

**EUROPEAN DIALOGUE &
DEMOCRACY ASSOCIATION (EDDA)
ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION**



**FINAL REPORT
KOSOVO
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS 9 FEBRUARY 2025**

INTRODUCTION

On the 9th of February 2025, parliamentary elections were held in Kosovo¹. This marks a milestone in Kosovo's democratic history as the first regular elections since it declared independence in 2008, making Albin Kurti's government the first to complete a full four-year term in office. In total 28 political registered entities competed for 120 seats in the national assembly.

European Dialogue and Democracy Association (EDDA) deployed a team of 15 short-term observers (STOs) to observe the election, whereof the majority of the participants were experienced election observers. The mission was headed by Venesa Hulaj, Isabel Bogen Ivarsøy, Lisa Shoshi, and Tea Vucic.

Ahead of the election, all STOs underwent the OSCE/ODIHR comprehensive e-learning course for election observers as per EDDA's guidelines. The observers were also given an introduction into the election regulations of Kosovo and the observation tools which EDDA use on election day. In the days leading up to the election, the EDDA-delegation met with a range of local stakeholders and organisations to facilitate a more holistic understanding of the political and electoral context in the country.

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

CHANGES TO VOTING REGULATIONS

Since the last parliamentary elections in Kosovo in 2021, a comprehensive set of new election regulations have been implemented, largely based on EU recommendations. In the period leading up to the election, the Central Election Commission of Kosovo (CEC) provided information about the new voting procedures on their official social media channels, including both infographics and videos. The CEC did not only provide information on how to mark the ballots, but also on how to spot and report irregularities in the polling centres, which ID was required of the voter, how to register for assisted voting and more.

Changes in election regulations included marking the voter's right thumb with a simple black marker to show they had voted, whereas voters were previously marked with invisible ink. The CEC also introduced surveillance cameras in the polling stations. The cameras were not broadcasting live, and were meant to record the polling station without infringing on the security of the vote. Although the cameras were utilised for the first time in 2024 during municipal referendums in northern Kosovo, this is the first time they have been applied in a national election. On election day, EDDA's observers took notice of the implementation of these two changes in practice.

Lastly, new counting procedures were introduced. Ballots were to be transported to a central municipal station for the counting of preferential votes, after the counting of party votes at the polling stations. EDDA's STOs were unfortunately not able to observe this last part of the counting process, nor the counting of the diaspora votes due to its time-frame.

ELECTION DAY

EDDA's STOs were divided into 6 observation teams deployed across 6 different municipalities. Three teams were accompanied by local interpreters, while two included observers speaking Albanian. The remaining team was aided by a Bosnian speaker for parts of election day. In total 54 polling stations were visited during the election day. In addition to observing polling stations in the capital of Pristina, STOs also visited Graçanicë/Gracanica, Lipjan/Lipljan, Obiliq/Obilic,

Podujevë/Podujevo and Fushë Kosova/Kosovo Polje. These municipalities had polling stations with registered voters from various minority ethnic groups, including Serb, Roma and Ashkali peoples. This permitted the EDDA-delegation to gain a more well-rounded view of the election process in both rural and urban areas, and different ethnic majority areas.

OPENING PROCEDURES

The STOs observed opening procedures in 6 polling stations in the municipality of Pristina. The teams arrived at the polling stations between 06:19 and 06:45. All necessary voting material was reported to be present in each of the polling stations upon opening. Cameras were carried in, sometimes accompanied by local police, and turned on before the opening of the polling stations. 5 out of 6 observed polling stations opened on time, at 07:00, with the exception of one that opened at 07:14. When later asked, polling station officials (PSOs) in 4 of the 54 polling stations reported to have opened late.

There were some minor procedural issues reported, mainly related to confusion when distributing voting materials, recording of ballot box seal numbers, recording the number of voters, and some interference by local election observers. Otherwise, few procedural omissions were noted during the opening procedure, and all STOs reported a clear view of the opening procedures performed by PSOs. Overall, the opening procedures observed can be considered as consistently satisfactory, with 4 out of 6 STO teams rating them as “good”, and the two remaining teams rating them as “very good”.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Secrecy of the Vote

STOs observed a few instances of potential compromises to the secrecy of the vote. In over 9% of cases, there were reported issues with the polling station layout and the placement of the voting booths. In 13% of the observed polling stations, STOs reported potential compromises to secrecy relating to how ballots were being inserted into the ballot box, such as not being folded properly or voters handing the

ballots to PSOs instead of inserting the ballots themselves. In three cases, the observers also noted polling station officials or journalists standing too close to the polling booths, with direct view of the marking of ballots.

There were no reports of the security cameras compromising the secrecy of the vote and the cameras were generally well-placed, capturing an overview of the polling station. In one instance the camera was placed behind a corner, presumably not obtaining a sufficient view of the polling station, and the chairperson repeatedly tried to move the camera into a better position.

There were some instances of family voting, though PSOs often intervened. Notably, the Election Regulations mandate the presence of posters in polling stations prohibiting the carrying of firearms, taking pictures and family voting (Election Regulation 12/2024, art. 4, 5.3). However, the latter was not included in the posters distributed by the CEC.

Voting Procedures

Throughout election day, the proper voting procedures were generally upheld. This includes consistent checking of IDs, signing of voter lists and stamping of ballots. Some discrepancies were, however, observed. Despite the election regulations mandating the PSOs to check voters' fingers for markings before entering the polling stations (Election Regulation No. 12/2024, art.12.1), this was not systematically enforced. The checks were instead often conducted later in the process with varying degrees of meticulousness. PSOs were not always consistent when applying the marks, sometimes marking other fingers or the wrong thumb.

Local Observers

A large number of observers from political parties and local organisations were present on election day, and several of EDDA's observers noted interference by such observers in the election process. There were reports of observers assisting PSOs in their work, and helping and talking to voters. Many party observers also lacked visible accreditation, leading to our observers sometimes being unable to distinguish between PSOs and observers. This also led to some confusion among voters and increased instances of interference by local election observers in the

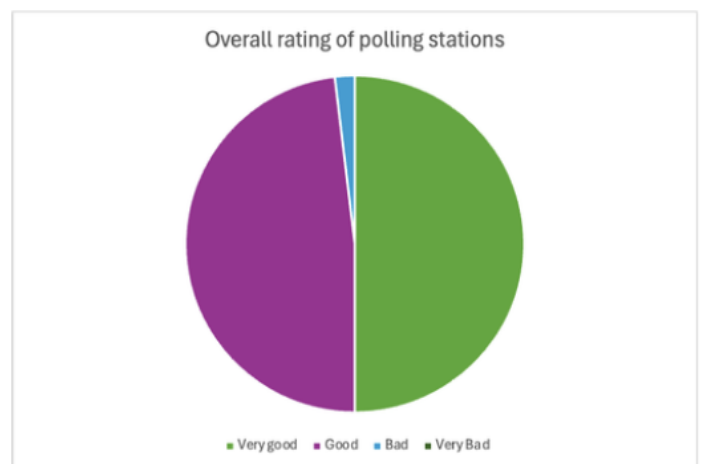
overall process. Throughout the day, the observers also noted several PSOs lacking accreditation badges. When asked, the chairpersons reported challenges in applying for accreditation for the PSOs.

Other Observations

A consistent issue throughout the observation was the lack of accessibility for people with disabilities. In 43% of the polling stations the STOs observed challenges with accessibility. A few voters needed assistance from others walking up or down the stairs. This was also remarked upon by some polling station officials, expressing concern for the ability to vote and general dignity of people with disabilities and the elderly.

A notable number of polling stations lacked proper information on the voting procedures, in total 24%. However, in these cases, voting materials were often placed outside the polling stations. In addition, in 9% of observed polling stations, the ballot boxes were not properly sealed. It should also be noted that EDDA observers were often not recorded into protocol, nor were their accreditation and ID constantly checked. Lastly, our observers noted a large gender discrepancy of the polling station chairpersons. 70% of chairpersons were men, and 30% women.

The overall voting process was assessed as positive in 52 out of 54 observed polling stations. Here, 50% were rated as “very good”.



CLOSING PROCEDURES

EDDA's observer teams were present during the closing and counting procedures of 6 different PS, all located in the municipality of Pristina. Based on arrival and departure times registered by the STOs, closing procedures in the observed polling stations were on average completed in 2 hours and 50 minutes. One team, accompanied by local police and polling station chairpersons, also escorted the

ballot box and camera to observe the handover-process to the central municipal station.

One of the observer teams was not able to observe the entirety of the counting and closing procedures as the STOs were physically removed from a polling station by local police, minutes before the closing of the polling station and start of the counting process. Local observers were allowed to stay, while EDDA's STOs and local media were removed. After contacting the CEC, EDDA's observers were let back in 40 minutes later.

The closing procedures in the observed PSs were largely followed. However, there were some noteworthy discrepancies. One observer team noted that there was a lack of clear and consistent use of identifying badges which, again, made the roles of individuals participating in the counting procedures difficult to identify for the observers. 50% of the STOs reported that PSOs were disturbed in their work, with party observers directly participating in the counting and sorting of votes. None of the PSOs intervened in these cases, and in one instance PSOs directly asked party observers for assistance.

The closing and counting process was in most cases completed in an efficient and generally satisfactory manner. 4 out of the 6 STO-teams rated the observed closing procedures as "good". The number of voters registered corresponded with the number of ballots cast, and the results of the counts were not disputed. The PSOs appeared for the most part to have a sufficient understanding of and adhered to the required procedures. The attempt to exclude one of the STO-teams from observing the closing and counting procedures, and the involvement of local observers in the counting process may, however, indicate some shortcomings in the training of the PSOs.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Based on a limited number of observations on the 9th of February 2025, EDDA concludes that the parliamentary election in Kosovo was conducted in a transparent,

free and fair manner. In a majority of cases, the polling station officials acted in a professional manner and seemed generally informed about the election regulations. Despite observing some discrepancies from international standards and the election regulations of Kosovo, EDDAs delegation did not observe indications of election fraud. The process was at times disorganised and PSOs seldom intervened when party observers interfered with the election process. This does not, however, seem to be attributed to malice or bad intentions, rather a lack of clear boundaries between PSOs and observers. Other issues such as lack of accessibility, inadequately sealed ballot boxes and the lack of voting information inside the polling stations should also be addressed to improve the overall election process.

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