

Next Government Faces Mountain of Expectations

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Whoever takes office will have to deal with growing public frustration over jobs, energy and schools, as well as final status.

More than 1.3 million registered voters this weekend have the opportunity to shape the future make-up of the next government in Kosovo, or the Kosovo Provisional Institutions of Self-Government, PISG, as it is called.

As no party is likely to get more than 61 of the 120 assembly seats and form a majority on its own, any administration is likely to resemble the current multi-party arrangement, which has been widely criticised as inefficient.

A total of 27 parties and 5 independent candidates are competing for seats in the October 23 election. Ten will be reserved for ethnic Serbs and 10 more for smaller minorities, such as Roma, Ashkalis, Egyptians, Bosniaks and Goranis.

Kosovo's first post-war election in 2001 resulted in a coalition dominated by the three biggest parties, the Democratic League of Kosova, LDK, the Democratic Party of Kosova, PDK, and the Alliance for the Future of Kosova, AAK.

But so far, Kosovo's local administration has wielded only limited powers, for under UN Resolution 1244, the entity has effectively been governed as a UN protectorate.

Talks on Kosovo's final status are to begin in 2005, however, which makes the coming election more crucial than its predecessor. The next government will enjoy increased powers, once the international administration starts to hand over all or most of its responsibilities.

"These elections are particularly important," Naim Maloku, vice-president of the AAK, told IWPR, "because during the next parliament's three-year mandate, the process of determining Kosovo's final status will both start and be concluded."

Xhavit Haliti of the PDK, a member of the Kosovo assembly, warned that this coming transfer of power will also pose a considerable challenge to the politicians. "Whoever takes office will have some homework to do," Haliti said, "such as fulfilling standards, dealing with the energy crisis and ensuring a secure environment and freedom of movement for all citizens."

According to Muhamet Hamiti, a member of the LDK and spokesperson for Kosovo's president, Ibrahim Rugova, the incoherence of the various government ministries, led by different parties, hampered the government in carrying out its tasks in the past.

"Some ministers acted as if they were in the opposition," Hamiti said. "It was impossible for the government to function normally."

Heather Kashner, director of the National Democratic Institute, NDI, a Pristina-based think-tank, agrees. "One of the first things the next government must do is to have a more coherent agenda on issues such as

the economy, education and the environment,” she said.

Research conducted in September by the UN Development Programme, UNDP, and by the prime minister’s office on good governance, suggested the general public rates the government and presidency among the five most corrupt institutions in Kosovo.

Leon Malazogu, research director at the Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development, KIPRED, says one way to combat this perception is to encourage a more vigorous parliamentary opposition.

“To have a system of accountability and checks and balances, Kosovo needs an opposition,” he told IWPR. “The more opposition there is, the less chance there is of abuses in government institutions.”

But Ramush Tahiri, advisor to Nexhat Daci, the assembly speaker, says such a development is unlikely while party leaders remain fixated on the goal of entering government.

“The main parties are more interested in holding some power, even if this just means holding a single ministry, than being in the opposition,” Tahiri told IWPR.

According to Tahiri, party bickering after the elections is likely to centre on who is to get control of the lucrative key ministries, such as transport, finance, the economy and agriculture.

“Most people think companies that win tenders to build roads or other services will hand over about 15 per cent of the value of the service to government ministries, in the form of bribes,” Tahiri explained.

Heather Kashner, however, predicted that it will be more difficult for the next Kosovo government to get away with such financial unaccountability.

“Kosovar people have become very savvy,” she said. “And they are sick of the Kosovo leadership’s blame game with the international community. You can be sure the following government will be held accountable for what happens during its next mandate.”

Whatever government does take office in Pristina, it will have to deal with mounting public frustration over issues such as unemployment, power shortages and poor educational facilities, as well as final status.

What Kashner fears is that many people still harbour unrealistic expectations about what their own government, or the international administration, can realistically achieve in the months ahead.

“As we have seen before,” she warned, “expectations that aren’t met, lead to bad things.”

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