



Statement by Mr Andrey Kovatchev, MEP

Head of the EP delegation to the legislative elections in Kosovo

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We are delighted to be in Pristina at the invitation of the Kosovar authorities to observe these early parliamentary elections. The contest that we have witnessed is another significant step in Kosovo's process of consolidating and strengthening its democracy.

Our delegation from the European Parliament comprised six Members representing four political groups. We fully endorse the statement that has been presented by our colleague, the EU Chief Observer, Ms Viola Von Cramon. I would like to thank her and her team for their excellent cooperation with us. These elections have been generally competitive and well managed, with a vibrant campaign in most of the country, although we regret that the electoral process for Kosovo Serbs fell well short of international standards.

I would like nonetheless to take this opportunity to reiterate and support the comments of the Chief Observer about the state of play

of the recommendations of past EU election observation missions. It is very regrettable that recurring systemic problems with the elections process that were identified by past missions have still not been addressed. The authorities must tackle these issues and bring Kosovo fully into line with international standards for democratic elections.

I would here like to highlight one persistent area of concern that has been raised by past observer missions – the issue of party finance. The current regulatory framework does not guarantee the transparency and integrity of party and campaign finances. Furthermore, many political parties interpreted the law to mean that they were only required to report their expenditure for the last ten days of the campaign. This significantly reduced transparency. In addition, there have been allegations that past ruling parties have given public procurement contracts to big donors. These and other weaknesses in the current legislation must be addressed.

Like many in this room, the European Parliament delegation observed proceedings on Election Day. Our experience reflects the generally positive reports of the long term observers. We were pleased that the day was orderly and calm, with no major incidents. Along with other observers, we saw some irregularities in procedures but these were limited. Nevertheless, we were concerned about restricted access to many polling stations for people with disabilities and urge the authorities to take action to address this issue. We welcome the high presence of observers from the political parties and civil society, which enhanced the confidence of stakeholders in the electoral process. Indeed, one of our teams also commended the representation of members of non-majority groups, including the Roma, among the staff of some polling stations that they observed.

We urge all political parties in the future to nominate observers for each and every polling station in the country – working together across parties strengthens democracy.

However, we noted that relatively few women were chairs of polling station centres – and indeed in some regions there were few women among any of the polling centre staff. This was particularly apparent in some rural areas and must also be addressed.

Turning more generally to the position of women in the whole electoral process, we welcome some positive developments, in particular we were pleased that the 30% quota on the candidates' list was met. However, only one woman stood for election as prime minister and we also note, with regret, the reports that the platforms of political parties did not specifically address gender issues. It is vital for women to become involved in all sectors.

In conclusion, I would like to make some more general comments.

The 2019 election was the latest in a series of early parliamentary elections in Kosovo. This does not promote stability.

We look forward to a new government taking office in Pristina in the near future – a new government which should complete its mandate and be able to strengthen the rule of law and carry out the fundamental reforms that are needed – including those related to EU accession – and implement the recommendations on electoral reform that the EU Election Observation Mission will be making. This will send a very positive signal to the EU and across the world.

We await the establishment of a new parliament in Kosovo – a parliament which should carry out effective oversight of the executive and ensure transparency and high quality law making. It should also build a consensus on EU accession-related reforms. Their partner in the EU will be another new legislature – the European Parliament – which was elected in May 2019 with a 60% turnover of its membership. This is therefore a fresh opportunity for both our sides and you can be sure that we will be supporting you on your path towards European integration.

Thank you for your attention.

I wish you well.