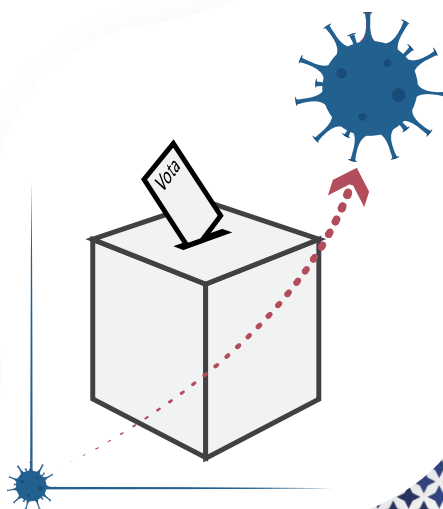


Elections in the time of pandemic

Management versus Consequences



Elections in the time of pandemic

Management versus Consequences

Pristina, March 2021

Copyright © 2021. Democracy for Development (D4D)

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purposes of criticism and review, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of D4D.

Prepared by:

Blerinë Ukshini

This report is published by the Democracy for Development (D4D) Institute with support from the British Embassy in Pristina. The contents of this document can in no way be considered to reflect the views of the British Embassy in Pristina.

Contents

Introduction.....	2
Elections, public trust and the impact of COVID-19	3
Organizing elections in the time of pandemic in countries of the region	6
<i>Serbia</i>	7
<i>Northern Macedonia</i>	8
<i>Montenegro</i>	10
Did Kosovo have the capacity to organize elections in a time of pandemic?.....	12
<i>Election campaign</i>	15
<i>Election observation</i>	19
<i>Organization of elections by the CEC</i>	21
Recommendations.....	24
References.....	26

List of Tables

Table 1 . Original schedule and moving of elections in Serbia, Northern Macedonia and Montenegro.	7
Table 2. Data for Serbia on the management of elections, turnout in elections and cases with Covid-19 before and two weeks after the elections.	8
Table 3. Data for Northern Macedonia on election management, turnout in elections and Covid-19 cases before and two weeks after the elections.	10
Table 4. Data for Montenegro on the election management, turnout in elections and cases with Covid-19 before and two weeks after elections.	11
Table 5. Situation with COVID-19 by periods	14
Table 6. Number of positive cases with COVID-19 in different periods (by regions).....	17
Table 7. Number of accredited observers in early elections for the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo 2017 and 2019 and 2021.....	20

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the way how many countries function in many areas. In addition to health and socio-economic damages which are undoubtedly the greatest of all, the situation has also affected political and institutional developments, especially in countries in which it was an election year for the national or local level. The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview on the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on organization and conduct of elections, including the risk of virus spreading. The paper elaborates on the importance of holding elections as a democratic form for governance, practices from countries in the region that held elections in 2020, and analysis Kosovo's capacity to organize elections in the time of pandemic.

Also, an important part of this paper are recommendations that the Political Entities, Candidates for Members of Municipal Assemblies, Electorate, Accredited Observers and Institutions responsible for organization and holding of elections should take into consideration in the next local elections that will be held this year in the time of pandemic.

The preparation of this document was based on the analysis of official data from countries that held elections during the Covid-19 pandemic, reports of national organizations, analysis of NIPHK statistical data on positive cases with Covid-19, and continuous monitoring of the election campaign and other activities related to early elections for the Assembly of Kosovo that were held on February 14, 2021.

Elections, public trust and the impact of COVID-19

Elections are one of the most powerful tools that proclaim the democracy of a country, enabling citizens to decide with their free, fair and secret vote about the representation in the government, both at local and national level. Depending on practices of countries, there are different forms of organization of election system and there are different types of elections. The Republic of Kosovo is a parliamentary system, where the members are elected through the vote of citizens in closed lists, for a regular four-year term. As for the local level, the electorate is given the opportunity to vote for the mayor in one ballot and for members of the Municipal Assembly in another ballot. The regular term of the mayor and of the members of Municipal Assembly is four years, with the possibility of re-election for future terms. All these are regulated with the Law no. 03/L-073 on General Elections in the Republic of Kosovo and the Law no. 03/L-072 on Local Elections in the Republic of Kosovo.

In addition to the two laws mentioned above, election procedures in Kosovo are also stipulated and regulated with Election rules adopted by the Central Election Commission (CEC), which are all fully in compliance with the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, as the highest legal act in the country. In addition to the laws and regulations for organization of elections, state institutions have signed a Memorandum of Cooperation for election process that has been signed by: Central Election Commission (CEC), State Prosecutor (SP), Kosovo Police (KP), Election Complaints and Appeals Panel (ECAP), Kosovo Judicial Council (KJC). This cooperation started in 2013 to be upgraded in 2016, and most recently in September 2020, when the Independent Media Commission (IMC) became signatory to this memorandum. The purpose of this memorandum initiated by

the Democracy for Development (D4D) Institute was to increase the level of public trust, enhance transparency and closer and more functional inter-institutional coordination¹.

Elections are considered as one of the best democratic instruments for governance and their importance is indisputable as they make different political entities compete with each other and leaves their election up to the will of the people. However, there was much to be desired in regard to how prepared the Kosovo state institutions were to manage the organization and holding of elections in a time of pandemic, on one hand, and entities with their election campaigns, on the other, in terms of protection from Covid-19.

On 6 January 2021 Acting President of Kosovo announced early elections for the Assembly of Kosovo and scheduled February 14, 2021 as the election day. Since the pre-campaign is not regulated by the law on general elections nor by CEC regulations, political parties and their members have since that day begun their unofficial campaigning. The media reported on door-to-door campaigning and meetings even with larger groups despite measures imposed by the outgoing government. Measures were not respected by any political party, not even by the political parties that had taken the decision for such measures. Given the time period, election day, also known as "Z DAY" was much better managed than the pre-election and election campaigns.

The public trust on election process cycle is very important as it determines the turnout which in turn reflects how a country will function in the term for which the elections are called. Therefore, in a time of pandemic it would be required (and certainly it will be required for this year's local elections) to analyze the capacities for situation management, there

¹ <https://d4d-ks.org/aktivitetet/nenshkruhet-memorandumi-bashkepunimit-per-procesin-zgjedhor/>

should be inter-institutional coordination and instruction from Ministry of Health and NIPHK on whether conditions are in accordance with their rules and decisions on measures against the spreading of Covid-19. In this case, a task force should be established in Kosovo to manage elections in the time of pandemic, which will include various experts in order to develop, implement and monitor an action plan. This task force, in addition to serving for local elections that will be held in autumn of this year, will also be an orientation for the future actions in similar situations.

Organizing elections in the time of pandemic in countries of the region

If we analyze the world statistics related to elections, based on reports of the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance² by the end of October 2020, 74 countries organized elections, of which 36.5% were in Europe and the Western Balkans. Although their organization was postponed for some time due to the increased number of cases and health crises in these countries, in most of them they were held during the same year.

Even countries of the region like: Serbia, Northern Macedonia and Montenegro had an election year. Like other European countries, they decided to postpone the elections for a certain period of time. Serbia had initially planned to hold elections on 26 April 2020, and moved them to 21 June 2020; Northern Macedonia under normal circumstances would hold elections on 12 April 2020, while it postponed their organization to 15 July 2020; Montenegro had also planned to hold elections on 5 April but held them on 30 August 2020. These changes of dates were a result of the number of positive Covid-19 cases of their citizens and residents.

² <https://www.idea.int/news-media/multimedia-reports/global-overview-covid-19-impact-elections>

	Originally scheduled for	Moved and held on
Serbia	26 April 2020	21 June 2020
Northern Macedonia	12 April 2020	15 July 2017
Montenegro	5 April 2020	30 August 2020

Table 1 . Original schedule and moving of elections in Serbia, Northern Macedonia and Montenegro.

Serbia

Serbia was the first country in the Balkans to organize elections in the time of Covid-19 pandemic, holding parliamentary elections on 21 June 2020. Though in pandemic times, elections were not much different in terms of the way they were organized: they were held only in one day, and the polling hours were the same as in the past³ from 07:00 am to 20:00 pm⁴. The people turnout in these elections was 7.77% lower than in previous elections, where the turnout was 56.07%⁵, while percentage of turnout in these elections reached 48.93%⁶. Due to the pandemic and better management, and in order not to bring too many people together in polling stations, number of polling stations increased from 8,377⁷ to 8386⁸. However, despite the increased number of polling stations, use of masks and disinfectants, the number of positive cases with Covid-19 for

³https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/2016_ifes_serbia_parliamentary_election_s_faqs.pdf

⁴https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/ifes_faqs_elections_in_serbia_2020_parliamentary_elections_june_2020.pdf

⁵ <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/country-view/253/40>

⁶ <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/country-view/253/40>

⁷ <https://crta.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/PRELIMINARY-REPORT-ON-THE-ELECTION-DAY-OBSERVATION-2016.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.dw.com/sq/zgjedhjet-parlamentare-t%C3%AB-serbis%C3%AB-mbahen-edhe-n%C3%AB-kosov%C3%AB/a-53880547>

two weeks increased for 3,328, from 12,803⁹ individuals who resulted positive with Covid-19, two weeks after the elections this number reached 16,131 infected¹⁰.

Serbia

Covid-19 cases before the elections	12.803
Covid-19 cases two weeks after the elections	16.131
Turnout in the previous elections	3,778,923 (56.07%)
Turnout in elections during the Covid-19 pandemic	3,221,908 (48.93%)
Polling hours before the pandemic	07:00- 20:00
Polling hours during the pandemic	07:00- 20:00
Number of polling stations before the pandemic	8,377
Number of polling stations during the pandemic	8,386

Table 2. Data for Serbia on the management of elections, turnout in elections and cases with Covid-19 before and two weeks after the elections.

Northern Macedonia

Northern Macedonia held parliamentary elections on 13, 14 and 15 July 2020. The competent bodies announced that the elections would be held with additional safety measures and that the public health would not be put at risk. Based on situation analysis, elections in Northern Macedonia were not conducted in one day, as has always been the practice, but they were conducted with an extended procedure of three days in a row. On the first election day (July 13) voted people who were in self-isolation due to positive testing for Covid-19;

⁹ <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/serbia/>

¹⁰ <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/serbia/>

on the second day (July 14) voted sick persons, and all other persons whose voting is conducted according to the Election Code of the country, while the rest of population who were not tested at all or were not tested positive with Covid-19 voted on the third day (July 15). In addition to increased number of days, competent authorities decided to extend the polling hours, from the common practice in the past of voting until 19:00¹¹ in these elections people were able to exercise their right to vote until 21:00¹². Despite the extension of number of hours and days, the number of polling stations in these elections was smaller for 44 in order to observe the pandemic measures. Although the polling duration was much longer, the impact of the pandemic and fear of infection were very much present among the citizens. Turnout was 14.77% lower than in previous elections. In 2016 the voter turnout was 66.79%¹³, while in these elections in 2020 the turnout was 52.02%. Even though the necessary measures had been taken, the trajectory of infected people who tested positive with Covid-19 went up. Before the presidential elections in Northern Macedonia, there were a total of 8,332¹⁴ persons who had tested positive, while two weeks after the elections the total number of infected people was 10,504¹⁵, or 2,172 that were specifically after the election date. Although we cannot say that these cases are specifically due to elections, again the number of infected people for a short period and the turnout of 943,750 may be one of the factors for increased number of cases.

¹¹ <https://www.dw.com/sq/maqedoni-e-veriut-hapen-votimet-p%C3%ABr-zgjedhjet-parlamentare/a-54154841>

¹² <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/n-macedonia-holds-snap-polls-amid-pandemic/1909817>

¹³ <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/country-view/207/40>

¹⁴ <https://koronavirus.gov.mk/stat>

¹⁵ <https://koronavirus.gov.mk/stat>

Northern Macedonia

Covid-19 cases before the elections	8332
Covid-19 cases two weeks after the elections	10504
Turnout in the previous elections	1,191,851 (66.79%)
Turnout in elections during the Covid-19 pandemic	943,750 (52.02%)
Polling hours before the pandemic	07:00-19:00
Polling hours during the pandemic	07:00-21:00
Number of polling stations before the pandemic	3,524
Number of polling stations during the pandemic	3,480

Table 3. Data for Northern Macedonia on election management, turnout in elections and Covid-19 cases before and two weeks after the elections.

Montenegro

Montenegro has recently, on 30 August 2020, organized parliamentary elections. Similar to Serbia, elections in Montenegro were held in a single day and did not reflect the practices of Northern Macedonia in extending elections for three consecutive days. The only difference was in the extension of polling hours, where from 13 hours as was the practice in previous elections¹⁶ there were 14 hours, as the polling stations opened at 07:00 in the morning and closed at 20:00¹⁷. In addition to extending the time for people to exercise the right to vote, there was an increase in the number of polling stations from 1,199 in the last election, to 1217. Despite the fact that in Serbia and Northern Macedonia the

¹⁶ <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/3/d/295511.pdf>

¹⁷ https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/ifes_faqs_elections_in_montenegro_2020_parliamentary_elections_august_2020.pdf

turnout in these elections was significantly lower, the opposite happened in Montenegro, as there was an increase of 3.24% of number of citizens who exercised their right to vote. More specifically, in the previous elections voted 388,220 people or 73.41%¹⁸, while in these elections 413,952 persons or 76.65%¹⁹ casted their votes. In terms of positive cases with Covid-19, if we compare the election day with two weeks after their conduct we see an increase of total number for 1,985, or from 4,727²⁰ how many were before the elections to 6,712²¹ positive cases two weeks after their conduct.

Montenegro

Covid-19 cases before the elections	4,727
Covid-19 cases two weeks after the elections	6,712
Turnout in the previous elections	388,220 (73.41%)
Turnout in elections during the Covid-19 pandemic	413,952 (76.65%)
Polling hours before the pandemic	07:00-19:00
Polling hours during the pandemic	07:00-20:00
Number of polling stations before the pandemic	1,199
Number of polling stations during the pandemic	1,217

Table 4. Data for Montenegro on the election management, turnout in elections and cases with Covid-19 before and two weeks after elections.

¹⁸ http://archive.ipu.org/parline/reports/2385_E.htm

¹⁹ <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/country-view/203/40>

²⁰ <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/montenegro/>

²¹ <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/montenegro/>

Did Kosovo have the capacity to organize elections in a time of pandemic?

Although 2020 was not an election year in Kosovo, due to political changes as a result of October 2019 elections and delays in establishing the government until early 2020, mayoral elections had to be held in two of its municipalities. More specifically, Municipality of Podujeva and Municipality of North Mitrovica had remained without their mayors due to resignation of their existing mayors after being appointed as ministers in the Government of Kosovo.

The situation with Covid-19 made it impossible to hold elections in these two municipalities even after the decision of the President of Kosovo, as the person responsible to announce elections based on the powers provided to him by the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo and the Law on Local Elections in the Republic of Kosovo. Based on the consultation and recommendations of the NIPHK and the Ministry of Health, it was decided to postpone these elections for an indefinite period until the situation normalizes. However, although the situation with the pandemic was not yet stabilized and the country was facing a second wave and there were enormous numbers of positive cases with Covid-19, the then President of the country decided that the elections in these two municipalities are to be held on November 29, 2020.

At the time when the decision was made to postpone the elections in these municipalities (March 14, 2020) there were very few active cases with Covid-19 in Kosovo, while when the decision was taken to hold the elections, every day there were over 500 new positive cases in the entire Kosovo, including in the two municipalities where local elections were to be held. Municipality of Podujeva, among others, was considered as a red area, or an area with a higher risk of virus spreading due to the increased number of active cases. In the pre-election period there were about 400 active cases in this Municipality

and over 700 persons who had recovered. Whereas from November 19, 2020 (10 days before the elections) to December 9, 2020 (10 days after the elections), there were 569 new cases.

Although the election campaigning by candidates for Mayor was conducted in smaller groups - door to door visits and without big electoral rallies, on the election day in most polling stations the decisions of the Ministry of Health and Administrative Instruction no.03/2020 on protective measures to prevent COVID-19 infection for voters and election staff on election day, adopted by the Central Election Commission on November 17, 2020, were not complied with. Among the main measures that were not complied with was the measure to wear the mask properly, covering the nose and mouth, to respect physical distance of 1.5 meters from other people and to disinfect hands after casting the ballot.

This should provide a clear picture for state institutions and political entities on what to do in the upcoming elections, which were held not long after that as in the beginning of the year, on January 6, 2020, they were announced by the Acting President. Early elections for the Assembly of Kosovo were held on February 14, 2021 and despite them being assessed as free and democratic in terms of the voting process, they had an impact on increasing the number of new cases of COVID-19 in the country.

	New cases	Recovered persons	Total active cases	Number of tests
Beginning of 2021	174	445	51,502	1,224
Announcement of early elections for the Assembly of Kosovo	301	457	52,634	1,459
Official start of the election campaign	341	207	61,086	2,357
Election day	246	201	64,341	3,031
Two weeks after the end of the election campaign	445	264	68,351	2,570
Two weeks after the election day	453	206	69,230	3,680
One month from the beginning of the election campaign	568	295	70,753	2,532

Table 5. Situation with COVID-19 by periods

Kosovo had a good start of new year in terms of the situation with the COVID-19 pandemic. As of January 1, 2021, out of 1,224 tests only 174 people tested positive, while 445 others recovered, while there were 51,502 active cases in total at the national level. A few days later, on January 6, when the early elections were announced, out of 1,459 tests there were 301 new positive cases, 457 recovered, while the total number of

infected persons reached 52,634. On February 3, when the official election campaign started, out of 2,357 tests, 341 people tested positive, 2017 people recovered and there were 61,086 active cases in total. On the election day on February 14, 2021, out of 3,031 tests, 246 people tested positive and 201 others recovered, while number of active cases was increasing day by day, reaching 64,341. The impact of election campaign had begun to be reflected in the number of positive cases with Covid-19 two weeks later, when on February 26 out of 2,570 tests there were a total of 445 new positive cases, 264 recovered while the total number of active cases was 68,351. Two weeks after the elections on February 28 out of 3,680 administered tests, which was also the largest number of tests in these periods, 453 people tested positive, 206 others recovered while the total number of cases was 69,230. On March 3, one month after the start of election campaign, although the number of tests was lower, 2,532 in total, 568 people tested positive, 295 recovered and total number of active Covid-19 cases reached 70,753. Statistics of the NIPHK do not include data from Serb-majority municipalities.

These figures prove once again the impact that elections held in the time of Covid-19 pandemic had, with special emphasis on election campaign which in most of the municipalities brought together a large number of supporters.

Election campaign

In addition to the election day, election campaign is one of the most important aspects of the election process. The election campaign and notification of political events are regulated in Chapter VII of the Law on General Elections. Article 44, General provisions specifies that political entities have the right: a) to organize and hold political meetings/events, roundtables, press conferences, speeches, or any other similar activities, at which they can freely express their opinions in order to gain support of their voters; b) publish

and distribute placards, posters and other material related to an election campaign; and c) campaign through any television, radio or cable operator, as well as through journals, newspapers, phone network, postal system or any other means of advertisement, in accordance with CEC rules and other applicable laws.²²

Item a) of this article turned out to provide for a right that does not go in favor of general public health in pandemic times. Election campaign by political entities was not conducted in accordance with decisions on protective measures against COVID-19 pandemic. Political entities as a whole or the candidates for member of parliament did not respect the social distancing, wearing of masks and use of disinfectants. Although based on decisions of the Outgoing Government of Kosovo, respectively the Ministry of Health, only 30 people were allowed to gather in closed spaces, while in open places only 50 people, the number of supporters in meetings held in municipalities at the invitation of political parties was many times higher. In addition to meetings called by political parties, meetings of individual candidates at homes and restaurants did not respect any decision taken against the COVID-19 pandemic.

²² <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2544>

	<i>Pristina Region</i>	<i>Mitrovica Region</i>	<i>Peja Region</i>	<i>Prizren Region</i>	<i>Ferizaj Region</i>	<i>Gjilani Region</i>	<i>Gjakova Region</i>	Total new cases
Beginning of 2021	100	26	4	11	15	13	5	174
Announcement of early elections for the Assembly of Kosovo	194	31	19	12	18	12	15	301
Official start of the election campaign	164	32	19	78	14	20	14	341
Election day	137	18	30	20	1	14	26	246
Two weeks after the end of the election campaign	229	34	42	41	16	34	49	445
Two weeks after the election day	242	30	52	37	13	40	39	453
One month from the beginning of the election campaign	310	51	48	20	29	63	47	568

Table 6. Number of positive cases with COVID-19 in different periods (by regions)

The highest number of positive COVID-19 cases in different periods: Beginning of 2021; Announcement of early elections for the Assembly of Kosovo; Official start of the election campaign; Election day; Two weeks after the end of the election campaign; Two weeks after the election day and one month after the start of election campaign, was in the Pristina Region, followed by Mitrovica, Prizren and Peja regions. In certain cases, also Gjilan and Gjakova regions.

Considering that local elections will also be held in autumn of this year, number of candidates for members of Municipal Assemblies will be much higher than the one for Members of the Assembly of Kosovo. Therefore, for such cases, the responsible institutions in cooperation with political entities should develop an adequate strategic plan for all parties, not to undermine the democratic right of political entities to campaign, but also not to put the public health at risk. Such a strategy should be a long-term strategy, in order to be ready to be implemented in similar cases of future pandemics or emergencies. One of the options to conduct the campaign of political entities is online, using new and traditional media, participation in public debates, advertising in portals, billboards, assigning a minimum number of people in meetings, always in compliance with government measures, and cancellation of all bigger rallies.

However, given the different age groups in Kosovo and distribution of people in different areas, the electorate does not always have access to the so-called online campaigning. Therefore, in order not to penalize political entities and for elections to be as democratic and legitimate as possible, decisions of the Central Election Commission must be in accordance with the Law on Elections but also in line with recommendations of the Ministry of Health. In such case all larger rallies should be avoided, there should be a limited number of people in physical meetings and all other applicable decisions should be complied with, such as wearing the mask properly and social distancing, as the two

main measures for protection against the Covid-19 pandemic.

Election observation

Close observation of the election process is allowed in all elections. A large number of different local and international organisations participate in this process. Observers are accredited by the Central Election Commission, which initially sets deadlines for application and after reviewing their documentation, they are voted for by the CEC members.

Number of observers has increased from one election year to another, especially if we compare the last three elections. Two elections were held in 2017, early elections for the Assembly of Republic of Kosovo in June and local elections in October. Even within this year there was an increase in the number of observers where in the early elections for the Assembly of Kosovo there were 29,722 observers in total, while in local elections there were 33,863 observers. A bigger increase in the number of observers was in October 2019 where the CEC accredited a total of 35,103 observers. While in this year's elections, the CEC accredited a smaller number compared to the previous three elections. The CEC accredited a total of 29,200 observers, of which the largest number were from political entities that accredited 26,635 observers, or 8210 more observers. Local organizations had a smaller number of observers compared to the previous elections for 2441, same as with international organizations that had minus 236 observers.

**Total accredited observers in early elections for the
Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo**

	2017	2019	2021
Embassies	161	154	146
International organizations	300	273	37
Local organizations	8,892	4,154	1,713
Political parties	4,049	18,425	26,635
Coalitions	15,788	11,457	0
International Institutions	27	0	0
Local Institutions	1	0	43
Local/ international media	504	622	626
Independent candidates	0	17	0
Consulates	0	1	0
Initiatives	0	0	0
	29,722	35,103	29,200

Table 7. Number of accredited observers in early elections for the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo 2017 and 2019 and 2021.

In case the situation with Covid-19 pandemic continues to remain the same in the next local elections, number of accredited observers should be reduced, especially from among political entities, as the possibility of spreading the virus by such a big number would be extremely high. Of course, never putting to question the importance of observers in election process both on the election day and their active observation at the Counting and Results Center.

The Central Election Commission and Office for Registration of Political Parties, which reviews applications and sends them to the CEC for approval, should analyze the number of polling stations and number of observers/ applicant organizations and based on that set a maximum for each type of accredited observers.

In addition to election day and a proportionate number with polling stations, no more than 3 representatives of an observer organization (one for each shift) should be allowed a day in the CRC. This is due to the very large number of permanent and regular staff in the CRC and the limited space which is not suitable for work in times of a pandemic.

Organization of elections by the CEC

The elections held on February 14, 2021 were considered as democratic and with no significant issues. However, apart from the election day, CEC manages the entire election cycle.

To avoid the risk of spreading the COVID-19 pandemic, CEC adopted the administrative instruction for protection against the Covid-19 pandemic. This instruction was intended to provide for implementation of protective measures against infection with COVID-19 for voters and election staff in areas where elections are held, including the counting of ballots at polling stations and handing over of election material.²³ The instruction provided for protective measures for electoral staff in places where the elections will take place; protective measures for voters during election process; protective measures during the counting process at the polling station; handover of election material from Polling Station Committees (PSCs) to Municipal Election Commission (MEC); Handover of sensitive election material by the MEC to the CRC.

Although the administrative instruction also served for local elections held in the Municipality of Podujeva and Municipality of North Mitrovica and recently for Early Elections for the Assembly of Kosovo, actually it was not taken into consideration by voters or even by commissioners

²³ https://www.kqz-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/1154-2020-Vendim-per-miratimin-e-udhezimit-adm-nr-03-2020_17-11-2020_1.pdf

and observers.

The CEC also adopted the Administrative Instruction for identification, confirmation and voting of persons who due to a positive testing with COVID-19 were under house quarantine and persons who were assigned the measure of self-isolation. This instruction aimed to determine how to register voters infected with COVID-19, and those in self-isolation whose permanent residence is in municipalities where elections were taking place; how to exercise the right to vote through a mobile team on the election day, and for the second round of elections where applicable; a description of steps for applying protective measures that voters and members of mobile team must observe²⁴.

For February 14 elections, the CEC deployed 104 mobile teams in the entire territory of Kosovo, which enabled citizens to exercise their right to vote despite being in isolation.

Something that should not happen in these elections was the reduction of number of polling stations by the CEC from 2,547 in the previous elections of 2019 to 2,382 in these elections. Actually, the CEC should increase the number of polling stations in order to avoid crowds and long waits in front of polling stations which threaten the spread of COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to number of polling stations, polling hours should be extended, so that the polling stations do not close at 19:00 but at 21:00. Since such a practice was not applied in these elections, at least in the next local elections it should be taken into consideration.

²⁴ https://www.kqz-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/1092-2020-Vendim-per-udhezim_al.pdf

Turnout in previous elections	826,916 voters (44.56%)
Turnout in elections during the Covid-19 pandemic	903,379 voters (48.78%)
Polling hours before the pandemic	07:00-19:00
Polling hours during the pandemic	07:00-19:00
Number of polling stations before the pandemic	2,547
Number of polling stations during the pandemic	2,382

Recommendations

- › Emergency situations are not always regulated with national laws and regulations, so in cases like Covid-19 pandemic, one should act carefully, especially when it comes to elections. The credibility of elections, citizens trust, democratic and transparent process and public health must be a paramount in any situation.
- › Given the current course of the pandemic which is not yet known when will end, and given that local elections could take place this year in such a situation, authorities responsible for organizing elections should:
 - Establish a task force for organization and management of elections at the time of Covid-19 pandemic, which will include various experts for drafting the action plan and its implementation and monitoring;
 - Prepare a strategic plan/ guideline for organizing and holding elections in the time of pandemic;
 - Take measures in advance for organization of election campaign and electoral rallies (by moving into online campaigning and allowing gatherings only in small numbers (max 5 people), complying with protective measures - mask and distance);
 - Institutions that have signed memorandum of cooperation should continue cooperating even more closely not only on the election day but also during the election campaign and other preparation phases;
 - Political entities should reflect on how the campaign was conducted and the negative impact it had on increasing number of positive cases with Covid-19;
 - Reduce number of accredited observers, especially from political entities;

- Ensure additional space or reduce number of staff and observers in the Counting and Results Center;
- Extend the polling hours until 21:00;
- CEC to increase number of polling stations.

References

- <https://d4d-ks.org/aktivitetet/nenshkruhet-memorandumibashkepunimit-per-procesin-zgjedhor/>
- <https://www.idea.int/news-media/multimedia-reports/global-overview-covid-19-impact-elections>
- https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/2016_ifes_serbia_parliamentary_elections_faqs.pdf
- https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/ifes_faqs_elections_in_serbia_2020_parliamentary_elections_june_2020.pdf
- <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/country-view/253/40>
- <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/country-view/253/40>
- <https://cрта.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/PRELIMINARY-REPORT-ON-THE-ELECTION-DAY-OBSERVATION-2016.pdf>
- <https://www.dw.com/sq/zgjedhjet-parlamentare-t%C3%AB-serbis%C3%AB-mbahen-edhe-n%C3%AB-kosov%C3%AB/a-53880547>
- <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/serbia/>
- <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/serbia/>
- <https://www.dw.com/sq/maqedoni-e-veriut-hapen-votimet-p%C3%AB-zgjedhjet-parlamentare/a-5415484>
- <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/n-macedonia-holds-snap-polls-amid-pandemic/1909817>
- <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/country-view/207/40>
- <https://koronavirus.gov.mk/stat>
- <https://koronavirus.gov.mk/stat>
- <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/3/d/295511.pdf>
- https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/ifes_faqs_elections_in_montenegro_2020_parliamentary_elections_august_2020.pdf
- http://archive.ipu.org/parline/reports/2385_E.htm
- <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/country-view/203/40>
- <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/montenegro/>
- <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/montenegro/>
- <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2530>

List of publications

Elections and political parties:

1 D4D Institute. September 2011 Breakdown of electoral trends 2000-2010.

2 D4D Institute. March 2012. An impression of reform: How to restore trust on elections?

3 Malazogu, Leon, Visar Sutaj and Drilon Gashi. November 2012. Kaçanik Voters' List Audit: A Sample for Kosovo

4 Malazogu, Leon and Selatin Kllokoqi. February 2013. Lessons Learned for Future Elections - An Analysis of Mayoral By-elections in Ferizaj and Kaçanik?

5 Malazogu, Leon and Selatin Kllokoqi. Sept 2013. Translation of trust - Perception of Representation and Participation.

6 Malazogu, Leon and Selatin Kllokoqi. Sept 2013. Electoral Deform - Two years later, reform is back to square zero

7 Leon Malazogu and Brenna Gautam; With contribution by Rezarta Delibashzade and Ngadhujim Halilaj. 26 November 2014. Kosovo's Political Compass - Mapping Party Ideology

8 Dardan Berisha with the contribution of Driton Qeriqi, Mjellma Hapçiu-Alijaj and Rina Vokshi, July 2015. Bringing Justice to Elections

9 Leon Malazogu with the contribution of Ngadhujim Halilaj and Rezarta Delibashzade, July 2015 Election Trends 2000-2014 - A Numerical Analysis of Participation and Representation

10 Thomas Atherton, Driton Qeriqi and Rina Vokshi, February 2016 Manual for Gender Equality in the Electoral Process

11 Dr. Besnik Pula, May 2018. Kosovo's Democracy at Risk?

Party system volatility, government duration and institutional crisis in Kosovo.

12 D4D, September 2018. Electoral Reform Agenda: Towards Real Representation.

13 D4D and Democracy Plus (D), October 2018. Out-of-Country Voting: Policy Review and Practical Recommendations.

Publications from other fields may be found on the official website **www.d4d-ks.org**

Cataloging in publication - **(CIP)**

National Library of Kosovo "Pjetër Bogdani"

324:005(047)

324:616-036.22(047)

Elections in the time of pandemic : Management versus Consequences / prepared by Blerinë Ukshini. - Prishtinë :Demokraci për zhvillim. - 41 f. ; 21 cm.

1.Ukshini, Blerinë

ISBN 978-9951-823-07-4

Democracy for Development (D4D) is a think tank organisation established in 2010 with the belief that democracy is a precondition for development. D4D's mission is to influence the development of public policies to accelerate the socio-economic development of the country, improve governance and strengthen democratic culture in Kosovo.

D4D's vision is to promote an active and educated society, which participates in the public space and uses it for representation and decision-making, to discuss and build consensus on the distribution of resources that are efficient, fast, long-term and leading to impartial development.

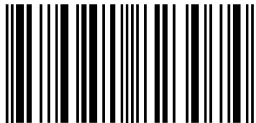
For more information about D4D activities please visit our website: www.d4d-ks.org.

This paper is supported by:



British Embassy
Pristina

ISBN 978-9951-823-07-4



9 789951 823074