



## **PRELIMINARY STATEMENT**

### **Peaceful and vibrant election process despite harsh rhetoric reflecting deep divisions**

**Pristina, Kosovo, 11 February 2025**

*This preliminary statement of the EU election observation mission (EU EOM) is delivered before the completion of the entire electoral process. Critical stages remain, including counting of votes, tabulation of results and adjudication of complaints. The EU EOM is now only in a position to comment on observation undertaken to date, and will later publish a final report, including full analysis and recommendations for strengthening future electoral processes. The EU EOM may also make additional statements on election-related matters as and when it considers it appropriate.*

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#### **Summary**

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The elections were peaceful and competitive with participation of all communities, testing a new legal framework. The campaign was vibrant despite harsh rhetoric reflecting deep political divisions. Election day was well-run thanks to the collegial effort of polling station staff, overcoming challenges posed by belated decisions of the CEC. Despite delays in the tabulation of results, the overall process demonstrated resilience and commitment to democratic principles.

The 2025 parliamentary elections were the first to be held under the Law on General Elections, adopted in 2023, that introduced some novelties aiming to increase stakeholders' trust and enhance the transparency of the electoral process. The legal framework lays a sound basis for conducting democratic elections. Implementation of the new electoral legal framework has highlighted that some aspects of the law warrant further clarification to avoid potential for uncertainty.

Although the election administration generally enjoys stakeholders' confidence, concerns were raised over the Central Election Commission's (CEC) impartiality and independence from political influence. The election process witnessed attempts of politicisation of key institutions by the ruling party, particularly the CEC and the Independent Media Commission. The CEC became entangled in political disputes and politicised certain technical aspects of the electoral process. The attempt by *Lëvizja Vetëvendosje* (LVV)-nominated members of the CEC to prevent the certification of *Srpska Lista* (SL), and the blocking of the disbursement of public funding to political parties, placed significant pressure on the institution.

The final voter list contained a total of 2,075,868 voters, including 104,924 registered for out-of-Kosovo voting. While EU EOM interlocutors voiced confidence in the inclusiveness of the voter list, concerns remain over its accuracy, primarily due to shortcomings in civil registration. The CEC certified 28 political entities with 1,279 contestants. The share of women candidates represented only a negligible increase compared to the 2021 parliamentary elections. The certification process was overall inclusive, yet it was tarnished by the CEC's politically influenced disagreement. The CEC experienced significant delays in certain aspects of the technical and administrative preparations and adopted several decisions late, including technical instructions and appointment of the lowest-level election bodies. This had a negative impact on efficiency and timeliness of preparations. Several parties were critical of the composition of the polling station committees for being insufficiently representative.

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Positively, the campaign was vibrant with no major incidents. However, negative rhetoric, harsh verbal attacks and inflammatory language were widespread during campaign events. Women candidates were subject to sexist verbal attacks, had fewer resources than their male counterparts, and attracted less media coverage. No meaningful debates were held between leading candidates. A high number of cases was filed with the Election Complaints and Appeals Panel, resulting in large fines imposed for breaches of the code of conduct. The misuse of public resources by multiple political entities was reported by EU EOM observers and interlocutors and in some cases sanctioned.

The Kosovo Serb-majority municipalities saw a relatively subdued campaign. SL remained dominant within the Kosovo Serb community, receiving endorsement from President of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić, and relying on Serbian media and small Kosovo Serb outlets. Additionally, pressure on voters dependent on Serbian social assistance and employment was reported. However, the participation of six Kosovo-Serb political parties was perceived as a positive step towards increased political pluralism.

Political entities from small non-majority communities faced challenges in campaign funding, and for some, limited access to media created an uneven playing field. Instead, non-majority political entities conducted most of their campaign activities within their own communities.

Online campaigning was very prominent, mirroring the aggressive tone of public debates and rallies. All political parties contesting the elections and over half of the candidates campaigned on social media, mostly on Facebook and Instagram. The harsh tone of the campaign was reflected on social media through videos of campaign events, which constituted a large part of the content posted by parties and candidates.

Freedom of expression and freedom of the media are guaranteed by the legal framework, and generally respected. However, the Independent Media Commission lost its quorum three weeks before election day, failing to sanction the numerous media violations during the campaign. The public broadcaster RTK1 provided equitable news coverage to main contestants. Despite poor funding, RTK2, the non-majority language public broadcaster, hosted debates, but its limited viewership and SL's refusal to participate left other Kosovo Serb parties with minimal campaign opportunities beyond social media. LVV boycotted three prominent private media outlets, citing bias.

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*The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) has been present in Kosovo since 8 January 2025, following an invitation from the President of Kosovo. The mission is led by Chief Observer Nathalie Loiseau, Member of the European Parliament (France). In total, the EU EOM deployed 104 observers from all 27 EU Member States, Canada, Norway and Switzerland across Kosovo to assess the whole electoral process against international standards for democratic elections, as well as Kosovo laws. A delegation of the European Parliament, headed by Marta Temido MEP, also joined the mission and fully endorses this statement. On election day, observers visited 412 polling stations in all the 38 municipalities of Kosovo to observe voting and counting.*

*This preliminary statement is delivered prior to the completion of the electoral process. The final assessment of the elections will depend, in part, on the conduct of the remaining stages of the election process, in particular, the counting of votes, the tabulation of results and the handling of possible post-election day complaints and appeals. The EU EOM remains in Kosovo to observe post-election developments and will publish a final report, containing detailed recommendations, within two months of the conclusion of the electoral process. The EU EOM is independent in its findings and conclusions and adheres to the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation endorsed at the United Nations.*

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## Preliminary Findings

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### POLITICAL CONTEXT

Kosovo organised the 2025 elections following the completion of a full governmental term. The political landscape in the last four years has been shaped by the government of *Lëvizja Vetëvendosje* (LVV) and Prime Minister Albin Kurti, while the main political parties in opposition, Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) and Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK-NISMA) managed to maintain their strong standing in the municipalities following the 2021 local elections.

The Government has been criticised for contributing to the polarisation of the political landscape with Kosovo Albanian opposition parties and hindering the normalisation process with the Kosovo Serb community, which remains heavily influenced by Serbia. The affirmation of Kosovo's sovereignty has been a key focus of the ruling party's policies and initiatives. Sovereignty also emerged as a key campaign theme for LVV, encapsulated in its main slogan "From corner to corner." The LVV-led attempt to prevent the certification of Serbia-affiliated *Srpska Lista* (SL) was followed by intensified rhetoric aimed at delegitimising SL's participation in the elections, with LVV linking SL and Belgrade to the terrorist attack in *Banjaska* in September 2023. A large-scale operation followed on 15 January by Kosovo authorities to dismantle Serbia-operated structures in 24 locations across municipalities south of the Ibar/Ibër river. The international community regretted those actions as not conducive to the normalisation process of the EU-facilitated Dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade.

The election process witnessed politicisation of key institutions by the ruling party, particularly the Central Election Commission (CEC) and the Independent Media Commission (IMC). The CEC became entangled in political disputes and politicised certain technical aspects of the electoral process. The attempt by LVV-nominated members of the CEC to prevent the certification of SL, and the blocking of the disbursement of public funding to political parties, placed significant pressure on the CEC.

The participation in the elections of six Kosovo-Serb political parties is seen as a positive development, leading to a perception of increased political pluralism in the community. However, SL has until now dominated the political landscape in the Kosovo Serb community, with Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić endorsing SL and urging Kosovo Serbs to vote in large numbers for their candidates.

### LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Parliamentary elections are primarily regulated by the 2008 Constitution (as amended in 2020) and the Law on General Elections (LGE) adopted in July 2023, as well as subsidiary legislation, including CEC Regulations, which expand on LGE provisions.<sup>1</sup> The legal framework lays a sound basis for conducting democratic elections, yet further steps could ensure full inclusion, transparency and legal stability.

The 2025 parliamentary elections are the first to be held under the new LGE, seen as an important milestone and implementing several previous EU EOM recommendations to further align the electoral legal framework with international standards. These include enhancement of the CEC's

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<sup>1</sup> Including the Law on Financing of Political Parties of 2010 (as most recently amended in 2022), the Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Communities and their Members in Kosovo (LPPRC), the Law on Languages, media related laws and relevant provisions of the Criminal Code and the Law on General Administrative Procedure.

financial autonomy, digitalisation of processes, establishment of an oversight authority for campaign finance, introduction of provisions to ensure media plurality and detailed provisions for assisted voting. Further, the law promotes greater gender inclusivity by offering financial incentives to political entities whose deputies include more than 30 per cent women. Beyond this, the LGE modifies the electoral system by increasing preferential votes from five to ten and changes the formula for allocation of mandates, introduces provisions for online campaigning, and removes those that could lead to arbitrary withdrawal of observers' accreditation. Despite these improvements, the law leaves broad regulatory scope to subordinate legislation while several provisions could benefit from further clarity and harmonisation with other legislative texts, notably with respect to regulation of the media, gender equality and campaign financing.

The 120 members of the Assembly are elected for a four-year term in a single electoral constituency with an open list proportional representation system and preferential voting for up to ten candidates. One hundred seats are allocated to the parties, coalitions, citizens' initiatives and independent candidates proportionally to the number of valid votes obtained, provided they pass a threshold of five per cent of the valid votes cast. Twenty seats are guaranteed for non-majority communities, including ten for the Kosovo Serb community, three for the Kosovo Bosniak, two for the Kosovo Turkish and one each for the Kosovo Gorani, Kosovo Roma, Kosovo Ashkali and Kosovo Egyptian communities, as well as a seat for the community among the latter three with the highest number of votes.

## **ELECTION ADMINISTRATION**

The elections are managed by the CEC, a permanent body, 38 temporarily established municipal election commissions (MECs), and over 2,500 polling station committees (PSCs). The legislation allows for meaningful representation of eligible political entities in the lowest-level electoral bodies, without providing sufficiently clear criteria, thus granting the CEC wide discretion in determining the formula of appointment. The initial distribution failed to fully respect the legal criterion of reflecting the last parliamentary election results at the municipal level, to the benefit of some newly running entities. Following the decision of the Election Complaints and Appeals Panel (ECAP), the CEC revised the distribution of seats for PSCs and counting teams in 11 municipalities, primarily among non-majority political entities. Many interlocutors from various political parties expressed discontent regarding the final attribution of seats. The disputes over seats contributed to significant delays in the appointment and training of the PSCs and counting teams across Kosovo, which were further exacerbated by difficulties of some political entities to secure sufficient PSC nominations.

During the electoral period, the CEC has held regular public sessions and generally published their decisions in a timely manner. However, some sessions were reduced to decisions taken only by email, and information on several discussed issues was limited, with only brief records in the minutes, thus reducing the transparency and accountability of the CEC. Moreover, some instructions and decisions were adopted relatively late in the process, affecting the efficiency and timeliness of the electoral preparations. Although the election administration generally enjoys stakeholder's confidence, the EU EOM has noted instances of political influence in the CEC decision-making process, including on certification of electoral contestants and approval of disbursement of public funds to political parties, compromising its independence and impartiality.

The CEC experienced significant delays in certain aspects of the technical and administrative preparations. Difficulties in the procurement process severely hampered purchase of technical equipment for the counting centres, preparation of voter education materials, as well as logistical operations for distribution and retrieval of election materials, including postal votes for out-of-

Kosovo (OoK) voting. The CEC also informed the EU EOM that administrative constraints on the recruitment of temporary personnel curtailed the commission's ability to ensure adequate staffing levels, most notably for campaign monitors, trainers and data entry clerks.

Some MECs expressed dissatisfaction with communication from the CEC, citing belated instructions and insufficient guidance, often resulting in confusion over certain procedures. A few MECs also informed the EU EOM of insufficient support by municipal administrations in terms of office space, transportation and other needs. Despite these challenges, the EU EOM observers assessed the MECs as generally efficient and transparent. The quality of the training sessions for the polling staff observed by the EU EOM varied across Kosovo. While most sessions were informative and interactive, at times, key topics such as the new regulation for assisted voting, PSC members' roles, and counting procedures were not uniformly addressed, leading to their inconsistent implementation on election day.

Despite a voter education programme launched by the CEC prior to the official announcement of elections, featuring in-person meetings, audio-visual materials in the media and online, many EU EOM interlocutors considered these efforts insufficient and expressed doubts over the voter education campaign's effectiveness and reach. According to EU EOM observers, involvement of MECs in voter education remained limited, despite their new legal responsibility in this respect. The voter education campaign covered topics such as voter registration, including for out-of-Kosovo voting, participation of persons with disabilities, combating gender-based discriminatory speech, media literacy and election-day procedures. Positively, the CEC produced voter information campaigns in sign language, as required by law.

## **VOTER REGISTRATION**

The voter registration system is passive and centralised, with the final voter list of all eligible voters compiled by the CEC based on data from the civil register managed by the Civil Registration Agency (CRA) and the database of the Department of Issuance of Identification Documents. On 4 January, the CEC certified the final voter list with a total of 2,075,868 voters, an increase of 174,888 voters compared to the 2021 elections.

Voters outside Kosovo had to register in advance either for postal or in-person voting, which has been introduced for these elections. For OoK voting, the CEC registered a total of 104,924 voters: 20,416 voters to vote in-person and 84,508 voters who opted for postal voting. After the registration, due to the low number of voters in some locations, as well as logistical and administrative difficulties, the CEC decided to cancel five planned voting centres abroad and instructed the affected voters to cast their ballots by post. Eligible voters who did not register for OoK voting remained on the voter list and could vote at their regular polling station, or at a designated voting centre for conditional voting, established in each municipality.

The voter list is regarded as inclusive by most stakeholders, and all CEC members unanimously voted to certify the final voter list. Concerns, however, remain over the voter list containing deceased voters, primarily due to administrative obstacles in obtaining official evidence for their removal, with the current system primarily relying on declarations of deaths by close relatives and allowing for limited powers of the public institutions in the process. While the LGE provides for the opportunity to challenge registration of a voter by another voter during the public scrutiny period, in practice, voters had access only to their personal registration data, limiting possibilities for meaningful scrutiny.

## **POLITICAL ENTITIES AND CANDIDATE CERTIFICATION**

Parliamentary candidates may be nominated by political parties, coalitions and citizen initiatives, or may stand independently. All documents submitted with certification applications were verified by the Office for Registration, Certification and Financial Control of Political Entities (“the Office”) which, after a few corrections by two submitters, recommended all political entities to be certified. All submitted candidate lists with more than two candidates complied with the legal requirement for a minimum gender representation of at least 30 per cent of either gender on candidate lists, with one candidate of each gender included among every three candidates.

An otherwise inclusive certification process of electoral contestants was tarnished by the CEC’s politically influenced disagreement over the certification of SL candidates, which had been recommended by the Office. Although the LGE grants the responsibility for certification of electoral contestants to the Office, with the CEC’s decision intended as an administrative procedure to confirm certification of those who complied with the legal requirements, the CEC’s failure to adopt a decision effectively stalled the process. On 31 December 2024, ECAP instructed the CEC to certify the SL candidates. In total, the CEC certified 28 political entities and their 1,279 contestants representing 20 political parties, five coalitions, two citizen initiatives and one independent candidate.

## **CAMPAIGN ENVIRONMENT**

The official 30-day election campaign began on 11 January, ending at 07:00 on election day. EU EOM observers assessed the campaign events they attended as calm, with no major security incidents. Candidates reported enjoying freedom of assembly, expression and movement throughout the campaign. The main Kosovo Albanian political entities, including LVV, LDK, PDK, AAK-NISMA and the Coalition for Family, campaigned across Kosovo, and some sporadically in the north. LVV, LDK and PDK organised most of the large-scale campaign rallies. Door-to-door activities and small gatherings targeting specific groups of voters were the most frequent campaign method by all contestants. The main campaign topics were economic development, education, NATO and EU memberships, judicial reform and social welfare, with LVV distinctively focusing on the sovereignty of Kosovo. For Kosovo Serb contestants, the main campaign messages were the security and protection of the rights of Serbs within Kosovo.

Although the election campaign was vibrant with no serious incidents reported, it was marked by negative and inflammatory language and harsh verbal attacks on opponents, often by LVV, LDK, PDK and AAK-NISMA, at public events, debates and online. The United States envoy for special missions, Richard Grenell, became involved in the campaign, criticising Prime Minister Albin Kurti for not being a reliable partner to the United States. The Coalition for Family’s campaign messages denigrated the LGBTIQ+ community and promoted traditional gender roles in society, sometimes inciting hatred. In the last weeks of the campaign, harsh rhetoric and personal attacks intensified, leading to numerous complaints filed with ECAP regarding campaign language. Most parties engaged in dynamic online campaigning, with Facebook as the primary platform, followed by Instagram and TikTok. Online campaigning mirrored the harsh tone of rallies and debates, with videos from campaign events forming a large part of the content posted.

The campaign in Kosovo Serb-majority municipalities was more subdued compared to other municipalities. Four out of six Kosovo Serb parties participated in three heated TV debates, where verbal attacks and inflammatory rhetoric overshadowed substantive discussions. Additionally, smaller parties faced challenges in campaigning due to limited resources and fines imposed by ECAP after LVV filed multiple complaints over the improper placement of campaign material. SL’s campaign was the most prominent out of the Kosovo Serbian parties, primarily through

Serbian media and small Kosovo-Serb outlets in which other political parties had no or very limited access. Interlocutors frequently reported about SL members putting pressure on voters who are largely dependent on Serbian social assistance or employment in Serbia-managed institutions in the Kosovo-Serb municipalities. Moreover, President Aleksandar Vučić of Serbia openly endorsed SL and urged voters to vote for the party. On 3 February, the director of the Kosovo and Metohija Office announced that 22,000 Serbian dinars (€170) per month would be distributed to socially vulnerable and unemployed persons, starting with 5,000 recipients as of mid-February.

EU EOM observers reported that non-majority political entities conducted small gatherings and door-to-door campaigning within their communities. Campaign messages focused on quality-of-life issues, language barriers in primary education for the Bosniak community, school enrolment for Roma girls, as well as the government's policies towards non-majority communities.

Public funding is available for political entities represented in the parliament. However, due to LVV-nominated CEC members' opposition to disbursement of funding for January and February, contestants conducted their campaigns without these funds. The law includes a non-mandatory provision for allocating additional public funding for campaign activities to all certified political entities. This provision was not implemented, creating an uneven playing field amongst contestants, especially for small political entities from the non-majority communities.

Misuse of public resources by numerous contestants was reported by EU EOM observers and interlocutors at central and municipal levels. Throughout the entire campaign, the "Office" within the CEC did not monitor campaign activities systematically in all municipalities due to recruitment challenges. Monitors were either recruited only for half of the campaign period or not recruited at all, which resulted in a significant portion of the election campaign remaining unmonitored.

## **ELECTORAL DISPUTES**

The Election Complaints and Appeals Panel (ECAP) is a permanent independent body of 11 members appointed by the Kosovo Judicial Council currently operating with ten judges under its Regulation for Submission and Decision-Making of Complaints as revised in 2024. ECAP is the main forum of adjudication of election related disputes, including appeals to CEC decisions specifically provided for by the LGE. In this context, ECAP has dismissed cases falling outside its remit and has so far referred 18 cases to the Independent Media Commission (IMC), which is responsible for adjudicating complaints against media outlets. ECAP's decisions are subject to appeal to the Supreme Court (SC) if related to a fine over €5,000 or affecting fundamental rights.

Since the beginning of the process, ECAP has received over 500 cases. Appeals against CEC decisions related to the establishment of OoK voting centres were filed by LVV and dismissed. One appeal related to the certification of political entities. ECAP permitted the SL appeal against the CEC notification denying its certification, deciding in favour of the appellant. The subsequent certification of SL led to a further appeal by LVV for failure to comply with the regular CEC decision-making process which was in turn dismissed for lack of legal standing by the SC. Four appeals related to the non-disbursement of public funds by the CEC were dismissed for lack of competence. Other appeals filed by non-majority community political entities were related to the appointment of polling and counting staff, with ECAP instructing the CEC to reconsider the representation formula applied pursuant to the criteria set by the law.

Some 400 complaints were filed with ECAP for breaches of the code of conduct during the campaign resulting in substantial fines imposed on political entities, especially for repeated

violations, totalling some €640,000.<sup>2</sup> Breaches related mainly to placing campaign material in public places, incitement to hatred and hate speech, misuse of public office and resources, and using children for campaigning. Most cases were brought by LVV, followed by PDK and LDK, while the majority were filed against LVV, LDK and PDK. Despite the volume of cases and resource challenges, ECAP is so far seen as performing in a professional manner with sufficiently reasoned decisions, published in a timely manner. The law offers clear timelines and well-articulated steps for processing electoral disputes. Yet, it could benefit from further clarity, particularly with regards to criteria for determining the amounts of fines imposed and expanding the right to appeal. The SC has to date received 37 appeals against ECAP decisions. Out of the 32 decisions published so far, 22 were dismissed or rejected and ten approved, overturning ECAP's decision, or partially approved, lowering the fines imposed on first instance.

## MEDIA

The Constitution and media laws guarantee freedom of expression and freedom of the media. The media environment is dynamic yet fragmented, shaped by ethnic divisions and institutional challenges. Kosovo Albanian, Kosovo Serb and other non-majority communities mostly inhabit different informational spheres, separated by a language divide that very few media outlets seek to bridge.

The Independent Media Commission (IMC), responsible for regulating and sanctioning broadcast media, became deadlocked due to the absence of a quorum some three weeks before election day, failing to sanction 100 potential media violations and leaving outlets in prolonged uncertainty amid accusations of political influence. The public broadcaster RTK fulfilled its legal obligations and offered all political parties equal access to free and sponsored airtime, despite challenges such as a dysfunctional board and insufficient funding.

The campaign coverage on broadcast media was tainted by partisan mudslinging reverberating across online media and social media channels. LVV boycotted three prominent private media outlets, citing persistent negative coverage of the party and the government. This, combined with scheduled debates that, due to no-shows, often included representatives from only one party, limited voters' ability to directly compare leading candidates and to make an informed choice. There was some independent journalistic scrutiny of candidates' policies, particularly on Dukagjini's "*Debat Pernime*", where campaign promises were challenged by real-time data and fact-checking. The ruling party participated only in seven out of 18 debates on monitored TV channels, and opposition parties prioritised criticising the government over substantive, policy-driven discussions. Regrettably, no debate was organised between the leading candidates.

The LGE mandates that all media provide fair and equitable coverage of political entities during the election campaign. The law sets limits on paid airtime and guarantees a minimum amount of free airtime for all contestants, which not all parties chose to utilise.<sup>3</sup> RTK1 provided equitable news coverage to the main political entities, LVV, PDK, LDK, and AAK-NISMA. Private TV channels also sought to provide balanced airtime to parties and candidates overall.

The Kosovo Serb community predominantly relies on broadcast media from Serbia for news. Although public broadcaster RTK2 is available in all ten Serb-majority municipalities across

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<sup>2</sup> Political entities receiving most fines were: LVV, PDK and LDK, followed by AAK-NISMA, SL and Coalition for Family.

<sup>3</sup> The EU EOM media monitoring unit monitored five TV channels: RTK1 (public), Dukagjini (private), Klan Kosova (private), T7 (private) and ATV (private) in prime-time broadcast 18:00-24:00 hours.



Kosovo and hosted debates, its limited viewership leaves non-majority opposition parties without an effective public TV channel, leaving minimal space for campaigning, apart from social media. SL refused to take part in any debate organised by RTK2. Most Serbian language online media covered the campaign, however, TV Most and Kosovo Online focused almost entirely on the activities of SL.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA**

Kosovo's internet penetration rate is estimated at over 95 per cent and around half the population is present on social media platforms. Facebook and Instagram are the most popular platforms, with over 700,000 users each. TikTok is a close third, with a growing number of users, surpassing 500,000. Social media remains unregulated, and the platforms operate primarily under their own policies and regulation mechanisms. However, content such as hate speech or incitement to violence falls under the criminal code and the law on protection against discrimination, as well as the Code of Conduct for Political Entities.

All political parties contesting the elections and over half of the candidates were present and campaigned on social media with varying intensity, mostly on Facebook and Instagram. Social media generally reflected the off-line campaigns of the parties, with little content developed specifically for this medium. The first half of the campaign was relatively calm, with a large majority of the content posted by political parties and candidates consisting of pictures and videos from campaign events, which brought online some of the contestants' harsh rhetoric. As political parties started publishing their programmes around the middle of the campaign, activity on social media picked up pace.

Facebook and Instagram ads were employed extensively by political parties, many candidates and several supporter and media pages. Over €250,000 was spent on promoting more than 7,000 election-related ads on Facebook and Instagram, including negative ads from third parties. Since the beginning of January, Russia-backed RT Balkan and *Sputnik Srbija* have published some 60 articles on the elections, some with narratives alleging manipulations against the Serbian community. The social media reach of the two outlets is limited by the fact that they are present only on X where their posts rarely reach more than 2,000 users.

## **PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN**

Kosovo laws that regulate women's political representation need further harmonisation. Gender equality is enshrined in the Constitution, the LGE (2023), and the Law on Gender Equality (2015). The LGE requires that party lists for parliamentary elections comprise at least 30 per cent of the less-represented gender, while the Law on Gender Equality sets a 50 per cent gender quota across all elected institutions. A recent judgement by the Constitutional Court stated that Article 28 of the LGE on gender quotas remained consistent with the Constitution, setting its quota as a minimum threshold. There were 443 women running for the 2025 elections, comprising 34.64 per cent of the 1,279 certified candidates. While this is in line with the 30 per cent gender quota, it represents only a negligible increase compared to the previous parliamentary elections. The CEC does not publish gender-disaggregated data on voter and candidate registration.

While women contestants from the main political entities sometimes headlined campaign events, men had a dominant presence at rallies, representing a significant majority of participants and speakers. About 28 per cent of participants in 75 rallies observed were women. The political discourse, particularly on social media platforms, was often hostile towards women candidates who were criticised for their looks or marital status. Women candidates had fewer resources than their male counterparts, less media coverage, and appeared in fewer televised debates. According to EU

EOM monitoring, women were featured 15 per cent of the prime time across five TV channels from 11 January to 8 February.

The LGE also provides a financial incentive to enhance women's representation by earmarking an additional one per cent of the amount of public funds to be allocated to a political entity for each mandate won by women over the quota. Although the LGE includes provisions encouraging women's participation in the election administration, they are not compulsory. Only two out of the 11 CEC members are women. Women also comprised 23 per cent of the MEC members, including 16 per cent of the chairpersons, while the EU EOM observed that 28.3 per cent of PSC members in the visited polling stations were women.

## **PARTICIPATION OF NON-MAJORITY COMMUNITIES**

The Constitution defines Kosovo as a multi-ethnic society placing significant emphasis on the rights of non-majority communities, notably by guaranteeing 20 seats in the Assembly. Positively, 20 of the 28 certified lists represent non-majority communities and four members of non-majority communities served in the outgoing Government. Except for Kosovo Serbs, interlocutors from non-majority political entities indicated that they were able to conduct their campaigns free from interference by authorities. Likewise, they did not record any instances of online harassment or discriminatory speech directed at their communities. While they reported good relations with the CEC and MECs, several parties were critical of the composition of the PSCs, which they deemed insufficiently representative. The CEC awareness-raising campaign on voting procedures in the Turkish, Bosniak and Roma languages was also released belatedly. In a break from past practices, the ballot design included the Albanian and Serbian languages in the header while omitting the Turkish language.

## **ELECTION OBSERVATION**

While the election legislation provides for election observation of the whole electoral process, the CEC delimited the accreditation registration period to the last month prior to elections, which caused misalignment with deadlines for many important phases of the electoral process. Positively, official accreditation was *de facto* required by the election administration only for access to electoral premises on election day, and observers did not report any obstacles to their work. In an inclusive process, the CEC accredited 22 domestic organisations, including the Institution of Ombudsperson, with a total of 1,193 observers as well as some 18,600 partisan observers. The largest civil society observation effort was led by observer coalition Democracy in Action, which deployed long-term observers to monitor the election campaign and pre-electoral environment.

## **POLLING AND COUNTING**

Election day was calm and generally polling proceeded smoothly, although isolated incidents in and around voting centres were reported by observers and media. While the voting was generally assessed positively, with some procedural errors, difficulties with the implementation of procedures became more apparent during the counting phase. Partisan observers were present in 97 per cent of the polling stations observed, while citizen observers were reported in 23 per cent. Women made up 28 per cent of polling staff, including 23 per cent of chairpersons. On the morning of election day, the CEC announced its decision, adopted on 8 February, to allow the use of expired identity documents for voter identification.

The opening of polls was assessed positively in 40 of 43 polling stations observed by the EU observers. Most observed polling stations opened on time, with only a few experiencing slight delays under 30 minutes due to disorganisation or insufficient understanding of procedures by PSC

members. While procedures were largely followed, some procedural oversights were observed, thus omitting important integrity safeguards such as recording of sensitive election materials. The conditional voting centres reported difficulties with access to the online registration platform, resulting in late opening and prolonged waiting time for voters.

Observers assessed the voting process as well-organised and transparent in 97 per cent of 412 polling stations visited. Voting procedures were generally respected, although gaps in training of polling staff were evidenced by a number of procedural errors. As additional security measure, indelible ink was used to mark voters to prevent multiple voting. However, the EU observers noted that voters' fingers were not consistently checked for traces of ink in 15 per cent of observations. Moreover, EU observers reported that the ink marking on fingers could be removed. Due to belated instructions on the use of expired documents, some voters were not allowed to vote in some cases.

The secrecy of vote was compromised in 5 per cent of polling stations observed due to polling station layout, positioning of polling booths and people standing too close to the booths, and in 17 per cent of observed polling stations due to the positioning of the camera. The EU observers reported instances of group voting in 4 per cent of observed polling stations. Insufficient or missing materials were reported in 11 per cent of polling stations, namely, complaints forms, insufficient ballots for conditional voting, and candidate lists. The posters with voting instructions were not displayed in 19 per cent of polling stations. In addition, the information was available mostly in Albanian language.

New procedures for assisted voting were not implemented consistently in 64 per cent of polling stations observed, with PSCs often allowing voters to be assisted without the required documentation or neglecting to record the reason for assistance. Some 38 per cent of the voting centres did not provide independent access for persons with reduced mobility and 17 per cent of polling stations had unsuitable layouts for these voters. PSCs did not receive or were not aware of the presence of tactile ballot guides for visually impaired voters in 45 per cent of polling stations observed.

The EU observers assessed the closing and counting process negatively in 8 of the 42 polling stations observed, due to procedural errors, although it was mostly evaluated as transparent. Prescribed integrity checks, such as counting and packing of unused and other sensitive materials, were not completed correctly in close to two thirds of the observations before the start of the count. Counting procedures were not performed in the prescribed order in more than a quarter of instances or were performed concurrently, negatively impacting transparency. During the count, validity of the ballots was not determined in a consistent manner or in line with the established rules in four instances and such determination was disputed by some PSC members in six cases. EU observers reported from eight counts that PSCs had difficulties in filling in the results forms as a result of insufficient understanding of the procedures or not having followed them properly. In seven polling stations, the PSCs did not publicly display copies of the results forms as required by law.

On election night, CEC IT systems were unavailable for an extended period, impacting the publication of preliminary results and the intake of election materials at municipal counting centres. To overcome these difficulties, the MECs and the CEC resorted to first processing the data manually. The EU observers assessed this phase as transparent and efficient despite the technical challenges.

The counting of preferential votes, initially scheduled for the morning of 10 February, was postponed due to persistent technical problems and reports of missing critical equipment and

software. Another important phase of the process, including the counting of out-of-Kosovo and conditional ballots, as well as ballots cast using mobile ballot boxes, had yet to begin at the time of writing.

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An electronic version of this preliminary statement is available on the EOM website: [eeas.europa.eu/eom-kosovo-2025](https://eeas.europa.eu/eom-kosovo-2025). For further information, please contact: Emilia Hinkkanen, EU EOM Press Officer, tel.: +383(0)45 536 911, email: [emilia.hinkkanen@eueomkosovo2025.eu](mailto:emilia.hinkkanen@eueomkosovo2025.eu).

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