

## **Another 100 days of Ramush Haradinaj**

The Kosovo government fulfilled its first 100 days on 19 December - the second term for Ramush Haradinaj as prime minister. Thirteen years ago, Haradinaj resigned as prime minister on the 96<sup>th</sup> day of his mandate following his indictment for war crimes by The Hague ICTY Tribunal. At that time, Haradinaj took office during a difficult period and in a very sensitive political context, following the March 2004 riots and tense relations between political parties and with the UN administration. This new mandate now finds Haradinaj as a prime minister of an independent state, thus bearing the responsibility for state-building and democratic consolidation.

Unlike Isa Mustafa's government, which was oriented around long-term planning policies alongside slow-paced decision-making, the beginning of Haradinaj's second term has been characterized by a high degree of mobilisation of institutions and officials, as well as increased activities and prompt decision-making. However, soon after the formation of his government, Haradinaj faced similar phenomena to his predecessor; another exodus of citizens towards Europe looked likely and the demand for the dismissal of the Serb minister Nenad Rikalo who was accused of being involved in crimes against Albanians during the war in 1999 echoed Mustafa's early leadership.

Back in 2015, a few days after the formation of Isa Mustafa's government, a large exodus of over [100,000 people fled to Europe](#). Moreover, the opposition organised massive protests against the former minister of the Mustafa government, the Minister of Communities and Returns, Aleksandar Jablanović, after he offended mothers of war victims in Gjakova. After several protests, Prime Minister Mustafa eventually dismissed him. This time around some lessons were learned. The government and the police reacted quickly to prevent mass migration while the Special Prosecution Office investigated the past of Minister Rikalo, and found no evidence of involvement in war crimes.

The government, which consists of a coalition of five major parliamentary parties and 17 other parties with contradictory agendas and a tense relationship with the opposition, does not offer favourable conditions for Haradinaj's leadership.

Just a few days after the formation of the government, local election campaigning began, to be held on 22 October. The lengthy process of the local elections rendered the parliament inactive as its members and ministers were fully engaged in campaigning activities.

As a result of the fragile coalition, Haradinaj has compounded the problem by overcrowding the cabinet. He has appointed no less than 68 deputy ministers, 4-5 to each ministry. Such inefficiency

has frustrated the public and has badly damaged the image of the government. [The opposition ironically stated](#) that the appointment of a record number of deputy ministers is the only success of the government in these past 100 days.

As he promised, Haradinaj dismissed the State Commission for Border Demarcation and Maintenance of the border with Montenegro. The government appointed a new commission, whose members shared the same views as Prime Minister Haradinaj. The new commission's report, as expected, confirmed the claims of Ramush Haradinaj that Kosovo had lost territory with the agreement of August 2015. After the adoption of this report, Haradinaj decided to proceed to the Assembly with the border agreement that he had opposed and with the report from the new commission. For many, this move was seen as a way to delegitimise the agreement. On the other hand, contradictory positions on demarcation between coalition partners PDK-AAK-NISMA and AKR have sparked rumours that the issue could threaten government sustainability. Remarkably, Haradinaj's main ally on the demarcation issue is his former opposition partner and current opposition party, Vetevendosje.

The government has shown some willingness to implement reforms. During this period, meetings of the Ministerial Council for European Integration have become frequent; Haradinaj sought to discipline all those who disregard European Reform Agenda (ERA). The Prime Minister mobilised government structures and relevant ministries for the implementation of ERA. Also, the government launched the Economic Reform Program with the aim to accelerate the pace of the implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA). The government promised support for the Public Administration Reform and supported an agreement for transparent recruitment of senior officials and board members of public enterprises and independent agencies.

The Government of Haradinaj failed to present any concrete agenda on foreign policy. In mid-November, Haradinaj travelled to Brussels for the first meeting with the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini. The meeting did not go well and as a result the joint conference was cancelled. The meeting of the SAA Council between Kosovo and the EU was [reported with tensions](#); Haradinaj insisted that the U.S. should be involved in the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. Mogherini did not receive this very well and angrily left the meeting. On 18 December, Haradinaj travelled again to Brussels where he attended an informal meeting with prime ministers of the Western Balkan countries. He was invited by Frederica Mogherini, as was later reported, to discuss the issue of visa liberalization.

Another challenge for Haradinaj's government was approving the 2018 budget. The draft budget envisages a significant increase of finances for the rule of law institutions. Budget allocations for

some other projects were criticised by the opposition and public opinion, such as the construction cost of the Prishtina-Gjilan-Konjul highway and the on-going funding problems for veterans. The budget approval process accurately demonstrates the fragility of the ruling coalition.

The new government failed to honour Kosovo's commitments to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF program, though expired, had foreseen a number of reforms and programmes that the government had pledged to implement. In fact, the previous government had already initiated the implementation and as a result Kosovo had received a grant of 185 million euros from the IMF. If implementation does not happen, the Haradinaj government will struggle to negotiate new stand-by arrangements with the IMF.

Recently, the Kosovo government signed an agreement with U.S.-based Company ContourGlobal for the construction of the €1.3bn Kosova e Re, a coal-fired power plant to meet the increasing power demand. The contract had long remained in the drawers of previous governments. The agreement was largely welcomed by citizens. However, it has been greeted with scepticism from civil society and parts of the opposition who perceive the agreement as environmentally and socially damaging. The potential increase of electricity prices, has raised concerns among citizens, where many already have warned about the possibility of protests. Construction of the power plant is expected to further polarize the political scene. Former candidate for Prime Minister Albin Kurti of Vetevendosje [warned](#) that "bringing Kosovo C to the Assembly ... will encounter opposition resistance like never seen before".

Kosovo continues to face an energy crisis. In early September, the new government encountered a subsequent crisis due to the exhaustion of coal reserves, as well as disputes and delays in the resettlement program of the inhabitants of Shipitullë and Hadë, populated areas where new coal fields are expected to be opened. Haradinaj reached an agreement on expropriation of the land with the inhabitants. A few months later he had to order the residents and Kosovo Energy Corporation (KEC) management to conclude the agreement for the displacement of the residents.

So far, with the exception of the agreement for Kosovo C, Haradinaj's government has not undertaken any major decisions. In these 100 days, Haradinaj focused, as he said, on establishing order within the government. On a positive note, the government took action to address issues that had long remained overlooked by early governments:

- Approval of the law on the Capital of the Republic of Kosovo, Prishtina; a long-awaited decision.

- A long standing request for handing over the *Palace of Youth and Sports* (the sport centre) to the municipality of Prishtina was completed.
- The government renewed the agreement with the UK government to monitor and advise on the recruitment of senior management positions. It aims to ensure transparent, merit-based, and free of political influence recruitment on the basis of professional background.
- The government dismissed ten directors and board members of independent agencies and public companies. The Anti-Corruption Agency found that the names were politically appointed and in violation with the law. The previous government had been reluctant to act.
- The government began implementing the 2014 law for victims of sexual violence. Ensuring compensation for victims of wartime sexual violence is one of the major achievements of his first 100 days in office. The government allocated budget funds to begin verifying the status of sexual violence victims who had lacked legal recognition or rights.
- Draft Law on Amending and Supplementing the Law on Religious Freedom in Kosovo.

On the other hand, the government also undertook decisions that were largely seen as controversial: A tax amnesty for all water companies invoking a clause in an administrative instruction for the water payment structure, was followed by great public outcry. Correspondingly, the allocation of 219 thousand euros for family members of the Kumanova victims lowered tensions, pleased the affected families but also caused reactions. In 2015, more than 40 Albanians engaged in armed fighting with Macedonian police forces in Kumanovo. At the request of the head of government, the Ministry of Education discharged the board of the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA). The unexpected dismissal of this committee and KAA director encouraged reactions from the public.

Haradinaj fell into the trap of election campaign promises, promising that the free movement of citizens within the EU would occur within 3 months after he took office. No such thing occurred. The non-resolution of the border demarcation, a key criterion for visa liberalization, pushed Haradinaj towards intensifying the European agenda, adding that [the implementation of the SAA](#) will bring visa liberalization and EU candidate status for Kosovo. In the meantime, the Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities remains a topic in which the government has demonstrated little interest and has not taken any concrete steps to implement it. The new government had planned to pass the law on turning the security forces into an army within three months. That did not happen either. Haradinaj faced similar opposition from the international community, as President Hashim Thaçi did in the [spring of 2017](#). The Prime Minister advised that this issue would be postponed for another time, stating they are now in favour of transformation happening through constitutional amendments in the months to come. Consensus is required on the process of the transformation

of the Security forces but also on what form the future Kosovo army will take. Another promise to recommence 'Trepca' and find a solution for retired miners within the first 90 days of government was not concluded either.

A better picture of Haradinaj's governance will be seen in the spring. As of now it can be concluded that the reputation of the Prime Minister before and after the formation of the government has significantly improved. The results of the latest survey of [UNDP's Public Pulse](#) show an increase in citizen satisfaction with the work of the Prime Minister. Lately AAK, Haradinaj's party increased its electoral base, from three municipalities to seven in the recent local elections.

Ramush Haradinaj's government avoids complicated topics, many of which are not popular, such as the Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities or the transformation of Kosovo's security forces into an army. His government cannot hide behind these issues for very long because the pressure will be on to address, both internal reforms despite the unfavourable context, and in consolidating the foreign policy agenda, particularly for the dialogue with Serbia. For the latter, the pressure will come from the governing partners and from the international community. Along with the major aforementioned topics, [addressing long-standing suspended issues](#), such as reforming public administration, rule of law and economic development are equally urgent.

With the economic reform program and the increase of the budget for the judiciary, the government has enabled an increase in professionals for courts and prosecution. The prime minister, also supports the functional judicial review, by taking a leading role on this matter. In addition, the Ministry of Justice has processed several laws that are expected to regulate the issue of conflict of interests among public officials.

The clock is ticking for Haradinaj's ambition for a "different and never seen before governance". His government will constantly be challenged within the coalition as well as by a strong opposition. Haradinaj may conclude this mandate only if he governs well, delivers visa liberalization and improves relations with the opposition.