 entities (parties, citizen's initiatives, or individual candidates) representing the Albanian majority as well as Turkish, Bosnian, Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian, Gorani, and Serbian minorities – the participation of whom the international community perceives as vital to the future of a stable, multi-ethnic Kosovo. NATO sent 2,000 additional troops to prevent violence and the OSCE opened polling stations in Serbia and Montenegro to encourage internally displaced persons to vote, but mixed messages from leaders in Belgrade resulted in a *de facto* boycott among Serb voters. Only two Serb initiatives, the Serb Citizen Initiative and the Serb ticket for Kosovo and Metohija, participated in the elections, with most members of the previous Serbian coalition, Koalicija Povratak, opting not to run.

Election Results

The CEC stated that 51 percent of the 1.4 million eligible voters cast their ballot, down from 64 percent in the 2001 parliamentary elections. Preliminary results below are from the CEC and the Council for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms (CDHRF), NDI's election monitoring partner, and do not include results from mail-in, provisional, or questionable ballots.

<i>Political Party</i>	<i>CEC Preliminary Results (announced 10/25)</i>	<i>CDHRF PVT Results (announced 10/24)</i>
Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK)	45.3 percent	45 percent
Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK)	28.7 percent	26 percent
Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK)	8.3 percent	8 percent
Ora Citizens' Initiative	6.3 percent	6 percent

These results represent about the same results for LDK, PDK, and AAK from the Central Assembly election in 2001.¹ It is important to note that the Serbian list won more than 11 percent of the vote in that election while, in this election, it will not amount to more than .25 percent. By taking the Serb boycott into account, it is likely that the three largest parties actually received fewer votes than in previous elections. Final results are expected to be released on Saturday, October 30.

Election Monitoring

With assistance from NDI, the Council for Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms (CDHRF) conducted non-partisan election monitoring activities on October 23 that were consistent with the international standard for election monitoring operations. CDHRF sent 2,000 monitors to all of the 1,620 polling stations in Kosovo and conducted parallel vote tabulation (PVT)² in 324 of these stations, including seven Serbian and number of mixed Albanian/Serbian stations. Monitors reported no incidents of violence or intimidation, although there is anecdotal evidence of Serbs intimidating other Serb voters. Other issues reported by CDHRF monitors included the following:

- ⇒ Some stations did not open at the scheduled time of 7 a.m.
- ⇒ Twelve polling stations in Serbian neighborhoods were consolidated into nine on the morning of elections, causing voter confusion.
- ⇒ Unauthorized people directed voters within polling centers.
- ⇒ Voter lists were inaccurate in some municipalities, and in several instances voters either visited multiple centers to find their name or cast provisional ballots.
- ⇒ As a result of inaccurate lists, more people cast provisional ballots in this election than in 2001. CDHRF monitors estimated 15 to 30 percent did so in 2004, compared to 10 percent in 2001.
- ⇒ The process for filing the provisional ballots was applied incorrectly in many places. The ballot was placed into the envelope with the personal information and then shoved into the smaller privacy sleeve.

What's Next

After certification of the results by the CEC and receipt of OSCE approval, there is a three-day period in which parties can contest the results. Once any disputes are resolved, the deputies have 24 hours to accept their mandates, and shortly thereafter, the Central Assembly will hold its first session, at which time the deputies will be sworn in.

¹ Ora is a new civic initiative expected to become a political party.

² Parallel Vote Tabulation, known in the US as a quick count, is an election-monitoring method for projecting voting results.

Parties will begin to negotiate a governing coalition agreement. After the last Central Assembly elections in 2001, these negotiations lasted three months, and resulted in a broad coalition of the LDK, PDK, and AAK. This situation proved to be cumbersome and left the government without a formal opposition. At this time, it remains unclear whether a broad coalition will coalesce or a majority and opposition will form. However, LDK will likely retain the presidency and become the senior coalition partner. It is possible that the PDK, which currently holds the Prime Minister position, will lead an opposition. The AAK, PDK, and Ora have all expressed a willingness to form a coalition with Serb parties should the right circumstances arise.

Without certified results, it is difficult to speculate as to the make-up of the next government, as a difference of one or two Assembly seats could change party circumstances. No matter the final coalition outcome, a real challenge will lie in determining who will be Kosovo's next prime minister. In addition, it is unclear whether the Serb parties, particularly those from the Serb ticket for Kosovo and Metohija, will in fact take their seats in the next Central Assembly. Should they decide to boycott, Kosovo's leaders will face further difficulties in proving the legitimacy of the PISG to the Serb and international communities.

Conclusion

The impact that the low voter turnout and the Serb boycott will have in Kosovo's fulfillment of UNMIK's standards is hard to ascertain in the immediate wake of the elections. It is important, however, to note the progress made by Kosovo's political parties since the 2001 elections in professionalizing their campaigns and eliminating rhetoric promoting violence and ethnic division. Several parties conducted their own research to determine voter attitudes prior to the elections and crafted specific, issue-based platforms. Parties used new campaign methods and were more willing to engage in direct voter contact than in previous election cycles. However, a significant gap remains in parties' abilities to communicate their distinct party policies to voters and that, in concert with an election system that does not allow voters to choose based on individual or local interests, is driving down voter turnout.

Although the results are not yet official and the government has yet to be formed, it is clear that, as the PISG head into 2005 and begin talks on final status, President Rugova will be at the table. The least desirable outcome would be a return to the broad-based coalition among the LDK, PDK, and AAK. While such a coalition may offer a degree of unity at the negotiating table in 2005 and beyond, it would hinder the real representation of Kosovar people in government. As the PISG gain more competencies from UNMIK in the upcoming months, all parties will have to prove that they have the interests of their constituents in mind. The turnout in this election shows that people are no longer concerned only with the future status of Kosovo, but also with high unemployment, a failing education and health system, and poor infrastructure.

With funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), NDI has worked with the people of Kosovo since 1999 to promote a democratic and ethnically representative political system. NDI's programs reach a full spectrum of political parties, civic groups, and both the Municipal and Central Assemblies. For more information on NDI's Kosovo program, please contact Annisa Wanat in Washington, D.C. at 202-728-5665 or Tom Bridle in Pristina at 381-38-244-994.