



Kosovo

Last update:	19 June 2018
Population:	1,797,151 million (2015 World Bank est.)
President:	Hashim Thaci
Governemental type:	Republic
Ruling coalition:	
Last election:	11 June 2017 (parliamentary elections)
Next election:	
Sister parties:	None

On 17 February 2008, the Republic of Kosovo unilaterally called out its independence. The formerly autonomous province of Serbia consists of around 92% ethnic Albanians and has several minorities, mainly Serbs. Kosovo's independence has been recognized by roughly half of UN members, Serbia opposes Kosovo's independence. Five EU member states do not recognize its independence, thus hampering an EU position on the status of Kosovo. Over the past years the country has been struggling with its official status, its relation with Serbia and integration with the EU. Tensions and incidents remain in Kosovo, especially in the north, where the ethnic Serb majority does not recognize the authority and presence of the government in Pristina. On 19 April 2013, the EU brokered "First agreement of principles governing the normalisation of relations" was signed by Pristina and Belgrade and on 25 August 2015, another important agreement was reached between the two sides that is a "landmark achievement in the normalization process." So far the 2013 agreement has been lacking implementation, and overshadows other political issues such as the rule of law.

Political Situation

Kosovo is a multi-party parliamentary representative democratic republic, whereby the Prime Minister of Kosovo is the head of government, and the President of Kosovo is the head of state. Until 2012 the EU deployed, in cooperation with the International Steering Group for Kosovo, a special International Civilian Representative in Kosovo who had the "ability to annul decisions or laws adopted by Kosovo authorities and sanction and remove public officials whose actions he/she determines to be inconsistent" with the Ahtisaari Plan. Since 2012 Kosovo has been responsible for overseeing its own governance.

The Kosovo Assembly, which was constituted as part of the UNMIK regulations on the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government, consists of 120 seats of which a maximum of 100 are distributed proportionally among the political parties based on the amount of votes. Twenty additional seats are reserved for non-Albanian communities, of whom the Serbs can claim 10. Kosovo is a single electoral district. The Assembly elects the country's President for a five-year term. However, after the 2011 election of Behgjet Pacolli as president was ruled unconstitutional, he was replaced by outsider Atifete Jahjaga. The Assembly decided to reform the electoral code to allow for the President to be elected by popular vote. As of April 2016, Hashim Thaçi, has been appointed President of the country. Meanwhile relations between Serbia and Kosovo have somewhat improved through a 25 August 2015 agreement on the normalisation of their relations.

The agreement included deals on energy, telecommunications, the bridge that divides the town of Mitrovica into a Serbian and Albanian part and the Association of Serbian Municipalities (ASM). The ASM will be "a legal entity defined by a statute and will promote the interests of the Kosovo Serb community in its relations with the Kosovo central authorities." According to the plan, 10 municipalities with a Serbian majority will have their own assembly with an elected president, and with their own flag, but will be subject to Kosovo law. The agreement led to tensions in the parliament of Kosovo as the opposition party: Vetevendosje MPs threw eggs at PM Isa Mustafa, and later used tear gas in parliament to express their anger. Vetevendosje has succeeded in mobilising the young urban vote, winning the local elections in Pristina and gaining 14% of the voters at the 2014 general elections. At the same time, they are the only political party of relevance that has made a serious work of developing (social) policies. They also organized protests in the street against the Belgrade-Pristina agreement, leading to confrontations between protesters and the police. On August 3rd 2015, parliament amended the constitution to allow the creation of a special EU backed court to examine war crimes allegedly committed by ethnic Albanian guerrillas during the 1998-1999 war. Since then the European Council approved a 1 year

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budget in June 2016. The Kosovo specialist chambers also adopted its Rules of Procedure and Evidence, which means that the court could be judicially operational from May 2017 onward.

EU brokered agreements between Kosovo and Serbia

As a consequence of the ongoing tensions the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina was put on hold by the Serbian government, but since Serbia became an EU candidate state in 2013, more EU pressure on Serbia has led to progress. The EU facilitated a High-Level Dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, which resulted in the historic "First agreement of principles governing the normalisation of relations" (Brussels agreement) reached on April 19, 2013. It was agreed, among others, to deconstruct Serbian parallel (security) structures in north Kosovo by establishing one Kosovo Police force that would operate on the whole territory of Kosovo. In addition, an Association of Serb Municipalities (ZSO) – municipalities with a Serb majority – will be established as an authority in areas of economic development, education, health and urban and rural planning. On 25 August 2015 another important agreement was reached between the two sides that EU Foreign Affairs and Security chief, Federica Mogherini called a "landmark achievements in the normalisation process." Kosovo and Serbia signed deals on energy, telecommunications, the bridge that divides the town of Mitrovica into a Serbian and Albanian part and Association of Serbian Municipalities (ASM). The deal envisages that the ASM will be drafted within four months, further stating that "it will be a legal entity defined by a statute and will promote the interests of the Kosovo Serb community in its relations with the Kosovo central authorities." According to the plan, 10 municipalities with a Serbian majority will have their own assembly with an elected president, and with their own flag, but will be subject to Kosovo law. The agreement has, so far, caused polarization in the political scene. Political debates are highly dominated by the negotiations with Belgrade while social issues and rule of law are ignored. Moreover, the agreement has lacked implementation.

EU - Kosovo relations

Kosovo has expressed a desire to join the EU and welcomed a feasibility study in 2012 to look at the possibilities for joining, but their ties with Serbia and the divide in the EU on accepting Kosovo's independence continuously raise concerns. As unanimity among EU member states is demanded for the establishment of contractual relations with a country and not all member states recognize its independence, Kosovo is the only Balkan country without contractual relations with the EU. Citizens of Kosovo are the last people in the region that still need a visa to enter the EU. In 2015 the Group for Legal and Political Studies (GLPS), a Kosovo think-tank, found that it was difficult for Kosovo to reach the requirements of the European Commission because of "much higher benchmarks" than those imposed on other West Balkan states and the fact that the roadmap that Kosovo received is "open to amendments by the European Commission". While the European Commission (EC) has aimed to give the region a real EU perspective through a Stabilization and Association Process, developments in the relation with Kosovo have remained problematic. The EU is still divided on accepting Kosovo's independence; five EU member states have not recognized its independence.

Tensions in north Kosovo

In July 2011 tensions increased after Kosovo special police forces tried to take control of the two border crossings in Serb-dominated northern Kosovo (north of the river Ibar). Prime Minister at that time Thaci decided to send in the police after EULEX failed to impose Kosovo's government ban on import of Serbian goods and to establish Republic of Kosovo customs at the border. This was done without the consultation of either Serbia or KFOR/EULEX. One Kosovo police officer got killed and the police retreated from the border crossing after which local Serbs burned down the crossing and KFOR troops took over control of the border. Serbs from the north of Kosovo decided to set up barricades on the main roads and constructed alternative gravel roads.

Though tensions between the two sides eased somewhat after the intervention of KFOR forces, they continued to remain high amid concern from the EU, who criticised Kosovo for the unilateral provocation. Throughout 2012 the security situation in the north remains problematic, the Kosovo government is not able to exercise control in the north. By investing money they tried to involve the Serb citizens in the Kosovo institutions. However, this has not resulted in increased willingness of Serbs in north Kosovo to accept the Kosovo institutions and, with that, an independent Kosovo. An unofficial referendum in February showed 99% of Serbs in northern Kosovo reject the writ of the Kosovo's institutions. In April hundreds of ethnic Albanians, especially from the north of Kosovo, demonstrated against the ineffectiveness of the institutions and international bodies to put a stop to the violence.

Social Democracy in Kosovo

In Kosovo, social democracy has always been overshadowed by the nationalist struggle for autonomy and later for independence. In the recent years, a few social democratic political parties have emerged, such as Kosovo Social Democratic Party, Reformist Party ORA, and New Spirit (FER). However, due to the political situation, these parties do not have much popular support and have

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merged with stronger political parties which focus more on territorial integrity and independence of Kosovo. Politics in Kosovo is often more about personalities than policy, with ideology for the most part reserved to the national question, while social policy is mostly developed without serious political debate. Nowadays Vetevendosje is considered as the best alternative on the left and the only party that is trying to develop and implement social democratic policies. At the same time international partners are not eager to engage in cooperation with Vetevendosje because of their behaviour in and outside the parliament and nationalistic views; they keep open the option of Kosovo joining Albania.

Serbs in Kosovo

About 8 percent of the population of Kosovo is Serbian. The Serb population of Kosovo is concentrated in the northern area. Serbs generally live in enclaves that are separated from the Albanian territories by roadblocks and/or bridges. Especially the divided town of Mitrovica experiences tensions, causing temporarily closure of the bridge between the Southern Albanian dominated area and the Northern Serb dominated area. About 18 percent of the Kosovo Serbs live north of the river Ibar in North Mitrovica. The place has a strong symbolic meaning to Serbs, as it is the only Serbian urban centre in Kosovo with a university and hospital. In March 2004 interethnic violence, leaving 20 dead, further harmed the relation between Serbs and Kosovars. The outburst of violence became a point of reference for the vulnerability of the relations between the ethnic groups. At least 800 mainly Serbian homes and at least 17 Serbian religious buildings were destroyed or damaged. The call for independence in 2008 also led to riots in the north of Kosovo. Kosovo Serbs consider the declaration of independence by Pristina illegal, and a breach of international law.

During the past years, the Serbs in Serbia as well as in Kosovo have harshly criticised the failure of UNMIK and KFOR to protect the Serb population in Kosovo. Especially the removal of control posts has been a reason for fear. Personal security and freedom are the dominant concerns for the Serbian community in Kosovo. Improving the situation of the Serbian communities was one of the main points on the agenda during the status negotiations, and remains an important topic that is held under close scrutiny by the international community. The Serb community is mostly concentrated in the north of Kosovo, but there are also several enclaves in the centre and south of Kosovo with a Serb majority. Because the Serbs in these enclaves are more isolated from Serbia and therefore have more connections with the ethnic Albanians they show more willingness to integrate, whilst many problems and reluctance to accept Kosovo authorities remain.

EULEX

With Kosovo's call for independence in 2008 UNMIK ended and a new European Union Rule of Law Mission (EULEX) took over. EULEX aims at assisting and supporting the Kosovo authorities in the rule of law area, specifically in the police, judiciary and customs areas. EULEX is a technical mission which monitors, mentors and advises whilst retaining a number of limited executive powers. The EULEX mission has been hindered in its functioning by the fact that only 23 out of 28 EU member states have recognized Kosovo as independent, leading to internal division. The mission is therefore often criticized for being inefficient in establishing a fully functioning rule of law. In 2014 corruption allegations were made after EULEX prosecutor Maria Bamieh was quoted in a Kosovar newspaper, saying that the EULEX's internal investigation failed to have key suspects questioned and they were still allowed to work on sensitive cases. Among others, she accused former judge, Francesco Florit, of taking a 300,000 Euro bribe. In 2015 a report reviewing EULEX Kosovo mandate implementation with a focus on the handling of the corruption allegations was published, that found no evidence of corruption. The EU has stated to stay committed to its leading role in Kosovo and considers the establishment of the rule of law the top priority. After demands that by the EU to either withdraw or reform the EULEX mandate, EULEX refocused its efforts in June 2018, bringing its judicial executive part to an end while remaining active in other tasks.

Independence

In an extraordinary parliamentary session in Pristina on 17 February 2008, Kosovo unilaterally declared its independence from Serbia. Kosovo's Prime Minister Hashim Thaci read the declaration of independence, which stated that Kosovo is dedicated to peace and stability in the region, and is looking for a good relationship with its neighbours. The declaration furthermore states that Kosovo is created along the lines of the UN plan drawn up by special representative Martti Ahtisaari, and calls for Kosovo's supervised independence by an international presence. Serbia was, and remains, strongly opposed against an independent Kosovo. According to the Serbian government a solution for Kosovo must be found to which both Belgrade and Pristina agree upon. As of 20 October 2015, 111 UN states have recognised the independence of Kosovo and it has become a member country of the IMF and World Bank. 23 out of 28 EU member states recognise the independence; Spain, Cyprus, Greece, Slovakia and Romania have not done so, mainly due to issues with minorities and separatist movements in their own respective countries.

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UNMIK

The executive rule of Kosovo has, until its call for independence in 2008, been under guidance of the United Nations, though officially being part of Serbia. Kosovo was administered by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG). The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 placed Kosovo under transitional UN administration pending a determination of Kosovo's future status. This Resolution entrusted UNMIK with sweeping powers to govern Kosovo, but also directed UNMIK to establish interim institutions of self-governance. Since 2001 UNMIK gradually transferred governing power to the local institutions.

UNMIK initially brought together four pillars under UN leadership: Humanitarian Affairs under the responsibility of the UNHCR, Civil Administration of the UN, Democratization and Institution-building of the OSCE, and Economic Reconstruction, Recovery and Development of the European Union (EU). With the emergency stage over, pillar I (Humanitarian Affairs), was phased out at the end of June 2000. In May 2001 a new pillar I was created to be responsible for Police and Justice under the UN. To establish and maintain security in Kosovo, NATO-led international forces with a UN mandate were deployed (KFOR).

Kosovo war

Tensions between the Serbian and Albanian communities in Kosovo simmered throughout the 20th century and occasionally erupted into major violence, particularly during the First Balkan War, World War I, and World War II. The Socialist government of Josip Tito systematically repressed nationalist manifestations throughout Yugoslavia, seeking to ensure that no republic or nationality gained dominance over the others. After the death of Tito nationalist feelings became dominant again, especially among ethnic Albanians living in Kosovo, leading to an increasingly poisonous atmosphere between Albanians and Serbs.

Tensions further increased when the autonomy that was given to Kosovo in the 80's was revoked under the rule of Slobodan Milošević. In 1991 an unofficial referendum was held in Kosovo on the creation of an independent republic, 98% voted in favour with a 90% turnout. The denial of the independence of Kosovo by the Serb government led to an increase in violence between the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and the Serb authorities and finally to a situation of war in 1997. The international community demanded that the Serbs would end their offensives against the KLA whilst attempting to convince the KLA to drop their bid for independence. Moreover, attempts were made to persuade Milošević to permit NATO peacekeeping troops to enter Kosovo.

The failure of peace negotiations led to a NATO decision in 1999 to end the conflict with military means. Within ten weeks, NATO aircrafts flew over 38,000 combat missions with the following aim: "Serbs out, peacekeepers in, refugees back". On June 3, 1999, Milošević accepted the terms of an international peace plan to end the fighting, with the Serbian parliament adopting the proposal amid contentious debate with delegates coming close to fistfights at some points. According to the Kosovo Memory Book, based on the study of an NGO from both Kosovo and Serbia, around 13,000 people were killed during the conflict.

Elections

The Assembly of Kosovo was established in 2001, by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo. Kosovo's independence was declared on 17 February 2008, after which a constitution came into effect on 15 June 2008.

The Assembly is regulated by the Constitution of Kosovo and has 120 seats. 20 of these are pre-allocated, as follows:

- 10 seats for parties representing the Serbs;
- 4 seats for the Romani, Ashkali and Egyptians;
- 3 seats for the Bosniaks;
- 2 seats for the Turks;
- 1 seat for the Gorans.

Minorities in Kosovo

Between 7 and 12 percent of the population in Kosovo belongs to an ethnic minority. The flag of Kosovo includes six stars; each representing a minority group. Initially the aim was to depict Kosovo as a multi-ethnic state, with a strong legal position for minorities.

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As part of the efforts to secure minority rights, the Constitution guaranteed political involvement for parties representing minorities. Article 96 of Kosovo's Constitution also regulates the share of power for minority groups in Pristina's executive bodies. However, despite these efforts the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo are the most discriminated against, poorest and most vulnerable in Kosovar society.

Not only are the laws themselves discriminatory, implementation is lacking. Here, it does not help that minorities tend to be grouped together by law. For example, Ashkali and Egyptians might be close as communities, but their heritages are unique.

Parliamentary Elections

On 10 May 2017, Isa Mustafa's government fell before the end of its mandate, after it failed to pass a vote of no confidence. 78 out of 120 MPs backed the no-confidence motion. This was the third time in a row that the government of Kosovo collapsed, unable to tackle pressing issues such as unemployment, judiciary tensions and the border dispute with Serbia.

A snap parliamentary election was scheduled to take place on 11 June 2017. However, Kosovo's political scene has been thrown off balance; three parliamentary groups have each gained a large slice of the vote. Most notably the Self-Determination party has grown significantly; this party opposes Serbian and European involvement and therefore challenges both PDK's and LDK's efforts. This will complicate the negotiations towards the formation of a new government.

June 2017 Parliamentary elections

Party	Votes	% of votes	Seats	Seats in 2014
Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK)	245,646	33.74	39 (+5)	34
Self-Determination	200,138	27.49	32 (+18)	14
Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK)	185,892	25.53	29 (+2)	27
Serb List	44,578	6.12	9	
Turkish Democratic Party of Kosovo	7,852	1.08	2	
Coalition Vakaf	6,444	0.89	2	
New Democratic Party	3,561	0.49	1	
Independent Liberal Party	3,539	0.49	1 (-7)	8
Democratic Ashkali Party of Kosovo	2,424	0.33	1	
Egyptian Liberal Party	2,415	0.33	1	
United Goranska Party	2,369	0.33	1	
Ashkali Party for Integration	2,107	0.29	1	
United Roma Party of Kosovo	955	0.13	1	

Presidential Elections

Hashim Thaçi was elected as Kosovo's president on 26 February 2016, upon receiving 71 of the 120 MPs votes. He was installed as President on 7 April 2016. Rafet Rama, also from the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), did not receive any votes.

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As a result of a deal reached in December 2014 between the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) and the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), the post of president would go to the PDK.

For this reason, some MPs from the LDK party did not vote for Thaçi. Eventually he was elected with a simple majority during the third voting round, after failing to achieve a two-third majority in the first two rounds.

(Social) Democratic Parties

Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK)

Party Leader: Kadri Veseli

Number of seats: 39

<http://www.pdk-49.com/>

The PDK was formed by prominent members of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK), among them the former party leader, former prime minister and current President of Kosovo, Hashim Thaçi, and the current president of the assembly - former spokesperson of UCK - Jakup Krasniqi. When Thaçi resigned from the position of head of party to assume the office of the President, Kadri Veseli was unanimously voted to succeed him in the position of head of party.

Upon its foundation, the party stated it wants to adopt a social democratic ideology and contacts with social democratic foundations exist. But although PDK originally had socialist tendencies, its political tendencies have shifted to centre-right over the years.

Like many parties in former communist countries PDK wrestles with the bad image of left wing parties. Also it is obvious the party has to come to grips with their image of being a party of former guerrillas. Nowadays, the party is tolerant and accommodating towards local Serbs, offering them Serbian as an official language, special municipalities, special positions in institutions, right of veto for laws that deal with minority rights etc. Besides full independence for Kosovo, top priorities in the view of the party leadership are the fight against youth unemployment and corruption.

PDK draws its support especially from poor rural, Albanian dominated areas that suffered extremely from violence during the war. For example in the Drenica Valley, in which also a lot of UCK fighters were living, PDK gained 80% of the votes in the first three elections.

In the 2017 parliamentary elections the PDK came out as the biggest party.

Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK)

Party Leader: Isa Mustafa

Number of seats: 29

<http://www.ldk-ks.eu/historiku/ldk/>

The LDK was formed in 1989 by a group of intellectuals headed by Ibrahim Rugova and grew out to one of the main political parties of Kosovo. The immediate goal was to establish an independent Kosovo. The party won the 2001 and 2004 elections and has headed the governments to come out of these elections. In the 2007 elections, the party came in second after the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) and joined a coalition with the PDK. However, after the 2010 elections in which the party became second after the PDK again, the LDK choose to head the opposition.

The leader of the party, Ibrahim Rugova was Kosovo's president from 2002 to 2006, until he died of lung cancer. Rugova embodied for the Kosovars the struggle for independence and was much respected internationally for his moderate position and peaceful methods of resistance. The parliament elected Fatmir Sejdiu, who had been on the presidency of the LDK since it's

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foundation in 1991, as the new president. After the fall of the government in November 2010, Isa Mustafa won internal elections to become the new party leader.

LDK has a liberal orientation favouring a free market economy and privatisation or public-private partnerships. Other priorities are European integration, education (in one's native language), authentic development of culture, fair social policy, accessible healthcare, and guaranteeing minority rights.

In 1991 the party organised a referendum on self-determination of Kosovo in which more than 90% of the Kosovar Albanians voted for independence. The independence declaration was only accepted by Albania. Afterwards Rugova formed an underground government in Kosovo, which was not recognised by Serbia. A number of LDK members have been killed over the past years, which are suspected to be politically motivated assassinations.

Other Parties

Self-Determination

Party Leader: Visar Ymeri

Number of seats: 32

<http://www.vetevendosje.org/>

Self-Determination (Vetëvendosje!) is the second-largest parliamentary group in Kosovo, having won 32 seats in the Kosovar Assembly in the June 2017 elections. The movement was well known even before its formal establishment in 2005, especially for their graffiti slogans all around Kosovo, such as UNMIK Jashtë (UNMIK Out), and Jo Negociata, Vetëvendosje! (No Negotiation, Self-Determination).

The party has also organised street protests, which have often turned violent. Combined with its opposition towards UNMIK and international supervision in general, the party enjoys wide appeal amongst the youth, mainly due to its anti-establishment and anti-corruption message.

Moreover, Vetëvendosje! has become a symbol of opposition to the status quo, through its disruptive actions in the previous parliament. Its supporters released tear gas inside parliament and threw firebombs outside it to protest the deals with Montenegro and Serbia, issues that caused the previous government to spark the snap elections of June 2017.

Serb List

Party Leader: Slavko Simić

Number of seats: 9

<http://www.srpskalista.net>

Serb List is a political party supported by the Government of the Republic of Serbia. It aims at protecting the interests of the Serb people in Kosovo; the party wants to protect cultural and religious heritage, improve human rights, and advocate for the return of internally displaced persons. By doing this, the party hopes to strengthen the institutional and economic capacity of the Serb people in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija.

Serb List supports the process of normalizing the relations between Serbia and Kosovo, and the party is committed to implementing all the agreements that have been and will be ratified by Brussels. The party strives for legal certainty, and wants to carry out its political activities based on the rule of law. Equality and stability are key, and in order to defend these principles the party will constantly seek justice for Serb victims and punish those who committed crimes against them.

Biographies

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Hashim Thaci

President

Hashim Thaci's rise to prominence in Kosovar politics started during the war against Serbia, when he became the political leader of the Kosovar Liberation Army (KLA). After the war, he led the PDK party, but the party came in second in the first two elections. In 2007, the PDK managed to secure the first position, and thus Thaçi became Prime Minister of Kosovo. One of the promises of Thaçi's campaign was that he would declare Kosovo independent, which occurred on 17 February 2008. The PDK won early elections in 2010, and Thaçi remained as Prime Minister.

A 2010 report by the European Council implicated Thaçi in an organ theft scheme during the Kosovo War in the 1990s. The report, widely known as the Marty report, states that over 300 organs were harvested from Serbian prisoners of war and sold on the international black market in order to raise money for the war effort. The accusations were never conclusively proven. More recently, prosecutor Clint Williamson issued a report declaring that "senior officials of the former Kosovo Liberation Army" were suspected of crimes against humanity. Thaçi may be one of them, although his name was not mentioned.

Hashim Thaçi was elected as Kosovo's president on 26 February 2016, upon receiving 71 of the 120 MPs votes. He was installed as President on 7 April 2016. As a result of a deal reached in December 2014 between the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) and the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), the post of president would go to the PDK. For this reason, some MPs from the LDK party did not vote for Thaçi. Eventually he was elected with a simple majority during the third voting round, after failing to achieve a two-third majority in the first two rounds.

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- [The Guardian](#)
- [NY Times](#)
- [BBC](#)

Information on Kosovar political parties

- [Publication Fred Cocozzelli, New School University](#)
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Elections

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