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Observation of the elections to the Assembly of Kosovo* (9 February 2025)

Election observation report[1]
Ad hoc Committee of the Bureau
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1. *Throughout this document, all reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

1. Introduction

1. On 16 August 2024, Vjosa Osmani-Sadriu, President of the Republic of Kosovo, called for elections to the Assembly of Kosovo to be held on 9 February 2025. On 26 October 2024, the Parliamentary Assembly was invited to observe these elections. At its meeting on 28 November 2024, the Bureau of the Assembly decided to set up an ad hoc committee composed of 20 members to observe these elections and authorised a pre-electoral mission. It then appointed Ms Petra Bayr as chairperson of the ad hoc committee.

2. The composition of the ad hoc committee (thereafter "the PACE delegation") is provided in Appendix 1.

3. In accordance with the co-operation agreement between the Assembly and the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), signed on 4 October 2004, Ms Florence Ganoux, expert, represented the Venice Commission and provided legal support to the delegation.

4. A two-day pre-electoral mission took place on 16-17 January 2025 in Pristina to assess the electoral campaign and the broader political environment. The mission's programme is outlined in Appendix 2, and its pre-electoral statement is provided in Appendix 3.

5. The PACE full delegation was in Kosovo from 7 to 10 February 2025 (see the programme in Appendix 4). After the election day, it published a statement (Appendix 5).

6. This was the first time that the Assembly was invited to observe elections in Kosovo on its own.[2] Our delegation worked alongside a European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) which was deployed on 8 January 2025, with 18 long-term observers and 104 short-term observers. The European Parliament appointed a 6 member delegation, which was part of the EU EOM. The EU EOM and the PACE delegation issued separate statements and held separate press conferences after the elections.[3] However, co-ordination between our organisations proved to be very good and fruitful. I would like to thank EU EOM Chief Observer Ms Nathalie Loiseau and the Head of the European Parliament delegation Ms Marta Temido (Portugal, Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats) for our excellent co-operation.

7. The PACE delegation expresses its appreciation to the authorities of Kosovo for their invitation and support, as well as to all interlocutors and international partners for their effective co-operation. The delegation also acknowledges the invaluable support of the Council of Europe Office in Pristina in facilitating the organisation of the pre-electoral mission and main election observation mission.

2. Context and recent developments

8. These elections took place in a context marked by Kosovo's application for membership of the Council of Europe on 12 May 2022 and a positive recommendation by PACE to invite Kosovo to become a member of the Council of Europe on 16 April 2024 without prejudice to the future consideration of this application for membership of the Council of Europe by the Committee of Ministers.[4]

9. Since 2016, a delegation of the Assembly of Kosovo has participated in the work of the Assembly. The Association of Kosovo Municipalities participates in the work of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

10. The EU integration path is at the center of current domestic politics. While Kosovo has taken significant steps towards EU integration and has formalised its application for membership,[5] its path is hindered by recognition challenges from several EU member States. Kosovo also aspires to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) membership.

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2. In previous years, PACE contributed to election observation missions organised by the Council of Europe to observe the elections to the Assembly of Kosovo in 2001 and the municipal elections in 2000 and 2002.
3. In line with the EU observation methodology.
4. See Assembly's Opinion 302 (2024) "Application by Kosovo for membership of the Council of Europe" and its explanatory memorandum by Ms Dora Bakoyannis (Greece, EPP/CD), as well as the opinions of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights (Doc. 15964) by Ms Azadeh Rojhan (Sweden, SOC) and the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination (Doc. 15965) by Ms Béatrice Fresko-Rolfo (Monaco, ALDE) and the eminent lawyers' report on the conformity of Kosovo's legal system with Council of Europe standards.
5. Kosovo signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union on 27 October 2015 and submitted an application for EU membership on 15 December 2022. www.eeas.europa.eu/kosovo/eu-and-kosovo_en?s=321.

11. The last elections for the Assembly of Kosovo had been held on 14 February 2021, in which the Self-Determination Movement (Lëvizja Vetëvendosje – LVV), led by Albin Kurti, had won a decisive victory, securing 58 out of 120 seats in the Assembly. This was the first time since Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence that the members of the Assembly had completed their full term.

12. Since then, significant political developments have challenged inter-ethnic relations. On 24 September 2023, a security incident of unprecedented gravity occurred in the northern municipality of Banjska, in which a Kosovo police officer and three Serbian armed gunmen were killed and several Kosovo Force (KFOR) troops were seriously wounded. Council of Europe eminent lawyers[6] had described "the level of resourcing and organisation of this attack, including the discovery of significant heavy weaponry and ammunition, and the alleged direct connections between some of the assailants and the Belgrade authorities [as illustrating] yet another escalation of tensions and security threat".[7] In November 2024, Kosovo blamed Serbia for an explosion that damaged water and power supply systems. Belgrade denied both allegations. More recently, the closure of some Serbian parallel institutions by the Kosovo government on 15 January 2025 – a move criticised by the international community for being carried out without co-ordination or preparation – has heightened tensions between Kosovo and Serbia, particularly affecting the Serbian community in Kosovo.

13. Elections in Kosovo have generally been considered as free, fair and competitive. The last general elections were decisively won by the former opposition and the last municipal elections were won in most places by opposition candidates. The April 2024 mayoral recall elections, intended to facilitate new local elections in northern municipalities, were marred by a boycott by Kosovo Serb parties. As a result, voter turnout was extremely low (3.47%) and the mayors and municipal assemblies in these municipalities lack a genuine mandate.

3. Legal electoral framework

14. According to its Constitution, Kosovo is a parliamentary republic. Legislative power is vested in a unicameral parliament (the "Assembly of Kosovo" – "Kuvendi i Kosovës") and executive power is vested in a government headed by a prime minister, while the president is the Head of State.

15. Kosovo has been a member of the Venice Commission since 2014. The Venice Commission has issued a number of opinions on (draft) laws of Kosovo, including on draft amendments to the legislation on the financing of political entities and the legislation on General Elections in 2018 and on the draft law on public gatherings in 2020. Kosovo has undergone significant legal reforms in view of the elections on 9 February 2025. These elections were governed by the new Law on General Elections (June 2023) and the Law on Political Party Financing (August 2022), both of which were not reviewed by the Venice Commission.

16. With the exception of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Kosovo is not party to the main international and regional human rights instruments related to the conduct of democratic elections. This lack of ratification is due to Kosovo's complex political status which makes it difficult for Kosovo to join international organisations. However, although Kosovo is not a member of the Council of Europe and has not formally ratified the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5, "the Convention"), the Constitution of Kosovo (2008) explicitly states that the Convention and its protocols are directly applicable in Kosovo and take precedence over national law in the event of a conflict: Article 22 of the Constitution lists the Convention as one of the international human rights instruments that are directly binding in Kosovo.

17. The main legislation governing the 2025 elections was the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, the Law No. 08/L-228 on General Elections and the Law No. 03/L-189 on Political Parties. While the national legislation is conducive to the holding of democratic elections, the European Union has been actively involved in monitoring and encouraging electoral reforms in Kosovo. Some gaps had been identified by International Election Observation Missions and EU negotiators, including in the regulation and oversight of campaign financing.

18. Following the adoption of the new Law on General Elections in 2023, 17 new regulations were adopted by the Central Election Commission, ensuring that secondary legislation, decisions and procedures are aligned with the new electoral legal framework.

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6. Two eminent lawyers, Thomas Markert and Sia Spiliopoulou Åkermark, were appointed by the Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly to "draw up a report for the attention of the Bureau assessing the conformity of the applicant's legal system with Council of Europe standards" in view of the application by Kosovo for membership of the Council of Europe.
7. Doc. 15958, para. 56.

19. Kosovo has made efforts to consolidate its electoral framework, but persistent problems remain in electoral practice. The European Commission's 2024 report highlighted that, while the legal framework for elections was conducive to democratic processes, internal disagreements within the Assembly of Kosovo hampered effective governance and legislative action. There was a lack of co-operation between the ruling party, the LVV, and the opposition parties, which affected the Assembly's ability to pass key legislation and provide oversight. To address these challenges, the European Commission report recommended to strengthen consensus-building mechanisms and improve internal management within the Assembly, including the introduction of electronic voting systems to increase transparency and efficiency.

20. The 120-seat Assembly is elected every four years. Kosovo uses a single constituency for the whole country. An open list proportional representation system with a 5% threshold for parties seeking representation and the Sainte-Laguë method of seat allocation are used for 100 seats; there are 20 seats reserved for non-majority communities. Ten seats are guaranteed for representatives of the Kosovo Serb community. The remaining 10 seats are distributed among other non-majority communities, including: 3 seats for the Bosniak community; 2 seats for the Turkish community; 1 seat for the Gorani community; 1 seat for the Roma community; 1 seat for the Ashkali community; 1 seat for the Egyptian community; 1 additional seat which may be allocated to either the Roma, Ashkali, or Egyptian community depending on which of their lists received the highest support.

21. Some characteristic features of the 2025 elections are the participation of six political entities representing the Serbian community, the fact that for the first time video equipment was used to record the voting process in all the polling stations, that these were the first elections to be held under the 2023 Law on General Elections, as well as increased disclosure and oversight of political party finances.

22. Regarding out of country voting, provisions of the Law on General Elections were amended in 2023 and detailed in the 2024 regulations. Previously, voting was only possible by post. Registered voters received ballot papers via e-mail or post, which they had to print out, fill in, and return by post to the Central Election Commission. Two new forms of voting were now available to citizens living abroad: for the first time, they could vote physically in 35 of Kosovo's more than 50 diplomatic and consular missions in 22 countries, or send the ballot to the mailboxes of the missions abroad.

4. Election administration

23. The are three levels of election administration: the Central Election Commission (CEC), 38 Municipal Election Commissions (MECs) and 941 polling stations in 38 municipalities (PSC), with one station per municipality reserved for conditional voting.

24. The CEC has eleven members, including the chairperson. Six members of the CEC are appointed from amongst the members of the six largest political factions represented in the Assembly of Kosovo who do not have the right to participate in the allocation of reserved seats. If fewer groups are represented in the Assembly, the larger group or groups may appoint additional members. In addition, one representative shall be appointed by the members of the Assembly holding reserved or guaranteed seats for the Kosovo Serb community and three representatives shall be appointed by the members of the Assembly holding reserved or guaranteed seats for other non-majority communities.

25. The MECs consist of seven members (this number may be increased if the number of political entities qualified to be part of the commission is greater). Each MEC is composed of a MEC executive officer employed by the CEC – who is the MEC chair – and a member appointed by political entities that have passed the electoral threshold in national elections, if they are subject to the threshold. The composition of the PSCs reflects the structure of the MECs.

26. The work of the CEC is supported by various departments and other institutions that deal with specific aspects of election administration. These include the Office for the Registration, Certification, and Financial Control of Political Entities, which is responsible for certifying political entities and monitoring campaign financing. Others are the Anti-Corruption Agency, the Ombudsperson Institution, the National Agency for Data Protection, the Office of the Auditor General and the Election Complaints and Appeals Panel (ECAP).

5. Voter and candidate registration

27. All citizens who have reached the age of eighteen years, including on election day, and whose right to vote has not been restricted by a court decision, have the right to vote in Kosovo on election day and in the municipality in which they are registered, provided that their name appears in the Central Civil Registry. The

CEC shall maintain the voter list and ensure that it is based on the correct, updated and up-to-date data from the Central Civil Registry, systematically removing from the list dead persons and persons who have renounced their citizenship.

28. Eligible voters with special needs and requiring assistance may register by submitting their applications either electronically through the designated online platform or physically at their MEC offices. To complete the registration process, applicants must provide some documentation, including a valid identification document such as an ID card, passport, or driver's license. They must also submit a completed registration form and may be required to provide proof of residence. The MEC is responsible for reviewing the applications and verifying the authenticity of the documents submitted. If an application is refused, the MEC must provide a written explanation and inform the applicants of their right to appeal.

29. For the 2025 elections to the Assembly of Kosovo, the total number of registered voters was 2 075 868. Of these, 1 970 944 voters were resident in Kosovo, while 104 924 were registered abroad. According to the population census conducted in April and May 2024, the population of Kosovo is 1 586 659. The discrepancy with the number of registered voters becomes even more pronounced when one considers that the total number of people registered in the census includes young people who are not yet eligible to vote. However, it was clear from our observations that many people who died years ago are still on the electoral roll.

30. Following the 2023/2024 electoral reform, the CEC has implemented measures to simplify voter registration, especially for citizens living abroad. The reform aimed to provide multiple ways to register and ensure that all eligible citizens living abroad can participate in the electoral process; it also introduced online registration options and outreach programmes to encourage participation among under-represented groups.

31. In order to participate in the electoral process, a political entity must seek and obtain certification from the CEC. To obtain certification, political entities must submit a comprehensive application, including documentation such as a list of members, the entity's statute, and evidence of its financial viability. The CEC reviews these applications to verify compliance with legal standards, including adherence to the principles of democracy and human rights. The vetting process is designed to be thorough, enabling the CEC to assess the legitimacy and readiness of each political entity to participate in the electoral process.

32. Any person whose name appears on the voter list is eligible to be certified as a candidate, except if he/she is a public official with a special status, based on the law on public officials; a member of the foreign service or a diplomatic representative; a chairperson or a member of the CEC or MEC; an official of ECAP; has been disqualified from standing as a candidate by a final court decision, including an ECAP decision; has been found guilty of a criminal offence by a final court decision within the last three years and sentenced to one or more years of effective imprisonment; has failed to pay a fine imposed by the ECAP or the CEC; or has failed to comply with an order of the ECAP.

33. The application period for political entities to submit their list of candidate ran from 1 September to 11 December 2024. A total of 28 political entities with 1 280 candidates participated in the elections on 9 February 2025, including six representing the Serbian community. Of the 28 political entities, 20 were political parties, five were coalitions, two were civil society initiatives, and one was an independent candidate.

34. The Serbian List (“Srpska Lista”), a major political party representing Serbs in Kosovo, was initially denied certification to participate in the elections of 9 February 2025, due to statements made by its leader during the presentation of the party's electoral list that were considered nationalistic. However, following an appeal, the ECAP instructed, on 25 December 2024, the CEC to certify the party for participation in the elections. On 2 January 2025, the Self-Determination Movement again challenged the CEC's decision of 31 December to certify Srpska Lista, which was also rejected.

6. The electoral campaign and its financing

35. The electoral campaign started 30 days before the election day and ended on the day before election day.

36. According to the law, certified political entities may hold meetings in public spaces, in educational, sports, and cultural facilities, provided that their regular operations are not disrupted, and with the prior approval of the relevant facility and the MEC, which must be requested 24 to 48 hours before the event. The MEC may refuse a request from a political entity if the space has already been reserved by another political entity. The certified political entity that has received a negative response from a MEC regarding its request to hold a public meeting may appeal to the ECAP within 24 hours of receiving the response.

37. Inflammatory or hate speech was widespread during the campaign despite the fines imposed by the ECAP.[8]

38. Recent amendments to the electoral laws focused on campaign financing and aim to increase transparency and accountability. In January 2024, the CEC adopted an internal regulation on the finances of political parties, for which a specific budget should be allocated. The new regulations require political parties to disclose their sources of funding and expenditures during election campaigns and include a ban on cash donations to political parties and stricter penalties for violations related to campaign financing.

39. Control mechanisms have also been strengthened: the Office for Financial Control, which operates under the CEC, has improved its capacity to audit and monitor the finances of political parties. Political parties are required to submit annual financial reports detailing their income and expenditure. These reports are audited by independent auditors appointed by the Office for Financial Control. Regulations require all donations to be registered and reported and prohibit anonymous donations. The government has committed to increasing transparency and accountability of political parties through initiatives aimed at creating an online platform providing open data on party finances.

7. Media environment

40. The Law on General Elections regulates the media during the electoral campaign. It stipulates that all media shall ensure that all certified political entities receive fair and equitable coverage during the electoral campaign, and that all broadcast media shall ensure fair and equitable access to political discussion programmes, shows and debates for all certified political entities. The law strictly regulates political advertising on radio and television, and it states that print media shall provide fair and equitable access to all certified political entities that request advertising space. A print or electronic media must apply the same rate without discrimination to all certified political entities, and any paid political advertisement must clearly identify the organisation or individual responsible for it. The law does not apply to social media.

41. Television is the main source of information in the country. There are more than 130 radio and television stations operating in a relatively small market, and they are strongly divided along political and ethnic lines. The highly concentrated TV sector is dominated by private channels based in Pristina, although the public broadcaster RTK plays an important role. New online news portals include strong brands such as BIRN or Kosovo 2.0, the latter being one of the few media outlets that publishes both in Albanian and Serbian. The concentration of media ownership in Kosovo has raised concerns about transparency and diversity of viewpoints.

42. There is a lack of transparency in media ownership. This is due to gaps in the legal framework (lack of clear ownership disclosure requirements and gaps in the Law on Media Concentration).

43. Freedom of expression in the media is guaranteed by the legal framework, i.e. the Constitution, the Law on the Media (Law No. 06/L-088) and the Law on Radio and Television of Kosovo (RTK). Since 27 January 2007, Kosovo has undertaken significant reforms in its media regulatory framework, in particular through the adoption of the new Law on the Independent Media Commission (IMC). This law, approved by the Assembly of Kosovo on 11 July 2024, extends the jurisdiction of the IMC to online media, requiring them to obtain State licences and register with the IMC, which will manage the online media register.

44. The law also subjects online media to a system of sanctions, including potential fines of up to €40 000.

45. Concerns about the IMC's broad jurisdiction over media/social media, and in particular the impact of the new law on the institution's independence, led to widespread criticism from local and international organisations and questions about potential threats to press freedom and media pluralism. Another issue raised by the opposition was the regulation of online media through vague definitions added to the IMC law. The Council of Europe's legal opinion stated that the definition provided by the government did not exist in EU law.[9] On 19 July 2024, opposition parties challenged the law before the Constitutional Court, arguing that it violated the independence of the institution as guaranteed by the constitution (Article 141).

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8. The ECAP has imposed fines of more than €600 000 on numerous political entities. See www.koha.net/en/tempus-ktv/krasniqi-procesi-zgjedhor-i-suksesshem-integriteti-i-votes-u-ruajt.

9. Council of Europe Legal Opinion on the Draft Law on the Independent Media Commission of Kosovo, LEX/FoE (2024)6, 24 May 2024, p. 21.

8. Voting and counting procedures

46. Regular voting takes place at polling stations between 07:00 and 19:00. According to the rules, the polling station can be closed before 19:00 with the prior consent of the relevant MEC if all registered persons have voted, but the counting of votes cannot start before 19:00. Mobile teams are organised for home-bound voters and voters confined to an institution.

47. Each polling station shall have a register of votes in which all events relating to the progress of voting and counting at the polling station during the election day shall be recorded, including statistical data on voter turnout at specific time intervals as determined by the CEC. Only the presiding officer, members of the PSC and accredited observers present may make entries in the register. If a voter has a complaint about any activity within the polling station, he/she may ask the PSC chairperson to record the complaint in the register of votes and shall be instructed to obtain the complaint form from the polling station help desk.

48. Each voter shall be identified by the identification officer at the polling station by means of one of the following valid identification documents issued by the Kosovo authorities: identity card; passport; driving licence. If the voter's name and surname do not appear on the list of voters, the voter shall be directed to the help desk to find out in which polling centre and polling station he/she is assigned to vote.

49. A voter in Kosovo whose name and surname appear on the voter list and who, for objective reasons, cannot vote at the polling station assigned to him/her, may vote at any conditional polling station in any municipality for the elections to the Assembly of Kosovo. As new regulations have been introduced to increase the accuracy of the voter list, the CEC has decided to phase out the possibility of conditional voting. For the 9 February 2025 elections, there was only one conditional polling station per municipality.

50. The ballot papers have a red frame, are A3 in size and contain security features (microprinting, UV printing and anti-copying, secret marking), a serial number and a polling station code printed in both official languages and, in municipalities where another language is officially used, that language is also printed on the ballot paper. The number of printed ballot papers shall not exceed 5% of the number of voters on the electoral roll.

51. If the voter has damaged his/her ballot paper, he/she may return the damaged ballot paper to the PSC chairperson who will direct him/her to the ballot issuer for a new stamped ballot paper. The chairperson shall show the damaged ballot to the PSC members and observers, write “DAMAGED” on the back of the ballot and place it in the damaged ballot envelope. The incident shall be recorded in the register of votes, including the time and the serial number of the ballot paper. Voters who are illiterate or have a physical disability that prevents them from voting in the normal way have the right to be assisted by another voter registered in the same polling station; the assistant may assist only one voter and may not be a member of the PSC or an accredited observer.

52. The new legal framework introduces the doubling of the number of preferential votes from five to ten candidates. This decision has been criticised by the main coalition of citizen observers, who has pointed out that “in addition to the doubling of the time needed to count these votes, the potential for manipulation of the citizens' will by the commissioners increases, especially in cases where voters may mark less than ten candidates”. Furthermore, the analysis of past electoral practice did not support the need to increase the number of preferential votes – which could have a negative impact on the number of women elected to the Assembly of Kosovo, as the lists of candidates are sorted in descending order according to the number of votes received by each candidate.

53. At the close of polling on election day, the PSC shall determine the results of voting for political entities only; votes for candidates of political entities shall be counted at the Municipal Counting Centre. The votes counted for the political entities are recorded by the PSC chairperson on the Political Entity Results Form. On completion of the vote count, the PSC chairperson shall allow accredited observers present to obtain information and shall post a copy of the Political Entity Results Form at the entrance of the polling centre. The Political Entity Results Form, together with any sensitive material, is sent to the Municipal Counting Centre, which is responsible for verifying the votes for political units and counting the votes for candidates. In accordance with the instructions of the MEC, the PSC chairperson shall deliver the election material to the Municipal Counting Centre under police escort.

54. A vote shall be considered invalid if: i) it is not stamped; ii) it bears a serial number different from that of the polling station; iii) the voter has voted for more than one political entity; iv) the voter has not voted for a political entity; v) it is voted for candidates only and not for the political entity; or the intention of the voter is not clear. A vote for a candidate is counted if one to ten candidates are marked on the ballot paper. If more than ten candidates are marked or no candidate is marked, only the vote for the political entity is counted.

55. The resolution of electoral disputes in Kosovo is primarily governed by Law No. 08/L-228 on General Elections, which provides a structured framework for addressing complaints arising from the electoral process. Legal standing to file complaints is broadly granted to several entities and individuals. These include political parties, coalitions, civil society initiatives, independent candidates certified by the CEC and any individual in Kosovo registered to vote. Representatives of certified political entities, non-governmental organisations and international organisations involved in election observation are also entitled to file complaints. They can report any violations they witness during the election process, including issues related to transparency and fairness. Finally, members of the CEC and other electoral bodies can lodge complaints about violations they observe in the conduct of elections or with respect to compliance with electoral laws by political entities or candidates.

9. Complaints and appeals

56. The Election Complaints and Appeals Panel (ECAP) is an independent body charged with adjudicating on complaints of electoral malpractice. The ECAP is responsible for reviewing and resolving disputes relating to voter registration, campaign conduct and any other irregularities that may occur during elections.

57. The law sets out specific procedures for the submission of complaints, which must be made within a specified period of time following the occurrence of the disputed event. According to Article 119 of Law No. 08/L-228 on General Elections, any person who has a legal interest in a matter within the competence of the ECAP, or whose rights in relation to the electoral process, as established by this law or the electoral regulations, have been violated, may submit a complaint to the ECAP within 48 hours of the closing of the polling station, and the ECAP shall decide on the complaint within 96 hours of its submission. The ECAP is mandated to investigate these complaints thoroughly, ensuring that all parties involved are given the opportunity to present their case. This includes gathering evidence, hearing testimony and reviewing relevant documentation. The ECAP's decisions may include upholding or dismissing complaints, imposing sanctions on political entities or candidates, and ordering corrective action where necessary.

58. The law also provides a mechanism for appealing against the decisions of the ECAP. If a party is dissatisfied with the decision of the ECAP, it can appeal to the Supreme Court of Kosovo, which is the final arbiter in electoral disputes. This multi-level approach ensures that adequate remedies are available.

59. During the election campaign, the ECAP and the Supreme Court penalised political parties in Kosovo for disseminating hate speech in more than 30 posts. However, in some cases the disputed content remained publicly available on social media, mainly on platforms directly managed by the political parties or on online platforms where such content had been shared.

60. The Law on General Elections (No. 03/L-073) includes provisions on election observers and stipulates that certified political entities, NGOs and governmental and intergovernmental organisations, as well as international organisations specialised and engaged in elections or the protection of human rights, as well as representatives of foreign countries, have the right to request the accreditation of election observers. According to the Electoral Decree No. 08/2024, accredited observers are granted important rights, including the ability to observe all stages of the electoral process, from preparation to post-election activities. They can submit written observations to the electoral commissions, observe the ballot boxes and the counting process, and receive documents related to the electoral process. Observers also have the right to report violations of electoral rules.

10. Gender equality

61. Article 28 of Law No. 08/L-228 on General Elections stipulates that the list of candidates of each political entity must include at least 30% of each sex. This provision requires that each group of three candidates on the list include at least one candidate of each sex. In addition, the electoral law provides for an incentive whereby the CEC will allocate additional public funds equal to 1% of the total amount allocated to the political entity for each mandate won by women over and above the 30% quota at the time of certification.

62. On 19 December 2024, the Constitutional Court ruled on case KO15/24 concerning the constitutionality of Article 28. The Court ruled unanimously that the gender quota does not contradict Article 45 of the constitution, which guarantees the freedom to vote and to participate in public activities. The ruling emphasised that gender equality is a fundamental value of Kosovo's constitutional order and that public authorities have a positive obligation to promote it. While confirming the legality of the 30% quota, the Court clarified that the Assembly of Kosovo has the power to adjust this percentage if necessary, in order to promote gender equality.

63. The law does not provide for ranking criteria and political entities could place women in the lowest possible position in each group of three candidates (e.g. third, sixth, ninth, etc.). The increase in the number of preferential votes had no effect on women's representation in the Assembly of Kosovo in these elections. Another open question is how resigning women MPs would be replaced (beyond the 30% quota) and how this would affect the overall number of women in parliament.[10]

64. It should be recalled that the Beijing Platform for Action encourages governments and political parties to consider a number of specific measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision making and to "take measures, including, where appropriate, in electoral systems, that encourage political parties to integrate women in elective and non-elective public positions in the same proportion and at the same levels as men". In its Recommendation (2003) 3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making (Annex A.3), the Committee of Ministers recommends that Council of Europe member States consider adopting legislative reforms to introduce parity thresholds for candidates in elections at all levels. It specifies that where proportional lists exist, consideration should be given to the introduction of zipper systems.

11. Key findings of the PACE pre-electoral mission

65. During our pre-electoral mission to Pristina on 16 and 17 January 2025, we met with a wide range of election stakeholders. We found good preparation for the upcoming elections and confidence in the electoral process, a pluralistic and dynamic political landscape and a vibrant civil society.

66. We noted that the Law on General Elections adopted in 2023 introduced technical improvements, including the digitalisation of electoral operations, the possibility for out-of-country voters to cast their vote in person abroad, new modalities for the counting of votes allocated to parties and candidates, and new provisions aimed at strengthening the monitoring of campaign spending.

67. However, we also noted concerns about the lack of regulation of online media and transparency of media ownership, the potential impact of disinformation and the use of generative artificial intelligence during the campaign, the reluctance of some political parties to engage in contradictory debates on television, the rise of populist and nationalist rhetoric, as well as the use of hate speech and divisive language, which could undermine democracy and inter-ethnic cohesion and negatively affect women's participation in elections and politics.

68. Our delegation reviewed the appointment process for members of the Independent Media Commission. The July 2024 Law on the Independent Media Commission, which would increase the powers of the IMC and its board (from 7 to 11 members, with mandates extended to up to eight years), was under review by the Constitutional Court (see above). At the time of our pre-election mission, the lack of a quorum was paralysing decision making. The IMC's rules of procedure were amended to allow for the election of a new chairperson or vice-chairperson up to one month before the end of their term. On 17 January 2025, the IMC elected Besnik Berisha as its new chairperson amid claims of political interference and allegations of attempts to illegally dismiss the previous chairperson, Jeton Mehmeti.

69. The PACE pre-electoral delegation welcomed the decision of Srpska Lista to participate in these elections. At the same time, we heard reports of pressure on and intimidation of Kosovo Serb voters, as well as disinformation campaigns by Belgrade-backed media.

70. We were also informed of several complaints following the initial decision of the CEC – later overturned by the ECAP and the Supreme Court – not to certify Srpska Lista, as well as concerns about ethnic representation in local election commissions in municipalities with non-majority communities. The attempt by Lëvizja Vetëvendosje-nominated members of the CEC to prevent the certification of Srpska Lista revealed the possible politicisation of the CEC's work and created some pressure and agitation over this delayed certification.

10. In 2021, LVV candidates Tinka Kurti and Drita Millaku were not appointed as MPs to replace MPs who had taken up ministerial posts, despite having received more votes than their male counterparts; the Constitutional Court recognised that this interpretation was incorrect and inconsistent with the purpose of the legal quotas. The Court also emphasised that gender quotas should only be applied until the minimum threshold of 30% representation is reached. Beyond that threshold, representation should be based on merit, specifically the number of votes received by candidates.

12. Election Day

71. On Election Day, the PACE delegation was divided into eleven observer teams which were deployed in Ferizaj/Uroševac, Gjilan/Gnjilane, Gračanica/Graçanicë, Kamenicë/Kamenica, Leposavić/Leposaviq, Mitrovica/Mitrovicë North, Mitrovica/Mitrovicë South, Pejë/Peć, Podujevë/Podujevo, Pristina, Prizren, Rahovec/Orahovac, Suharekë/Suva Reka and Zubin Potok.

72. The voting process was generally peaceful and without tension. The PACE teams observed only minor irregularities.

73. Members of the local election commissions co-operated collegially and respectfully, overcoming political orientations and language barriers and distancing themselves from the divisive language and hate speech used by political leaders. They were very co-operative with the observers.

74. There was no campaigning, or intimidation attempts outside the polling stations.

75. Not all polling stations were accessible to people with special needs (particularly in the case of schools with many polling stations inside, including on the upper floors). In at least one polling station, a blind voter was not assisted with the Braille scheme available, which would have ensured that he could vote independently. He had to wait almost half an hour before assistance was provided.

76. In general, assisted voting went smoothly, except in one case where an older woman appeared to be not only assisted but controlled by her son. In one case, parents were seen accompanying their child, who was voting for the first time, into the booth.

77. In Mitrovica/Mitrovicë North, a voter was caught trying to photograph his ballot paper and was prevented from doing so.

78. In two polling stations where conditional voting was offered, there was a shortage of ballot papers, which caused some delays as additional ballot papers had to be requested from the Municipal Election Centre. These polling stations also experienced problems in connecting to the software at the opening or having a good internet connection: one polling station (in Mitrovica/Mitrovicë North) had to start voting 30 minutes late due to an internet connection failure – in another, the presiding officer resorted to using his private internet connection.

79. The counting procedures were generally disregarded in favour of "tweaked" (“optimised”) procedures. However, this appeared to be done in an uncontroversial and collegial manner; the overall process was smooth and transparent, and the results were agreed upon by all members of the polling station commissions.

80. One team observed that two ballot papers were invalidated although the voter's intention was clear. Two other teams observed that the respective polling station commissions took a 15-minute break before starting the count.

13. Outcome of the elections and post-electoral developments

81. The votes were counted in two stages: on election night, the votes cast for the political parties were counted. At this point it was clear that the Self-Determination Movement had won the most votes (over 40%), but without a majority in parliament. Three other parties, the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and the Coalition Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK-NISMA), passed the 5% threshold and entered parliament.

82. All the election material was then sealed and taken to the municipal counting centres, where preferential votes, conditional votes, postal votes and votes cast abroad were counted to finalise the results and determine which candidates would be elected to the Assembly of Kosovo. I visited the Municipal Counting Centre in Pristina, but the start of the counting process, which was supposed to begin that day, was delayed.

83. On the election day, the CEC experienced problems with the functioning of the software used to count the votes (the website crashed for a few moments), which delayed the publication of the results. The results were finally published on the official website on Monday morning. In addition, due to difficulties and system failures with the software and IT platform used to scan and tabulate the results, the CEC ordered all counting to be done manually, which slowed down the process significantly.

84. The Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK) expressed its concern about the obstruction of the T7 television team by the head of the vote counting centre in Pejë/Peć, Abdurrahim Haxhisefa, in the presence of the chairperson of the CEC, without any intervention or action on his part. AJK called on the CEC to take

appropriate measures and ensure a safe environment for journalists covering the election process. According to the 2023 Law on General Elections, the media has the right to be present at any polling station to observe the counting of votes.

85. The Secretary General of the Vetëvendosje Movement, Alim Rama, raised concerns about alleged manipulation of postal voting ballots, claiming that serious manipulation had been recorded, including the declaration of hundreds of invalid ballots and a suspicious increase in votes for LDK, and arguing on Facebook that votes for LDK had been artificially increased by over 400% compared to votes for diplomatic missions. The complaint was rejected by ECAP and by the Supreme Court on 26 March 2025.

86. On 3 March 2025, dozens of Kosovo Serb employees of the so-called "Provisional Municipal Authority of Strpce", which operates within the system of the Republic of Serbia, were summoned for questioning by the Kosovo police. It is reported that the investigation, conducted by the Serious Crimes Department in Pristina, concerns a case of alleged actions against the constitutional order involving employees of the afore-mentioned entity. A week earlier, the Kosovo police had closed branches of the Serbian Government's social work centres in the four municipalities of northern Kosovo, following an investigation into allegations of voter manipulation by the centre's staff in Zubin Potok.

87. On 9 March 2025, during a press conference, Prime Minister Kurti accused Serbia of interfering in Kosovo's 9 February elections and claimed the following day that the Serbian Government had interfered in Kosovo's elections and intimidated and threatened Kosovo Serbs to vote for the Belgrade-backed Srpska Lista.

88. The certification process took some time: the CEC carried out limited recounts of ballot boxes on the basis of specific complaints received through the ECAP. On 4 March 2025, the ECAP ruled that some ballots that had been declared invalid by the counting teams during the counting process at the Counting and Results Centre were valid.

89. On 5 March 2025, the CEC published the results of the postal vote. Later on, the results of the out-of-country and conditional voting and the votes of persons with special needs were published:[11]

	Total votes	LVV		PDK		LDK		AAK - NISMA		SL		Others	
		Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%
Embassy & Consulate Votes	15 191	12 261	80.71	1 175	7.73	1 109	7.30	299	1.97	1	0.01	346	2.27
Postal votes	63 025	32 706	51.89	5 992	9.51	19 037	30.21	2 027	3.22	119	0.19	3 144	4.98
Conditional voting	11 782	5 214	44.25	2 377	20.17	1 607	13.64	663	5.63	746	6.33	1 175	9.98
Persons with special needs Votes	2 585	824	31.88	621	24.02	505	19.54	229	8.86	203	7.85	203	7.85
Total	92 583	51 005		10 165		22 258		3 218		1 069		4 868	

90. On 15 March 2025 the CEC announced the final results.[12] The following parties entered into the Assembly of Kosovo:

Self-Determination Movement (Vetëvendosje) – LVV	42.30 %	48 MPs
The Democratic Party of Kosovo – PDK	20.95 %	24 MPs
The Democratic League of Kosovo – LDK	18.27 %	20 MPs
Coalition Alliance for the Future of Kosovo AAK-NISMA	7.06 %	8 MPs
Sprska Lista – SL	4.26%	9 MPs
The Kosovo Democratic Turk Party	0.51%	2 MPs
The New Democratic Initiative of Kosovo	0.50%	1 MP
The New Democratic Party	0.44%	1 MP
The Party For Freedom, Justice and Survival	0.44%	1 MP

11. https://rezultatet2025.net/sq/Public/CRCResults.
12. Ibid.

Coalition Vakat	0.37%	1 MP
The Egyptian Liberal Party	0.35%	1 MP
The Social Democratic Union	0.32%	1 MP
The Ashkali Party for Integration	0.23%	1 MP
The United Goran Party	0.18%	1 MP
The United Roma Party of Kosovo	0.14%	1 MP
TOTAL		120 MPs

91. Srpska Lista won 4.26% of the vote and nine of the ten seats reserved for the Kosovo Serb community. Nenad Rašić's Party For Freedom, Justice and Survival (Za slobodu Pravdu i Opstanak) won the remaining seat reserved for the Kosovo Serb community.

92. The other non-majority communities have the remaining ten seats: the Kosovo Democratic Turk Party has two seats, while the New Democratic Initiative of Kosovo, the New Democratic Party (Nova Demokratska Stranka), the Coalition Vakat, the Egyptian Liberal Party, the Social Democratic Union, the Ashkali Party for Integration, the United Goran Party and the United Roma Party of Kosovo each have one seat.

93. While the Supreme Court rejected the Vetëvendosje Movement's appeal for a revote and the cancellation of some 19 000 postal ballots, the Basic Prosecution Office in Pristina authorised, on 26 March 2025, the Kosovo Police Service to launch an investigation into the postal voting process in the 9 February elections. The LVV announced its intention to appeal against the Supreme Court's decision before the Constitutional Court, while the Supreme Court's ruling permitted the CEC to proceed with certifying the final election results, thereby clearing the way for the formation of new government institutions in Kosovo.

94. The elections were certified by the CEC on 27 March 2025, after all appeals had been dealt with by the Supreme Court. The turnout was 46.54%. 45 women (that is 37.5 % of the total number of members of the Assembly of Kosovo) were confirmed in their seats, only one more than in 2021.

14. Conclusions and recommendations

95. The delegation commends the Kosovo electorate for demonstrating their commitment to democracy by voting peacefully and without tension in the elections to the Assembly of Kosovo on 9 February 2025.

96. These elections presented a pluralistic and dynamic political landscape with 28 competing lists representing both majority and non-majority communities. Moreover, the participation of Kosovo Serbs, who were offered a wide range of political options, contributed to a more inclusive electoral process.

97. The legal framework is generally conducive to free, fair and competitive elections. Kosovo has made efforts to consolidate its electoral framework since the last elections: the Law on General Elections adopted in 2023 introduced technical improvements, including the digitalisation of electoral processes, the possibility for voters abroad to cast their vote in person, new modalities for the counting of votes allocated to parties and candidates, and new provisions aimed at strengthening the monitoring of campaign spending. This electoral legislation was designed to increase transparency and confidence in the system.

98. However, a number of issues remain in relation to electoral practice and the implementation of the new electoral system would require some improvements. The CEC should draw lessons from these elections and address in particular the following issues:

– the use of electronic means during the electoral process (in light of the technical problems encountered) should be assessed, as well as the problems arising from the outcome of the procurement, which raised some issues such as the quality of ink used in polling stations or the transport of electoral material to and from polling stations abroad;

– given the discrepancy between the number of registered voters for the 2025 elections (2 075 868, including 104 924 registered abroad) and the number of persons recorded in the April-May 2024 census (1 586 659), the authorities should ensure that the voter list is based on correct, updated and up-to-date data from the Central Civil Registry;

– ethnic representation on local election commissions in municipalities with non-majority communities should be reviewed or clarified including in the relevant law, and access to election and election administration materials in both official languages should be ensured;

– the rules about invalid ballot papers should be clarified and, in case of doubt, the voter's intention should be ascertained, in line with the Venice Commission Code of good practice in electoral matters.

99. Women's participation should be encouraged, while hate speech against women politicians should be sanctioned. Awareness-raising campaigns should be stepped up to increase women's participation in political life and elected positions, and the impact of the preferential voting system on women's representation should be further evaluated. Given the proportional system, the authorities could consider introducing "zipper systems" in the lists, in line with Recommendation (2003) 3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making.

100. Access for persons with disabilities should be improved and the authorities should conduct information campaigns on the possibility of benefiting from special needs programmes (home-bound and institutionalised).

101. The delegation noted that the CEC worked efficiently to prepare for the elections, The members of the local election commissions should be commended for their collegial and respectful co-operation, overcoming political orientations and language barriers and distancing themselves from the divisive language and hate speech of political leaders that characterised the pre-election period.

102. The authorities should continue and strengthen the thorough and consistent training of the electoral administration and voter education programmes.

103. The delegation welcomes the measures taken by the CEC to sanction hate speech during the election campaign. However, the delegation notes that the prevalence of hate speech and harsh rhetoric, the lack of political debate and issue-based debate, and the use of inflammatory rhetoric to gain popularity could deepen ethnic divisions and tensions. The delegation encourages the authorities to take measures to discourage such tendencies and calls on the political parties to take firm action against hate speech in electoral campaigns.

104. The electoral environment was marred by undue interference aimed at capturing the votes of non-majority communities, in particular the votes of the Kosovo Serbs. The authorities should seek to strengthen the independence and resilience of institutions and oversight bodies at the service of all communities, such as the Independent Media Commission and the CEC, and to counter and prevent attempts to instrumentalise or politicise these institutions.

105. The authorities should also further strengthen the legal framework, in particular in the area of transparency of party and campaign financing and declaration of assets by candidates, ensuring public access to detailed financial transactions of political parties and allowing civil society to effectively monitor compliance.

106. In the field of media, legislation on disclosure of media ownership should be adopted. Media legislation, currently under review by the Constitutional Court, should be brought in line with European standards. The authorities should ensure a safe environment for journalists to report on the electoral process, in line with the 2023 Law on General Elections, which allows the media to be present at every polling station to monitor the counting of votes.

107. The delegation concludes that despite some shortcomings and a polarised environment marked by increasingly harsh rhetoric, the calm, smooth, and inclusive conduct of the elections to the Assembly of Kosovo and the commitment to democracy demonstrated by voters represent a positive step toward bringing the country into line with Council of Europe standards. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Venice Commission stand ready to co-operate with all stakeholders to further improve the electoral framework, administration and practices.

Appendix 1 – Composition of the ad hoc committee

Chairperson: Ms Petra Bayr, Austria

Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group (SOC)

– Ms Sibel Arslan, Switzerland
– Ms Petra Bayr, Austria **
– Mr Christophe Chaillou, France
– Mr Titus Corlăţean, Romania
– Mr Yves Cruchten, Luxembourg
– Mr Yunus Emre, Türkiye
– Ms Edite Estrela, Portugal
– Mr Gerardo Giovagnoli, San Marino

Group of the European People's Party (EPP/CD)

– Ms Andrea Eder-Gitschthaler, Austria **
– Mr Pablo Hispán, Spain
– Mr Cristian-Augustin Niculescu-Țâgârlaș, Romania
– Mr Georgios Stamatis, Greece

European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates (ECPA)

– …

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)

– Mr Mehmet Akalın, Türkiye **
– Mr Nikolla Camaj, Montenegro
– Ms Diana Stoica, Romania
– Ms Liliana Tanguy, France

Group of the Unified European Left (UEL)

– Ms Nina Kasimati, Greece

Venice Commission

– Ms Florence Ganoux, expert of the Venice Commission
– Mr Michael Janssen, Legal Advisor, Secretariat of the Venice Commission

Secretariat

– Ms Sylvie Affholder, Head of the Elections Division, Secretary of the ad hoc committee
– Mr Bogdan Torcătoriu, Senior Elections Officer, Elections Division, Secretariat of the ad hoc committee
– Ms Sharon Lowey, Assistant, Elections Division
– Ms Carine Roller-Kaufman, Assistant, Elections Division

**Participants in the pre-electoral mission

Appendix 2 – Programme of the pre-electoral delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly

Thursday, 16 January 2025

09:00-10:00 PACE delegation meeting
- Welcome by Ms Petra Bayr, Head of Delegation
- Presentation by Mr Tankut Soykan, Deputy Head of the Council of Europe Office in Pristina
- Presentation of the programme by the Secretariat

10:00-11:30 Meeting with representatives of the international community
- Major General Giovanni Pietro Barbano, Head of the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX)
- Major General Enrico Barduani, Kosovo Force (KFOR) Commander
- Mr Milbert Shin, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK)
- Mr Cyprien François, Chief Political Advisor to the European Union Special Representative (EUSR) for Kosovo and Head of the Political Section
- Ms Pascale Roussy, Director of Democratization Department, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Mission in Kosovo
- Mr Ilir Haziri, National Elections Adviser, OSCE Mission in Kosovo

11:45-13:45 Working lunch with:
- Ms Nathalie Loiseau, Chief Observer of the EU Election Observer Mission (EU EOM)
- Mr Thomas Boserup, Deputy Chief Observer
- Ms Eva Palatova, Deputy Head of Mission of the European Union Office in Kosovo
- Mr Cyprien François, Chief Political Advisor to the EUSR for Kosovo and Head of the Political Section
- Ms Blerta Bejtullahu, Senior Political & Legal Analyst, EUSR
- Ms Marcela Maskova, Electoral Analyst, EU EOM

14:00-15:00 Meeting with civil society representatives
- Ms Venera Gashi, Project Manager, D4D, Democracy for Development
- Mr Albert Krasniqi, Democracy Plus
- Ms Marigona Shabiu, Youth Initiative for Human Rights
- Ms Iliriana Gashi, Executive Director, Women for Women Kosova
- Mr Visar Ymeri, Executive Director, Musine Kokolari Institute
- Mr Lulzim Peci, Executive Director, KIPRED
- Mr Boban Simić, Program Director, Center for Affirmative Social Actions – CASA
- Mr Dušan Radaković, Executive Director, Advocacy Center for Democratic Culture – ACDC

15:05-15:30 Meeting with representatives of the National Democratic Institute-Kosovo
- Ms Adea Beqaj, Programme Manager
- Mr Pajtim Gashi, Programme Director

15:30-17:00 Meeting with representatives of the media
- Mr Hysen Hundozi, Acting General Director, RTK
- Mr Faik Ispahiu (News Editor-in-Chief) and Ms Albulena Sadiku (journalist), BIRN Network
- Mr Budimir Ničić (Head of Medija Centar and journalist) Medija Centar (Serbian language)
- Mr Xhemajl Rexha, Chair of the Association of Kosovo Journalists
- Ms Brikenda Rexhepi, Koha Ditore, Editor-in-Chief

17:00-17:45 Meeting with the Independent Media Commission)
- Mr Niman Racaj, Acting Chief Executive Officer

– Mr Mirand Tafarshiku, Director of Monitoring and Analyses Department

19:00 Working dinner with representatives of the diplomatic community hosted by Mr Georg Schnetzer, Ambassador of Austria

With the participation of Mr Tunç Angılı, Ambassador of Türkiye, Ms Nathalie Loiseau, Chief Observer of the EU EOM, Mr Tankut Soykan, Deputy Head of the Council of Europe Office in Pristina, Ms Eva Palatova, Deputy Head of Mission of the EU Office in Kosovo, and Mr Kristoph Herbst (Austria), Long-Term Observer

Friday, 17 January 2025

08:00-08:30 Meeting with Mr Albin Kurti, Prime Minister of Kosovo

08:45-09:45 Meeting with Mr Kreshnik Radoniqi, Chairperson of the Central Election Commission (CEC) and CEC members

10:30-11:10 Meeting with Mr Glauk Konjufca, President of the Assembly of Kosovo

11:30-13:00 Working lunch hosted by the delegation of the Assembly of Kosovo to the Parliamentary Assembly

13:30-14:00 Meeting with Ms Vjosa Osmani Sadriu, President of Kosovo

14:00-17:00 Consecutive meetings with leaders and representatives of the main political groups of the Assembly of Kosovo

14:00-14:30 Lëvizja Vetëvendosje (Self-Determination Movement): Ms Mimoza Kusari-Lila

14:30-15:00 Partia Demokratike e Kosovë (Democratic Party of Kosovo – PDK): Mr Abelard Tahiri

15:00-15:30 Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovë (Democratic League of Kosovo – LDK): Mr Arben Gashi

15:30-16:00 Aleanca për Ardhmërinë e Kosovës (Alliance for the Future of Kosovo – AAK): Mr Besnik Tahiri

17:30-18:30 Delegation meeting and preparation of a statement

Appendix 3 – Statement of the pre-electoral delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly (17 January 2025)

In Kosovo*, a PACE delegation calls on all parties to work for inclusive elections despite growing polarization.

Pristina, 17 January 2025 – Concluding its pre-electoral visit to Pristina, a delegation from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) commended the good preparation for the upcoming elections to the Assembly of Kosovo despite growing polarisation and called on all stakeholders to act responsibly and inclusively, for the benefit of the population.

The delegation noted that the electoral campaign which has just started has been conducted in a calm and peaceful manner. The interlocutors expressed confidence in the electoral process and in the CEC's ability to complete the preparations for the elections within the established deadlines. The delegation expects that the electoral process will be in compliance with Council of Europe standards, which would be a sign of maturity of the institutions.

The delegation was informed that the election law adopted in 2023, which was notably based on recommendations from international observers, introduced technical improvements, including the digitalisation of electoral operations, possibility given to out-of-country voters to cast their vote in person abroad, and new modalities for the counting of votes allocated to parties and to candidates. In addition, new regulations aimed at strengthening the monitoring of campaign expenditure were viewed positively by many stakeholders.

However, concerns were raised regarding the lack of regulations for online media, the transparency of media ownership, the appointment procedure for members of the Independent Media Commission, as well as the potential impact of disinformation and the use of generative artificial intelligence during the campaign. The reluctance of some political parties to engage in contradictory debates on television, and the announced boycott of three prominent TV stations by the ruling party, were deemed detrimental to public information, particularly for elderly people. The delegation recalls that media play a vital role in ensuring voters have access to diverse and accurate information, which is essential for making informed decisions.

The delegation acknowledged the pluralistic and dynamic political landscape, with 28 contesting lists representing both majority and non-majority communities, offering voters a broad range of choices. However, several interlocutors raised concerns about the rising populist and nationalist rhetoric, as well as the use of hate speech and divisive language. They warned that such trends could undermine democracy and interethnic cohesion and may also negatively affect women’s participation in elections and politics, despite the gender quota in party lists.

The delegation also acknowledged the valuable contribution of a vibrant civil society in highlighting issues such as the rights of women, persons with disabilities, LGBTI and marginalised groups as well as youth participation in politics.

The delegation welcomed the decision of the main Kosovo Serb political party to participate in these elections, noting that this would contribute to a more inclusive electoral process and enhance representation in the Assembly. The delegation was informed of several complaints following the Central Election Commission’s (CEC) initial decision – later reversed by the Electoral Complaints and Appeals Panel (ECAP) and the Supreme Court – not to certify Srpska Lista, as well as concerns regarding the ethnic representation in local electoral boards in municipalities with non-majority communities. The delegation regretted that it was not possible to meet with representatives from Kosovo Serb parties this time but expressed the hope of discussing these issues during its main mission in February.

Discussions also focused on the situation in the north of Kosovo and recent developments. The delegation was made aware of reports regarding pressure on and intimidation of Kosovo Serb voters, as well as disinformation campaigns from Belgrade-backed media. In light of these concerns, the delegation urges all sides to avoid actions that could exacerbate tensions. It encourages the authorities to pursue their efforts to ensure the presence of personnel from non-majority communities in law enforcement institutions such as the police to help ease ethnic tensions in times of elections.

The delegation called on all parties to remain committed to creating conditions for fair and inclusive elections, despite increasing polarisation and to ensure that these elections contribute to strengthening democratic standards and practices in Kosovo.

The three-member cross-party delegation,[13] led by Petra Bayr (Austria, SOC), conducted its assessment in Pristina and met the President of Kosovo, the Prime Minister and the President of the Assembly, leaders and representatives of main political groups and the delegation of the Assembly of Kosovo to PACE, the

Chairperson and members of the Central Election Commission, the Chief Observer of the EU Election observation mission and members of the international community, as well as representatives of the diplomatic community, civil society and the media.

PACE – which represents parliamentarians from 46 European states – will send a full-fledged PACE delegation of 20 members, accompanied by legal experts from the Venice Commission, to observe the vote on 9 February 2025. PACE will debate its conclusions at the April part-session.

13. Composition of the delegation: Petra Bayr (Austria, SOC), Head of delegation, Andrea Eder-Gitschthaler (Austria, EPP/CD) and Mehmet Akalın (Türkiye, ALDE).

Appendix 4 – Programme of the meetings of the delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly

Friday, 7 February 2025

08:30-09:25	PACE delegation meeting – Welcome by Ms Petra Bayr, Head of Delegation – Presentation by Ms Mary-Ann Hennessey, Head of the Council of Europe Office in Pristina – Presentation by Ms Florence Ganoux, expert of the Venice Commission – Presentation of the programme by the Secretariat
09:30-14:30	Joint briefing session with the delegation of the European Parliament
09:30-11:00	Meeting with the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) Kosovo 2025 Introduction by Ms Nathalie Loiseau, Chief Observer of the EU EOM and Mr Thomas Boserup, Deputy Chief Observer Presentations by the EU EOM core team – Ms Erini Skouzou, Legal Analyst – Ms Vania Angelova, Political Analyst – Mr Gregoire Houel, Deputy Political Analyst – Ms Marcela Maskova, Electoral Analyst – Ms Agnes Doka, Media Analyst – Mr Constantin Marza, Social Media Analyst – Ms Emilia Hinkkanen, Press Officer – Mr Robert Bystricky, Data Analyst – Mr Marko Logar, Security Expert
11:00-12:00	Meeting with civil society representatives: – Mr Albert Krasniqi, Democracy Plus – Ms Violeta Haxholli, Kosovo Democratic Institute KDI / Transparency International – Ms Marigona Shabiu, Youth Initiative for Human Rights – Mr Boban Simić, Program Director, Center for Affirmative Social Actions – CASA – Ms Venera Gashi, Project Manager, D4D Democracy for Development – Mr Miodrag Miličević, Aktiv
13:30-14:30	Meeting with media representatives – Mr Lorik Arifaj, Head of Election Team RTK and Mr Mendu Hysa, Deputy Head of Election team – Mr Xhemajl Rexha, Chair of the Association of Kosovo Journalists – Ms Brikenda Rexhepi, Koha Ditore, Editor-in-Chief
14:30-16:30	Briefing for PACE delegation
14:30-15:30	Meeting with Mr Besnik Berisha, Chairperson of the Independent Media Commission
15:30-16:30	Meeting with leaders and representatives of main political parties (part I) – Roma community: Parti Rome e Bashkura e Kosove (PREBK): Mr Albert Kinolli

Saturday 8 February 2025

09:00-14:30	Briefings and meetings for the PACE delegation
09:00-12:30	Meetings with leaders and representatives of main political parties (part II) 09:00-09:30 Lëvizja Vetëvendosje (Self-Determination Movement): Mr Besnik Bislimi, Campaign Manager (DPM), Mr Alim Rama, Organisational Secretary

	10:30-11:00 Aleanca për Ardhmërinë e Kosovës (Alliance for the Future of Kosovo-AAK): Mr Haki Abazi and Ms Dajana Berisha, Campaign Manager
	11:00-11:30 Srpska Lista (Serb List): Mr Igor Simić, Mr Zlatan Elek and Mr Dragiša Milović
	12:00-12:30 For Freedom, Justice and Return: Mr Nenad Rašić
12:30-13:30	Meeting with Mr Kreshnik Radoniqi, Chairperson of the Central Election Commission (CEC)

Sunday, 9 February 2025

07:00-24:00	Observation of the opening of the polling stations, of the voting and of the counting (at 19:00)
17:00-08:15	Feedback session

Monday, 10 February 2025

08:00-10:00	Meeting of the delegation (debriefing and preparation of a statement)
14:00	Press conference

Appendix 5 – Statement of the delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly (10 February 2025)

PACE delegation welcomes inclusive and peaceful elections in Kosovo*.

Kosovo voters demonstrated their commitment to democracy by voting peacefully and without tensions during the 9 February 2025 elections to the Assembly of Kosovo. Members of local election commissions should be commended for their collegial and respectful co-operation, overcoming political orientations and language barriers, distancing themselves from the divisive language and hate speech used by political leaders, which was a feature of the pre-election period.

These elections presented a pluralistic and dynamic political landscape with 28 competing lists representing both majority and non-majority communities. Moreover, the participation of Kosovo Serbs, who were offered a wide range of political options, contributed to a more inclusive electoral process.

The 24-member delegation, led by Petra Bayr (Austria, SOC) and comprising 18 members of parliament, representatives of the Venice Commission and staff, observed the elections to the Assembly of Kosovo from 7 to 10 February. The eleven observer teams were deployed in Ferizaj/Uroševac, Gjilan/Gnjilane, Gračanica/ Graçanicë, Kamenicë/Kamenica, Leposavić/Leposaviq, Mitrovica/Mitrovicë North, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica South, Pejë/Peć, Podujevë/Podujevo, Pristina, Prizren, Rahovec/Orahovac, Suharekë/Suva Reka and Zubin Potok.

These elections were conducted in accordance with the Election Law of 2023, which generally provides an adequate legal framework. The delegation acknowledges that the amendments to the law aim to improve the overall transparency of the electoral process. The lack of clarity regarding the criteria for the participation of party representatives of non-majority communities in local election commissions of non-majority municipalities needs to be addressed. The new legal framework also strengthens financial oversight of campaign expenditures, which is an important step towards European standards.

The law provides for a gender quota on party lists. However, the representation of women remains low. It remains to be seen if the preferential vote system for seat allocation will negatively or positively affect the number of women elected. Online hate speech against women has also had a detrimental effect on their participation and visibility in these elections.

Awareness raising on existing tools and possibilities to assist persons with special needs should be reinforced. Adequate measures to ensure access for persons with disabilities or reduced mobility should also be implemented in all polling stations to guarantee access to the fundamental right to vote to all eligible voters.

During its pre-election mission a month ago, the delegation noted that the election campaign was generally calm despite polarisation and inflammatory rhetoric reported to the Electoral Complaints and Appeals Panel (ECAP). Some isolated incidents, including destruction of campaign material and intimidation of candidates, were also documented.

The media landscape was characterised by a lack of regulation of social media. Questions arose about the functioning of the Independent Media Commission, transparency of media ownership, and potential impact of disinformation. The ruling party's boycott of three prominent television stations was seen as detrimental to public information.

The Central Election Commission generally worked well. It had to deal with last-minute challenges arising from public procurement (for example, problems with the transport of election materials abroad or quality issues with the indelible ink). The last-minute decision to allow the use of expired Kosovo identification documents caused some confusion. Training of the electoral administration, which was sometimes perceived as late and insufficient, voter education and the display of electoral information in polling stations could be improved. The delayed online publication of the preliminary results was also seen as a shortcoming.

The 2023 Election Law, adopted by a large majority in the Assembly, introduced new modalities for out-of-country voting, allowing diaspora voters – of which there are many – to cast their ballots abroad not only by mail but also in person, even with expired Kosovo identification documents. While the expansion of opportunities for out-of-country voting is welcome, the authorities must also address the issue of the voters' list, which must be accurate and reflect the realities both at home and abroad. Inaccuracies in the civil register lead to outdated voters' list, which paves the way for a lack of confidence and fear of possible manipulation. Mechanisms should therefore be put in place to ensure that the civil register and voters' lists are continuously kept up-to-date and factually accurate.

The delegation's election observation report will be discussed at the PACE April 2025 part-session. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Venice Commission stand ready to co-operate with a view to further improving the electoral framework.