

In Kosovo, unprecedented victory of Vetëvendosje

Via [International Viewpoint](#)

On 14 February, the party that presents itself as a 'left-wing nationalist' won 48% of the votes in the legislative elections – a score that no party has achieved since the establishment of the international protectorate after the end of the NATO war in 1999 or as part of the self-proclaimed independent state in 2008 (recognised by 93 of the 193 members of the UN).

These elections come after years of constitutional and political crises, and in the midst of a pandemic. In December, the Constitutional Court provoked these early legislative elections by invalidating the government in power, whose parliamentary ratification had been narrowly achieved by counting the vote of a deputy condemned by the courts. In November, President Hashim Thaçi, the historic leader of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) – one of the commanders of the UCK, the Kosovo Liberation Army – indicted by the Hague Court, was deposed. He is awaiting trial for war crimes.

The Vetëvendosje party

Vetëvendosje (VV), for its part, has experienced major changes and crises. When it was founded in 2004, it had an “ethno-nationalist profile” and advocated union with Albania. [1] Its discourse, which became more social and denounced corruption, earned it growing popularity, all the more so as it also addressed the Kosovo Serbs: the search for an understanding with them was given priority over the “negotiations” with Belgrade, conducted in an opaque manner by President Thaçi under pressure from the Trump administration. The latter advocated population transfers to new ethnic borders as a condition for Belgrade’s recognition of Kosovo’s independence. While rejecting this logic, VV was moving towards a policy of

democratic popular sovereignty that responded to the concrete needs of the people of Kosovo. However, against a backdrop of contradictions between social orientations and the search for international recognition, the internal functioning of the VV in 2018 provoked a “self-destruction of the party” due to the lack of democratic modalities for expressing disagreements – particularly with regard to the main leader, Arbin Kurti. [2]

Major contradictions

The current electoral victory nevertheless comes after several years of local anchoring of the party thanks to its success in the municipal elections – particularly in Pristina, but also after a narrow majority in the legislative elections of 2019. This led to a precarious governmental alliance of VV with the centre-right Democratic League of Kosovo (the LDK of historical leader Ibrahim Rugova). Arbin Kurti assumed the head of government for some 50 days and not without popular disillusionment at the weakness of the social policies implemented. It was a motion of censure initiated by the LDK that brought him down in March 2020. In the background: spectacular actions carried out by Kurti (for which he was condemned) on border issues.

Against popular disillusionment, the VV has multiplied its promises: dissolve the Privatisation Agency, create a sovereign fund for the management of public enterprises, ensure free tuition for students, parental leave and social welfare services especially for single mothers and the elderly. It rallied a massive vote from the diaspora (one third of the population, which brings in 60% of the country’s budget) and women (61% against 47% of men). [3] Albin Kurti declares that he wants to “put an end to the old regime” by responding to social priorities. He hopes for the integration of Kosovo with the whole of the Western Balkans into the EU. [4] These are challenges that are a source of major contradictions.

Footnotes

[1] *Le Courrier des Balkans*, 28 April 2020.

[2] *Le Courrier des Balkans*, 30 January 2018.

[3] See on these elections *LeftEast* 19 February 2021 [“Unprecedented Victory for the Left in Kosova: The Movement for Self-determination \(LVV\) Wins by a Landslide”](#) and the *Courrier des Balkans*, 16 February 2021.

[4] They include the countries of the former Yugoslavia and Albania, recognised by the EU as potential candidates, with Kosovo having an ad hoc status.