

Political Crisis weakens institutions in Kosovo

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(Note: I prepared this text on the request of Artan Haraqija of Indeksonline; for the text in Albanian see [here](#).)

The crisis will pass; sooner or later there will be a new government. Even if the worst happens and the government is formed in a really dirty way, with vote buying, it only means a few more years of bad government. Kosovo can survive that as it has survived worse. And this isn't going to be the last crisis. With twenty seats going to minorities and a number to Vetëvendosje, it is always going to be hard for one party to put together a coalition.

The damage being done to institutions is much more serious because the well being of Kosovo's people depends on the strength and health of its institutions much more than it does on the policies of any government or any official. When you look around the world and through history, one thing more than any other separates the successful, prosperous societies from the failures, and that is institutions: impartial, predictable, rule-based, professional institutions.

With strong institutions, when someone applies for a spot at university, or a job, or a construction permit, or bids on a contract, he or she is treated equally, on their merits. That rarely happens in Kosovo and the Balkans because institutions are weak; usually who you know matters more. The result is a huge waste of talent and mounting anger and frustration for those left out.

Kosovo's institutions are weak and the crisis threatens to damage them further. The role of the Constitutional Court is especially sensitive. Every supreme court has to define its own role in the political system through its first decisions and Kosovo's is no exception. Unfortunately the Court is claiming an extremely large role while issuing decisions that strike many impartial observers as strongly politically motivated. The legality of the three international justices' extension is also disputed. If the Court, and its place in the political system, evolve badly – as seems to be happening - it will damage Kosovo for many years.

Kosovo needs courts its people can believe in, but the judiciary is only part of the package. You can't have a good, free society if the courts are under political control or judges are easy to corrupt, but an independent judiciary isn't enough. There needs to be a culture of respecting institutions. Schools have to prepare students for university or work; universities have to train good doctors, engineers and scientists; plagiarism and corruption have to go. It's been fifteen years since the end of the war and people still have to go to Macedonia for decent medical care: why? Because the institutions involved in health care are weak and therefore decent doctors go abroad.

Without strong institutions, politics becomes a winner-take-all affair, because there are no rules and all that matters is who is sitting in the big chair. I think that's a big part of the reason the parties are fighting so hard to hold on to power or to win it: to lose power is to lose everything. It means none of your friends will get contracts, jobs or other opportunities, and you have no protection from investigation or prosecution. It's scary. And it shouldn't be that way. That's the real tragedy of this crisis: that the political struggle is tearing down exactly the institutions that Kosovo needs to be strong and free, and that would prevent crises like this one from happening in the future.