2020 TURMOIL AND ITS AFTERMATH

The crisis in Kosovo seems never-ending. COVID-19 outbreak resulted in a number of deaths, shut-downs of entire municipalities, and rigorous restrictions of movement. The technical government led by Albin Kurti confronted numerous attacks by political adversaries, complex relations with former coalition partners, and reaction from the international community regarding certain policy choices. The public still awaits the outcome of the no-confidence vote as the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) negotiations on forming the new government with the opposition parties came to a block after the decision of the Constitutional court temporarily suspended president's decree to give a mandate to Avdullah Hoti.

In Serbia, after a month and a half, the state of emergency came to an end, leaving the playfield open for the continuation of the political campaigns. COVID-19 outbreak resulted in a number of deaths, rigorous restrictions of movement, and alternating regulations. Several controversies arouse during the time, including statements made on COVID-19, alleged anti-constitutional measures, severe restrictions of personal freedoms, and arrests of journalists and activists. The situation further increased existing polarization in society, as citizens continued to express their political stances. Following weeks of applauding thought windows and balconies at 8 pm for the healthcare professionals, citizens started banging on sickles through windows and balconies at 8:05 pm. The tensions seem to be rising as the parliamentary elections postponed from late April are announced to take place on June 21.

CHANGING POLITICAL SCENE IN KOSOVO FOLLOWING VOTE OF NO CONFIDENCE

Constitutional Court decision to postpone the almost inventible forming of the new government, are perceived as just that – stalemate of the outcomes, and potential reactions. According to some, the Court showed legitimacy with this ruling, which has been debated over times in the past, including the latest election process. Adding to that, the Venice commission announced that it will not state anything, prior to the final ruling of the Constitutional Court, implying that the matter will be resolved internally. However, there are not many resolutions to it; rather debate is set around two possible scenarios to take place all leading to the same end. First being setting clear guidance over the process including a deadline for the winning party to respond to the President with a name of Prime Minister candidate, and in case that the party refuses or does not meet the deadline, allowing President's indiscretion to seek candidates from other parties which are more likely to assemble a parliamentary majority. Either way, the elections seem less likely to be a direct outcome of the Court ruling.

The new government, whenever established, will encounter problems beyond its legitimacy only. The reputation of the technical government asserted good management during the Covid-19 crisis, and the growing popularity of Albin Kurti will set the bar high for the coming one, which will have to deal with aftermaths of the Covid-19 crisis and the dialog with Belgrade. The economic crisis that is undoubtedly to follow along with the rise in unemployment rates, will require a strong government with high support rates, which the new government, with the assumed limited support in the Parliament, will be neither. As such, it will lack even more authority to resurface the Dialog, despite, or precisely because of, alleged

close ties with the US Special Envoy Richard Grenell. On top of it, internal struggles within the LDK, including opposing views over the no-confidence vote, the establishment of the new government, and the potential successor to Isa Mustafa, have put the party at risk of losing the newly regained popularity.

During the time of the new government, one party will for certainly grow in its already high approval rates, as not only for the claimed good but short ruling, but also for winning the battle of narratives, where they, and the people, are presented as the victims of the old guards who did not seem to care over the people even in the time of the crisis. So, despite some challenges faced, as the statements of the Shkelzen Gashi, death at the collective quarantine center, or even hurting relations with the US, a traditionally good partner, it appears that the Self-Determination Movement (LVV) carried the day, and will come for the payment. Thus, many speculate new elections to traditionally take place prior to the government competition of the mandate, and LVV is expected to swipe the votes as ever before.

POLITICAL SCENE IN SERBIA - ELECTIONS AMIDST PANDEMICS

Covid-19 crisis in Serbia has further increased the existing polarization in society, changing only the shape of the expression, where the former street protests turned into balcony protests, and public gatherings in support of the leading party into balcony contra-protests. The majority opined that the protests will escalate in the future, as the state of emergency just been lifted, and the parliamentary elections are set for June 21. Whatever the outcome of elections, many agreed that the opposition will continue to challenge the governing party outside of the institutions even after the elections. Moreover, some did not exclude escalations and possible intra-party supporters violence and the excessive use of force.

And while this polarization can be grasped at any level of society, it appears that the international actors remain somewhat oblivious to Serbia's internal struggles. Freedom House report which marked Serbia as a "hybrid regimes" rather than a democratic one, due to decline in standards in governance, justice, elections and media freedoms, gained publicity within both domestic and foreign media, including remarks on it made by the Ambassador of the US in Serbia. Yet, on a large scale, the international community has not made many comments on Serbia's internal affairs overall, with sporadic reactions such as visits of the European Union (EU) Parliament MPs to Belgrade to facilitate negotiation between the ruling parties and the opposition on the coming elections. Some see this indifference of the international actors toward developments in Serbia as a result of regional politics where it is believed that only President Aleksandar Vučić can deliver a promised agreement with Pristina both in Belgrade and to the east. In line with that, during the Covid-19 crisis, Serbia also worked on its strategic relations by strengthening ties with the east, especially China, due to assistance and support received to fight Covid-19, and is expected to continue with firm relations in the aftermath. Some argue that this is done as it will give leverage to Vučić in addressing potential critics from Europe. The opposition remains split over the boy.

cott initiative, with those in favor of boycott not having a clear campaign strategy and means of addressing the electorate, and those in favor of participating in the elections claiming it as the only option.The argument in favor of the boycott is that it can serve as a test to the legitimacy of the winning parties in case of a low turnout. However, it would hard to measure if the assumed low turnout is a result of the boycott campaign or still present Covid-19, making "capitalizing" on boycott challenging, but also delicate. The clear success is understood by some as no opposition in the Parliament, as the worse things are, the stronger the message is; however, as part of the opposition announced participating, it is unlikely not to have any, especially with lowering of census rate to 3%. On the other hand, elections can also serve as a legitimacy test to the opposition parties, and some argue that boycott is no more than their tactic for shying away from testing their support, or the lack of.

While some question the logic of the prompt continuation of the election process, just a month and a half after the state of emergency, many argue that for the leading party June is the perfect timing for the elections. The economic crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic is excepted to hit in fall, so the consequences would not yet be visible, while the perks of the social and economic measure to ease the consequences of the pandemic are. Temporary increase in salaries in the healthcare sector has been approved, financial assistance to retired people of 4000 RSD has been distributed, and a promise of 100 € for every citizen over 18 has been made. This is followed by a set of economic measures for small and medium enterprises, already in motion.

BELGRADE – PRISTINA DIALOG

The dialog is not a mainstream topic either in Belgrade or Pristina at the moment. New governments are expected in both cities, which takes away the attention from the inventible – a continuation of the Dialogue and some form of the agreement. However, it seems that there are third elections that are also affecting the Dialog, and that is presidential elections in the USA, which will set the course for the international policy of the country, including the one toward Kosovo. Some debate that at the moment, with Grenell as the special envoy, other international actors steer clear from entering the ring, as they might be sided in the process. The layout of the roles as such gives little room for substantial EU interventions, and for the newly appointed EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue Miroslav Lajčák to exploit his position fully. Thus, the speculations that the agreement will be drafted in the District of Columbia (DC), and only, later on, reviewed in Brussels.

What remains puzzling is Belgrade and Pristina's position in the process. While the second is playing with different narratives and approaches (i.e. taxes, reciprocity, border correction, mutual recognition) for the outcome, Belgrade seems reluctant to have one in the first place. While there are narratives about border correction and special protection for the Serbian Orthodox Churches, as the requests from Belgrade, some claim that status quo showed to be beneficial for Vučić, giving him no incentive in letting it pass. Vučić has been accumulating power internally and made alliances internationally, so he could endure delivering on the agreement; and indeed, many argue that it's the only thing keeping him in the shades

from scrutiny and international criticism. However, some argue that the scenario has shifted and that now, he may be accumulating power so he could endure not delivering on the agreement, or at least postponing it to the point of impossibility. One thing is certain, many elections are to follow, for those in power to remain in power, and linger on the dialog.

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