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ELECTION FEVER

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Navigating Coalition Dynamics and Regional Stability: The Road Ahead for Kosovo's Parliamentary Elections

At the outset of the discussion regarding the forthcoming parliamentary elections in Kosovo, it was observed that Albin Kurti is anticipated to secure a victory. However, this likely will not translate into an absolute majority of votes, thus necessitating the formation of a coalition government with one of the stronger opposition parties. In that regard, and in the context of recent events, a potential coalition between Vetëvendosje (Self-Determination) and PDK (Democratic Party of Kosovo) was perceived as part of Kurti's strategy to share responsibility, or rather the blame, for the government's poor performance, but also any future unpopular decisions. It was noted that further conflicts between Kurti and Osmani would benefit the LDK (Democratic League of Kosovo) as these rifts bring President Osmani closer to her former party. At the same time, the approximation of LVV and PDK benefits LDK and its image of "real opposition" allowing them to regain some LVV voters who sided with this party precisely because they were perceived as an anti-PDK governing legacy.

Considering the motivation of the PDK to ponder a coalition with LVV, the discussion participants underlined the clientelist nature of the part of the PDK voter base who would find any signals hinting toward this party being in the future governing mix appealing. Furthermore, PDK gained a bit of momentum by naming Bedri Hamza as a candidate for PM and that any prolongation of elections would dissipate this energy. When it comes to LVV, while the party can have its pick of the future coalition parties, the incentive to hold elections sooner rather than later may also be a potential milder but still significant energy crisis that can ramp up the price of energy costs at the beginning of the following year when regular elections are due.

The chances of a post-election coalition with a strong majority party are high; the expectation is that it would undoubtedly affect the dynamics of the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue due to potential internal disagreements and differing views on how to approach various aspects of the dialogue. The participants doubted that a government with a more vital coalition partner than the current non-majority parties would have been able to withstand the pressure of deteriorating relations with the U.S.

Consequently, it was posited that, in the post-election period, Kurti's approach towards the Serbian community would become more moderate compared to his second-mandate approach. This shift could facilitate the establishment of the Association of Serb-majority Municipalities (ASMM). Initiating the ASMM formation before the elections poses political risks for Kurti, prompting the anticipation of avoidance of such measures before the polls.

As for the participation of Serbs and Serbian political representatives, opinions were divided. On the one hand, it was believed that Serbs, particularly in the North of Kosovo, would abstain from participation due to the Serb List's (Srpska Lista) loss of citizens' trust, rendering them unwilling to engage in processes organized by the Kosovo government or within the Kosovo system. Furthermore, public pressure during the election campaign may lead Kurti to enact measures hindering Serbian community participation, potentially leading to a boycott of the elections. In contrast, it was argued that the Serb List would not permit such abstention - as it could result in losing positions at the central level, specifically in the parliament, which other candidates close to Kurti could exploit, potentially paving the way for constitutional changes - and would therefore find a way to participate, potentially resigning or boycotting the institutions thereafter. As an argument against this claim, it is stated that President (of Serbia) Vucic appears indifferent to potential changes in the constitution, primarily concerned about the implications and international pressure on Serbia to normalize relations with Kosovo following the potential establishment of the Association of Serb-majority Municipalities (ASMM).

What further exacerbates the situation regarding Kosovo Serb participation is the fact the Kosovo government lacks understanding regarding the problems of the Serbian community. This has prompted Kosovo Serbs, especially from the North, to leave Kosovo and predominantly move to Serbia. While migration trends were also noted among Albanians, their primary motives are economical, whereas, for Serbs, these are political-security reasons, according to several studies produced by NSI in recent times.

U.S. Elections: Waning Influence on Global and National Political Processes?

Given the presidential elections in November, the potential impact of a change in the U.S. administration was also considered. Opinions diverged: some believed there would not be significant changes under a possible Trump administration, while others highlighted the possibility of increased pressure on Kurti and a potential escalation of tensions, especially considering the strained relations between Kurti and Grenell, who would likely assume a prominent position in the new administration or at least a role responsible for the Balkans.

Regarding the current U.S. administration, it was noted that America increasingly lacks control over its allied countries, with its focus shifting from the Balkans to other current hotspots—namely, Ukraine, Gaza, Indo-Pacific, and Georgia. Furthermore, there were viewpoints suggesting that should the situation remain unchanged, an alteration in American's approach towards Kosovo is inevitable, irrespective of the administration leading after November.

In the context of the elections, there was also discussion regarding the recently conducted census in Kosovo. Criticisms were directed at the poor translation of the questionnaire, deficiencies in addressing war damages, and insufficient public awareness about the census. Most members of the Serbian community in the North were not visited by census takers, creating the illusion that citizens primarily boycotted the census despite their lack of opportunity to make that choice. Problems with the census were not confined to the Serbian community but were also present in many majority-Albanian municipalities across Kosovo.

Europe to the Right and away from the Western Balkans

Concerns were also expressed regarding the upcoming European Parliament elections and other changes within the E.U. The predicted growth of right-wing parties within the European Parliament could reinforce skepticism towards E.U. enlargement, particularly concerning the Western Balkans, including Serbia and Kosovo. E.U. distancing in this regard would likely affect the level of engagement in the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, collectively leading to a further erosion of the E.U.'s already shaken integrity and credibility in the region and between the two sides.

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