

New government in Kosovo: the end of the political crisis

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On 11 February, at its first session following the December parliamentary elections, the Assembly of Kosovo passed a vote of confidence in the new cabinet, headed by Albin Kurti, leader of the victorious left-wing Self-Determination (Alb. *Vetëvendosje*) alliance, which forms the core of the ruling majority coalition. He became prime minister for the third time, continuing the agenda of the previous term, although his government has undergone some personnel changes. In his policy speech, he focused on the need to increase social and defence spending.

The formation of a stable government signals the end of a year-long political crisis, raising hopes that the new cabinet will resume reforms, secure the release of frozen EU funds, and rebuild trust among Western partners. The most immediate challenge for parliament is to elect a new president.

Commentary

- **The prolonged political crisis undermined trust in Kosovo's democratic institutions and strained the country's relations with the US and the EU.** It dragged on for a year primarily due to Kurti's uncompromising stance (see '[Election in Kosovo: success for Albin Kurti and uncertain prospects for his continued rule](#)'). For many months, he refused to support the candidate for deputy speaker of parliament put forward by the main Serb minority political party, effectively paralysing the Assembly of Kosovo. Subsequently, lacking a majority, he declined to form an alliance with any other party. As a result, his cabinet lost a confidence vote, triggering snap elections. Only after these elections and the formation of a majority coalition (see '[Snap elections in Kosovo: Kurti regains support](#)') did he relent and endorse the candidate of the pro-Belgrade Serbian List for the post of deputy speaker. These political tensions were compounded by the disclosure of unprecedented electoral fraud. Consequently, it proved necessary to recount the ballots, which delayed the certification of the results by more than a month.
- **The prime minister has pledged to implement pro-European reforms, and his first steps indicate a desire to open a new chapter in relations with the EU.** Even before the elections, the European Commission launched a procedure to lift the sanctions imposed on Kosovo in 2023 following riots involving the Serb minority in the north of the country. However, the local economy has lost €230 million in EU funds irreversibly because of those incidents. Meanwhile, after more than a year, the Assembly of Kosovo ratified a framework agreement with the EU governing the use of funds from grants and loans under the EU's Growth Plan for the Western Balkans. It did so just two days after passing

the vote of confidence. Within the next few weeks, it is also expected to appoint a national Growth Plan coordinator to secure an initial 7% prepayment, totalling €61.8 million under the programme. By the end of June, the Assembly intends to adopt 13 reforms to unlock a further €96 million.

- **The government's main ambition is to achieve EU membership, but the slim chances of normalising relations with Serbia make that prospect highly distant.** Resolving the dispute would require revolutionary changes in approach on both sides of the border. Although Kurti asserted in his policy speech that dialogue with Serbia was possible, the past continues to weigh heavily on the talks. The EU has extended the mandate of its current Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue, but for now efforts to rebuild relations amount to little more than vague talk of a potential meeting between the leaders of the two countries in Brussels. On 22 January, during the first trilateral meeting at the official level in more than a year, only the issue of missing persons from the Kosovo war was discussed. Neither Pristina nor Belgrade has made any significant goodwill gestures over the past two years.
- **Certain conciliatory statements towards Belgrade have been accompanied by pledges to increase defence spending.** This stems from a persistent sense of threat from Serbia (see '[Zbrojny incydent na północy Kosowa](#)') and ongoing reforms aimed at transforming the Kosovo Security Force into a conventional army, a ten-year process scheduled to conclude in 2028. Kosovo has strengthened its position in this area by deepening defence and security cooperation with Albania and Croatia since March 2025. This has also brought the country closer to NATO membership. However, the fact that not all members of the Alliance recognise Kosovo's independence remains the principal obstacle to its accession. Moreover, increasing defence spending from the current level of 2.1% of GDP (see '[Kosovo Military Power Ranking 2025](#)') is a divisive issue in one of Europe's poorest countries. Kosovo struggles with high youth unemployment at 19.5% and its economy remains heavily dependent on remittances from the diaspora, which amounted to 14% of GDP in 2024 (see '[Remittances in Kosovo \(2015–2024\)](#)').
- **Parliament must elect a president by 4 March to avoid snap elections.** On the one hand, Self-Determination has taken swift decisions on key matters in recent weeks. On the other hand, Kurti has yet to name a candidate he would endorse. The incumbent, Vjosa Osmani, has expressed a desire to remain in office for a second five-year term, but relations between her and the prime minister are cooler than they were in 2021. The election of a head of state requires the presence of two-thirds of MPs, meaning that the prime minister will have to persuade part of the opposition to attend the session.