

# Breaking Down Hoti's New Government: Formation and the 2020-2023 Plan

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## BREAKING DOWN HOTI'S NEW GOVERNMENT: FORMATION AND THE 2020-2023 PLAN

### I. Introduction

From celebrations on election night back in October 2019, to the surprise ousting of Vetëvendosje's Albin Kurti as Prime Minister in March 2020, and finally to the fresh confirmation of the Democratic League of Kosovo's Avdullah Hoti as government lead in June 2020, citizens of Kosovo have faced a roller coaster of political developments in the past months. Such political turmoil happened in parallel to the COVID-19 pandemic's further thwarting of the country.

Kosovar citizens were recently presented with the new government plan led by Hoti and his proposed cabinet. It is a motivated plan which lays out all the right priorities and objectives, matched with a hopeful flare of ambiguity for long-term strategies. From the current handling and forthcoming economic aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic to diplomatic aims, the key priorities of the government say a lot about the new government's ambition.

This policy analysis will start by examining how the new Hoti government came to be appointed, followed by exploring the 2020-2023 government plan it presented to the public. This document will look at the key priorities of the plan and particularly concentrate on its foreign policy aims tied to the Dialogue with Serbia and EU integration. Other fields related to the different Ministries will also be addressed so citizens at large know what bets to keep an eye out throughout the recently-approved cabinet's work.

### II. From Kurti to Hoti, with the accompanying sound of banging pots

A moment of joy and hope arose in the Republic of Kosovo on the night of 6 October 2019. The parliamentary election had determined a groundbreaking win for Vetëvendosje (VV), the country's progressive social-democrat party widely supported by younger voters. VV went into a governing coalition with junior party Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and put forth Albin Kurti as the country's new Prime Minister. Kurti's ascent to power was a huge win for the anti-establishment movement - he presented himself as a politician striving for more transparency and self-determination, in an attempt to distance himself from behind-the-scenes deals with other state actors or foreign players. Kurti was outspoken against President Thaci's clandestine handling of state affairs, namely rumors of an ongoing discussion on the controversial land swap agreement with Serbia. Moreover, he openly questioned the intentions of the United States' new appointed special envoy for the Serbia-Kosovo dialogue, Ambassador Richard Grenell. Throughout Kurti's short-lived term, Grenell pushed for him to fully abolish the 100% tariff on Serbian goods or the country would be sanctioned. Upon the Prime Minister's hesitancy, an American foreign aid agency tied to the US Congress suspended two of its programs with Kosovo in mid-March until the tariff issue was finally resolved.

**Kurti's political strategy became a problem and soon enough the government was toppled after a no-confidence vote on 25 March 2020** - with 61 Members of Parliament votes in favor, 24 against and 1 abstention, the motion passed by a single vote given the Assembly's requirement of a 61 majority. The 120-seat Assembly chamber only had 86 MPs present since members from Vetëvendosje (VV), the largest party in parliament and Kurti's own, refused to attend. Albin Kurti himself called the move a "'parliamentary coup d'état' engineered by political rivals and supported

by a US envoy”<sup>1</sup>. The no-confidence vote was initiated by the governing coalition’s own junior party, LDK, and eventually saw LDK deputy leader come into power as the new Prime Minister of Kosovo.

The political move was, indeed, contested. With the country on mandatory lockdown in light of containment measures taken to fight the spread of COVID-19, **citizens took to protest the decision by banging pots and pans from their windows instead of taking to the streets**. Discontent was voiced not just on the sudden loss of government, but more so on politicians’ need to perform power-grabbing tactics even when a pandemic is ravaging the social, economic and public health foundations of the country.

Such discontent remained well into the formation of the new government, weeks later. President Thaci formally nominated Avdullah Hoti, the deputy leader of LDK, as Prime Minister on 30 April. A cabinet was proposed on 3 June 2020. Hoti’s government makes for the sixth government since the Republic of Kosovo declared independence in 2008. Members and supporters of VV objected the decision through small protests during the voting on the government formation - there were calls for new elections and that a newfound government via parliamentary vote would not be constitutional. In fact, the leader of VV’s parliamentary group, Rexhep Selimi, called for new elections and dismissed the new government as “illegal” - “Let us hold elections to respect the will of the people and the constitution”. This message was echoed by demonstrators, with some signs reading “I won’t allow my vote to be manipulated”<sup>2</sup>, or “vote theft”<sup>3</sup>.

Demonstrators contested the legality of the government formation not only in light of the abrupt and seemingly inexplicable ousting of Albin Kurti by its own coalition partner. Another key reason was the lobbying role President Hashim Thaci had in how the power play happened in favor of LDK, a party which he is known to enter into political coalitions. Avdullah Hoti’s government therein took office after the Constitutional Court ruled that Thaci did not act unconstitutionally when granting Hoti the mandate to form a new cabinet without another nation-wide election. Yet citizens massively voiced concerns of the legitimacy of this process.

In point of fact, the Republic of Kosovo has had three different Prime Ministers from three different political parties in less than a year. **The country is in shackles with deep-rooted political instability as it tries to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic and to recover the insofar-stagnant dialogue on normalization of relations with Serbia**. Not even this quasi-apocalyptic scenario harming society, public health, economics, politics and diplomacy enable a temporary halt of party politics and power games. Citing Prishtina Insight, “what Kosovo is missing now is genuine leadership to pull the country out of not only a huge economic crisis, but a political polarization and power struggle that is set to have a detrimental impact on the future of the country internally and internationally”<sup>4</sup>. The country has certainly long lacked a real political head to bring out the best of domestic and international struggles – Kurti’s glimmer of hope is far-gone and now Kosovo must face a multi-layered mess with a weak government and scattered coalition government.

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<sup>1</sup> NPR, “After Unprecedented Strains With Longtime Friend U.S., Kosovo Has A New Government”, 6 June 2020, online via: [https://www.npr.org/2020/06/06/863771374/after-unprecedented-strains-with-longtime-friend-u-s-kosovo-has-a-new-government?utm\\_term=nprnews&utm\\_source=twitter.com&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=npr&t=1593163043734](https://www.npr.org/2020/06/06/863771374/after-unprecedented-strains-with-longtime-friend-u-s-kosovo-has-a-new-government?utm_term=nprnews&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=npr&t=1593163043734)

<sup>2</sup> Balkan Insight, “Kosovo Parliament Confirms New Govt Under Hoti”, 3 June 2020, online via: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/06/03/kosovo-parliament-confirms-new-govt-under-hoti/>

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Prishtina Insight, “Kosovo’s new government is ill-fated”, 3 June 2020, online via: <https://prishtinainsight.com/kosovos-new-government-is-ill-fated/>

### III. Fragile government, strong President?

A new political era started in early June 2020, this time led by Avdullah Hoti and a **narrow-majority coalition government**. The Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) party leads the new government, in coalition with several minority parties and smaller parties which were the opposition to the previous Kurti government. The biggest party in Parliament, Vetevendosje (VV), is also the biggest opposition party with 29 seats and the *de facto* winner of the October 2019 elections. With 24 seats, the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) is another major opposition force. Hoti's parliamentary coalition is composed of LDK (28 seats), the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo/AAK (13 seats), the Srpska Lista (10 seats) and the Social Democratic Initiative/NISMA (4 seats)<sup>5</sup>. The cabinet of 16 Ministers is also diverse: seven ministers were nominated by LDK, four by AAK, two by NISMA, two by Lista Srpska and one by the Democratic Party of Kosovo Turks.

The new coalition government was greatly called out for its power-grab intentions. It was even criticized internally by prominent LDK MP Vjosa Osmani, who stated that the best solution for the country would have been to set up "a transitional government with a term of six to nine months, run by a unifying figure and technical ministers" in order to avoid a dependency on Lista Srpska to form a new government<sup>6</sup>.

The **presence of the Serb-dominant, Belgrade-backed Lista Srpska** (Serb List, in English) was one of the most contested issues. Founded in 2014 in the context of the EU-mediated Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, the party sought to be the political representation of the Kosovo Serb community. Although the party had been part of coalition governments before, it carries a more unfavorable role now as the Dialogue falters and Serbian-backed influence over Kosovar parliamentary matters is most unwelcomed. What is more, back in March 2018 during Haradinaj's second term when LDK was in the opposition, Hoti made a public statement strongly condemning Srpska Lista's presence in parliament - "No Kosovo government can be stable when its majority of 61 votes [out of 120] in parliament depends on the votes of Srpska Lista MPs who, unfortunately, have become an instrument of Belgrade. In no way would the LDK allow Srpska Lista MPs to determine Kosovo's political fate"<sup>7</sup>. Nonetheless, the coalition ultimately led by Avdullah Hoti two years later tells a different story now.

The above-mentioned scattered coalition came to be by the encouraging hand of President Thaci. Through a Presidential decree issued on 30 April, some weeks after the no-confidence vote on Kurti's government, Thaci put forth Avdullah Hoti as candidate for Prime Minister of Kosovo. He further "emphasized that in the coming days a new Government can be voted again in the Assembly of Kosovo, in full compliance with the Constitution of Kosovo and the democratic order of the country, receiving a clear legitimacy from the members of the Assembly of Kosovo"<sup>8</sup>. Vetevendosje, the winning party of the October 2019 elections, quickly rejected the move as disagreement with the democratic process. The self-determination party filed a complaint with the Constitutional Court stating Thaci's decree to be unconstitutional - either their party forms a new cabinet or new elections should be held. The decision came a month later, in favor of President

<sup>5</sup> Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, "Deputy Profiles", online via: <http://assembly-kosova.org/eng/deputyprofile/> [Accessed 28 June 2020].

<sup>6</sup> Balkan Insight, "Kosovo Parliament Confirms New Govt Under Hoti", 3 June 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Balkan Insight, "Hoti's Shaky Government Faces Uncertain Future in Kosovo", 8 June 2020, online via: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/06/08/hotis-shaky-government-faces-uncertain-future-in-kosovo/>.

<sup>8</sup> President of the Republic of Kosovo, "President Thaci decrees Avdullah Hoti as candidate for Prime Minister to form the new Government", 30 April 2020, online via: <https://president-ksgov.net/en/news/president-thaci-decrees-avdullah-hoti-as-candidate-for-prime-minister-to-form-the-new-government>

Thaci, stating there was no need for snap elections and that the appointment was legitimate<sup>9</sup>. Suddenly a full-fledged mandate for an entirely new government arose from the 2019 elections, one initiated by President Thaci and approved by the Constitutional Court. It has led to questions of just how **dichotomous the power dynamic is set to be between a strong President who has long asserted his position and influence, and a feeble government hoisted by a questionable coalition.**

Calling the new government 'ill-fated', Kosovar media hailed that "a multi-party coalition with a thin majority led by the party that took second place in the elections will have a tough time dealing with the economic fallout from COVID-19 and the restart of the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue"<sup>10</sup>. Hoti's government is carried by a President with too much power and is, moreover, dependent on a Belgrade-backed political party. Furthermore, the narrow 61-vote majority in the 120-seat Assembly of Kosovo does not prelude a triumphant mandate. With Kosovo, and the world at large, set for a challenging couple of years ahead post-COVID, the new government faces enormous challenges while showing little control. On the contrary, President Thaci already has an internationally-recognized name and domestically-established influence. This was proved recently, given his behind-the-scenes maneuvers backed by his US allies to put Kurti's defying rule aside. Case in point, Kurti challenged the President's negotiating role with the US and the EU on Serbia-Kosovo matters. Although both the Constitutional Court and the Assembly of Kosovo stating the responsibility of talks with Serbia falls on the Government, President Thaci has been leading the process and, now, is further enabled by the Prime Minister he himself appointed to keep this role.

At the end of June, however, another curveball in the saga of President Thaci's power in the country hit Kosovo. The Special Prosecutor's Office in The Hague indicted Hashim Thaci on war crimes committed during the 1999 war as part of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK). Thaci addressed the country on 29 June to announce that he would "resign immediately"<sup>11</sup> should a conviction be made. How this indictment will impact Kosovo's leadership remains to be seen as the trial progresses but, until then, Thaci will keep his presidential mandate and power over domestic politics.

Prime Minister Hoti is in for a roller coaster ride, of low public support, strong parliamentary opposition, disheveled EU-US partnerships, and a country reeling socioeconomically from an unprecedented global pandemic. This paper delves into this government plan devised to tackle all of the issues above in the following chapters.

#### IV. Priorities of the Hoti government plan

Avdullah Hoti's government plan for the next three years is comprehensive, ambitious and by-the-book. The June 2020 plan lays out principles and objectives for all major fields: the COVID-19 pandemic, institutional reform, sustainable economic development, justice system, foreign policy, education and science, health, infrastructure, defense, social protection, culture and diaspora. This chapter will firstly look at the main priorities and then at other key issues for Kosovo's social, economic and diplomatic future.

<sup>9</sup> Balkan Insight, "Kosovo Court Says Govt Can be Formed Without Elections", 29 May 2020, online via: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/29/new-kosovo-govt-can-be-formed-without-elections-court-rules/>.

<sup>10</sup> Prishtina Insight, "Kosovo's new government is ill-fated", 3 June 2020, online via: <https://prishtinainsight.com/kosovos-new-government-is-ill-fated/>.

<sup>11</sup> Balkan Insight, "Kosovo President: 'I'll Resign if Indictment is Confirmed'", 29 June 2020, online via: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/06/29/kosovo-president-ill-resign-if-indictment-is-confirmed/>.

### Primacy of the COVID-19 pandemic recovery

The government plan has **COVID-19 as main priority**, both the management of the pandemic and measures for economic recovery. The plan starts by clearly laying out that "Today Kosovo faces a serious situation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, both in terms of public health and economy. The firstly-mentioned and basic objectives of the Government are the fight to defeat pandemic, and post-pandemic economic recovery"<sup>12</sup>. On the COVID-19 management and recovery, the government lays out a public health strategy to allow normalcy to resume in the country.

As many countries worldwide, the first stage is a short-term strategy based on measures of social isolation and social distancing, to be gradually lifted as infection rates drop. The document lists the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, the World Health Organization and the European Commission's Roadmap as main sources for defining Kosovo's own public health strategy. Issues such as nationwide testing and repatriation flights are also mentioned as assurances, but the most important subject is the government's "ambitious project of monitoring and responding to the risk of recurrence of COVID-19 infection, based on real-time data and analysis, represents a significant investment of resources for its rapid implementation in four to six months"<sup>13</sup>. This tracking & monitoring tool proposal is good, yet execution remains conspicuous both in terms of funding and effectiveness.

The second part of the government plan's COVID-19 situation management concerns the post-pandemic economic recovery. The pandemic has negatively affected production, employment, income and exports, and it remains to be seen how a potential second wave will impact the country. Taking the economic shock into consideration, the government announced the "Program for Economic Recovery after Pandemic COVID-19" framework, "which will mobilize over EUR 1 billion during 2020 and 2021. (...) Create a new momentum for rapid economic development, placing the economy of Kosovo in a higher trajectory of growth and long-term development"<sup>14</sup>. Indeed, an Economic Recovery Fund will be raised to cope with the economic and social consequences of the pandemic. To complement, a **comprehensive table of measures for economic recovery for 2020-2021** is laid out – from easier access to finance for private businesses struggling to survive, to reduced tax burden on businesses, to unemployment benefits and support to public enterprises. Each measure is carefully explained, as are the relevant sub-measures, legal implications and implementing or supporting institutions. Let's consider the employment support measure: its stated purpose is to increase employment, in particular of specific groups of workers with lower employment probabilities; relevant sub-measures include wage subsidies, salary subsidies and professional support; a legal implication is the need to draft a strategic plan defining the criteria and procedures for the implementation of measures; and finally supporting institutions are Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Finance, Chambers of Commerce, and Municipalities<sup>15</sup>.

The table lists nine comprehensive measures to be implemented in the hopes of normalizing the functioning of the economy. In seeking proper execution and effectiveness, the government affirms that all measures envisaged for economic recovery are to be implemented in close cooperation with "**Civil society** and the media, as very important partners for providing the necessary expertise and outreaching citizens"<sup>16</sup>. Besides technical and financial assistance from international donors and institutions, and the municipalities and businesses themselves, civil society is noted as a coordination partner on development of legislation and public policies. From

<sup>12</sup> Government of the Republic of Kosovo, *Government Program 2020–2023*, pg.4.

<sup>13</sup> Government of the Republic of Kosovo, *Government Program 2020–2023*, pg.8.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, pg.9

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, pg.13

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, pg.16

the drafting phase, to implementation and impact-assessment, civil society stakeholders must be included in the decision-making process.

### Six main priorities to build up the country

The government plan can be considered as by-the-book given that it checks all the boxes and makes all the right assurances, albeit without the political stability or backing to guarantee such goals. The document starts by noting that “The Government of the Republic of Kosovo shall be the guardian and implementer of all principles and norms deriving from the Constitution of Kosovo, without any distinction”<sup>17</sup>. The **introductory paragraphs on Principles and Objectives** continue with the habitual assurances of political consciousness of the incoming cabinet, by addressing good neighborly relations and Kosovo’s Euro-Atlantic integration aims - “The Government of the Republic of Kosovo aims to establish and strengthen a competent and accountable government, which will strengthen trust of Kosovo’s citizens and our strategic partners, the EU and the USA, in Kosovo’s vitality as an independent state, implementing policies that increase quality of life, respect everyone’s rights, and provide equal opportunities in education, health, social life and public services in general”<sup>18</sup>. The above quote pinpoints another main priority of the government plan - to appease both the European Union and the United States as the country’s key strategic partners moving forward with the Dialogue with Serbia.

Building on the aforementioned basic objectives concerning combatting COVID-19, the **Government’s priorities read as follows**<sup>19</sup>:

- (i) Strengthening the state, advancing democracy, combating negative phenomena, especially crime and corruption;
- (ii) Economic development based on market economy, increased employment and investment, to face consequences of pandemics and the need to strengthen the competitiveness of local businesses and products;
- (iii) Assuming responsibility for advancing dialogue with Serbia, in co-operation with the EU and the USA, by not allowing border changes and territory swaps;
- (iv) Advancing the European integration process, through the implementation of the SAA, and the Euro-Atlantic integration process;
- (v) Full implementation of the European Reform Agenda;
- (vi) Creating the environment for position-opposition cooperation on vital issues in the best interest of the country and decision-making in broad and comprehensive consultation, especially in the dialogue process with Serbia.

The priorities tackle internal affairs of crime and corruption, economic development, strategic partnerships with the EU and the US, reform execution pertaining the EU acquis, and relations with Serbia. As is to be expected, it is the latter that holds more controversy. The topic of the dialogue with Serbia currently carries even more weight than usual, as the EU and the US seem to be at odds regarding mediation of the longstanding peace talks.

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<sup>17</sup> Government of the Republic of Kosovo, *Government Program 2020–2023*, pg.4.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, pg.4.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, pg.4.

## V. Foreign Policy

### Relations with Serbia

Neighboring relations between Kosovo and Serbia have been stalled and arguably waning for the past year, in light of the political instability in the newborn country. As Kurti actively challenged the US role in peace talks, the EU appeared to be missing in action and letting the US step up its role. With Kurti out of the picture, Hoti emerged in trying to reconcile both the EU and the US' roles as exceptional allies to the country.

One of the first decisions Hoti executed upon taking office was **lifting the trade barriers on Serbian goods** entering Kosovo<sup>20</sup>. The removal of tariffs was an attempt to impulse the Dialogue, and encourage reciprocity measures from Serbia. The Dialogue is, as is known, the prerequisite for Kosovo's Euro-Atlantic integration process.

On the **Dialogue on normalization of relations**, the government plan seeks "a final agreement with Serbia on mutual recognition within the existing borders"<sup>21</sup>. To ensure this outcome, a platform for dialogue will be prepared with issues to be addressed, specific objectives to be achieved, along with transparency assurances. Political and legal guarantees for the final agreement's implementation comprise Kosovar membership to the UN, paving the way for EU and NATO membership as well. The plan further stresses that "the territory of the Republic of Kosovo is one and indivisible and no institution has a mandate to negotiate the territory, sovereignty and territorial integrity and constitutional order"<sup>22</sup>, for the government has rejected land swap proposals.

The government is stated to be the negotiating party in the Dialogue, accountable to the Assembly as the oversight entity, while the President represents the country based on constitutional powers. Moreover, the document also lists civil society as a stakeholder in the Dialogue "in providing expertise in this process and overseeing and ensuring transparency towards the public and citizens"<sup>23</sup>. The current government plan undeniably holds the role of civil society as key to good policy-making and implementation.

The **European Union and the United States are both acclaimed as key players** in the Dialogue, for reaching an agreement and ensuring its implementation. Nonetheless, the two international actors diverge on who is leading the peace talks, albeit both sharing the final goal of resolving the neighborly dispute in the volatile Balkan peninsula and securing Kosovo's sovereignty. Since the start of the year, the United States has objectively beefed up its involvement in the Dialogue, with US envoy Ambassador Richard Grenell even closing two agreements on railways and air traffic between Kosovo and Serbia – even though its implementation remains undetected. Most notably, President Trump invited his Kosovar and Serbian counterparts to a three-way meeting in Washington DC on 27 June in an attempt to boost peace talks. This invite proved controversial for the EU was not consulted and, moreover, President Thaci openly favored the US' control of the talks - "Kosovo has always trusted the U.S. and has come out victorious. (...) This time the US has taken the leadership role, which we welcome"<sup>24</sup>, Thaci told the press. In fact, the importance of Kosovo's strategic partnership with the USA is specifically mentioned in the government's foreign policy goals. While "an increased commitment to maintaining, deepening,

<sup>20</sup> Euronews, "Kosovo's new government eases trade restrictions with rival Serbia", 6 June 2020, online via: <https://www.euronews.com/2020/06/06/kosovo-s-new-government-eases-trade-restrictions-with-rival-serbia>.

<sup>21</sup> Government of the Republic of Kosovo, *Government Program 2020–2023*, pg.33.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, pg.34

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, pg.34.

<sup>24</sup> AP News, "EU, US display differences over Serbia-Kosovo negotiation", 16 June 2020, online via: <https://apnews.com/7fdae2ee083ec9cf1ccb200156d1604a>

and developing relations with other international allies” is stated as a goal, the plan specifically relays a commitment to “maintaining and advancing strategic relations with the USA, deepening the partnership at all levels”<sup>25</sup>. Since the 1999 NATO intervention and subsequent US chief role in Kosovo’s state and nation-building, the ally-ship between the two countries runs deeper than the current EU partnership. Partnership with EU revolves around finding a resolution to the conflict with Serbia in hopes of integrating the six Western Balkan as members of the communal European peace project.

In light of all these recent developments, the EU reaffirmed its leadership role in the talks by highlighting that it has done so since 2011. The EU has mediated the talks also in consultation with the United States as a key player in the region, so “whatever might be agreed on the sides we’ll feed into the EU-facilitated dialogue. (...) Everything that has been achieved in the dialogue was the result of the very close and joint work of the EU and the US and this is exactly our ambition to continue”<sup>26</sup>. The impromptu meeting in Washington DC ultimately never took place in view of Thaci’s sudden war crimes indictment. It, however, strained EU-US coordination on the advancement of the Dialogue and left an even bigger cloud of uncertainty hovering over the advancement of talks. Has the EU been sidelined by the US and Thaci? Has Grenell’s recent involvement invariably altered the leading power dynamic in the mediated talks? Will the EU and the US’ different takes on how to approach the dialogue complicate the ability of Kosovo and Serbia to find mutually-agreed final deal?

The Dialogue with Serbia is a huge component of the Foreign Policy field within the government plan. This policy analysis takes a separate look at the Relations with Serbia given the newfound challenges of Thaci’s powerhold, Hoti’s changed dynamic vis-à-vis Kurti and, perhaps most importantly, the recent rift between the EU and the US’ role in the peace talks.

### Bilateral relations and EU integration

All political priorities in the context of Kosovo’s foreign policy aim for “recognition at the existing borders and the membership of the Republic of Kosovo in the relevant international organizations, primarily in the UN, EU and NATO”<sup>27</sup>. Such **global and Euro-Atlantic integration aims** encompass relations with Serbia, the EU integration process and, principally, the consolidation of Kosovo’s international recognition. In other words, bilateral relations, multilateral relations and special partnerships with key allies.

The government will put efforts into promoting the country’s international and regional standing by increasing academic, economic, and cultural exchanges, as well as boosting **public and parliamentary diplomacy** efforts. Case in point is betting on digital diplomacy as a means to promote the country and bilateral relations - not with the core key five non-recognizer EU countries, but equally with regionally-influential actors with which Kosovo has little-to-no (i.e. Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, Kenya). A special focus, still, is allocated to special and strategic relations with the United States and chief EU members given their role in common areas of security and defense.

With regards to **EU integration**, a government priority is to lead a state of good governance and effective fulfillment of obligations deriving from the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA). Hoti’s government plans to boost the country’s European integration process by ensuring full harmonization of public policies and legislation with the EU *acquis*, better effectiveness of the judiciary and tangible public administration reform to increase transparency. In the short-term, the government aims to guarantee visa exemption for the Schengen Area during the German

<sup>25</sup> Government of the Republic of Kosovo, *Government Program 2020–2023*, pg.29.

<sup>26</sup> AP News, “EU, US display differences over Serbia-Kosovo negotiation”, 16 June 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Government of the Republic of Kosovo, *Government Program 2020–2023*, pg.29.

Presidency of the EU Council, running from 1 July until the end of the year. Finally, the government aims to prepare Kosovo for European arenas by promoting youth mobility and establishing more cooperation channels with foreign partners with education, employment and vocational training programs.

## VI. Good governance: from institutional reform and infrastructures, to sustainable agriculture, effective justice and culture

After tackling the COVID-19 pandemic, listing the economic recovery measures, and developing how to improve Kosovo's international and regional position, the remainder of the government plan addresses other varied fields of domestic interest. Overall, the plan lays out eager objectives to guide the cabinet's work in the upcoming years.

Firstly, on **Government, Institutional Reform and Social Cohesion**, the government will focus on a functional review of institutions, agencies, and other independent bodies by means of eliminating unnecessary structures. Implementation of the Public Administration Reform is another priority, especially the obligations tied to the SAA. The government likewise plans to develop a framework to fight corruption and organized crime by strengthening institutional mechanisms and enhancing international cooperation. Once more - as we have already seen in the context of the measures of economic recovery and relations with Serbia - the plan highlights the need for coordination with civil society, and the media, for proper drafting and implementation of governance policies and institutional reform. Similarly, the plan notes **strengthening the position of women** in society as a good governance practice, by equipping them with better, and well-implemented, cross-cutting policies. Such policies would advance women's economic and educational position through improved decision-making roles and property rights.

Secondly, on **Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Development**, a caveat is laid out to the government's ambitious plan - this field requires a long-term strategy encompassing several governmental mandates. Especially since membership to international economic organizations, namely the World Trade Organization, is crucial to Kosovo's economic benefit yet still far-off. The strategic orientation encompasses development priorities and economic, fiscal, budgetary and public debt policy frameworks ranging from reducing informal economy, bureaucracy and operating costs, to boosting foreign investments, tourism, and information technology.

Another more long-term strategic plan is that of **key infrastructure priorities**, whose allocated budget will depend on post-COVID-19 economic recovery. Major investment projects are now being revised, and concession loans are being explored.

The **agricultural sector** is one the Hoti government is betting on, thanks to its potential to increase local production and employment throughout all phases of production and processing. The government is committed to a sustainable agricultural development strategy that follows EU Common Agricultural Policies, such as on food safety and land irrigation. A diversified rural development is key for a stronger economy.

Good governance implies an efficient legal state with institutions that citizens of all backgrounds trust. In that line, an **Independent and Efficient Justice System** is another government priority. The document specifically mentions a justice system based on constitutional principles, respecting the principle of separation of powers and checks and balances between them, which ensures an independent, fair and impartial judiciary that respects the hierarchy of legal norms"<sup>28</sup>. This may raise questions given the unclear power dynamics existing between the Government and

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<sup>28</sup> Government of the Republic of Kosovo, *Government Program 2020–2023*, pg.27.

the President, for example, concerning who *de facto* leads the mediated negotiations with Serbia or even the appointment of the new Prime Minister.

On the **Defense and Public Safety** front, the main topic is the need to transform the Kosovo Security Force into a professional army in accordance with NATO standards. This implies providing training, financial and logistical support. The government also lists compulsory military service as a best practice to be implemented.

Finally, the plan addresses objectives for other varied, less controversial fields – **education, science, culture, and diaspora**. The latter is highlighted as a source of social and economic wealth of Kosovo, which should not be dismissed and for which the government will strive to improve expat voting procedures. Culture as an actionable field is dedicated to promoting and exporting Kosovar history and heritage worldwide, as well as encouraging youth exchanges. On Education and Science, the government plan underlines the importance of sound nationwide infrastructures, proper curriculum, and quality pre-school. Only then will Kosovo offer a modern, public and private, education system to its citizens.

Overall, there are countless initiatives and proposals put forth which imply scores of drafting and decision-making, ideally partnered with civil society and other relevant independent stakeholders. It is a plan that makes sense and checks all the right boxes, from global aims of recognition and membership, to domestic concerns of inclusivity, effectiveness, transparency and social cohesion. The biggest constraint to a success fulfillment, however, may be the uncertainty the evolving pandemic and feared second-wave may bring to the world and the country. In the meantime, Avdullah Hoti has taken up a lot on his plate as he starts his mandate.

## VII. Concluding Remarks

The government plan is as ambitious as the government is weak. Together, this dichotomy may prove to be a problem when it comes to implementation. With only a 61-point majority in the 120-seat Parliament and a strong opposition made up of the biggest political party, Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti has his work cut out for him. Adding to this already chaotic scenario, the President who sponsored his unusual appointment has been indicted for war crimes by the Special Prosecutor's Office in The Hague. Last but not least, the Dialogue on the normalization of relations with Serbia is arguably at its most unfavorable, this time not only with Kosovo and Serbia at odds but also the EU and the US on how to best advance the talks. This is not the ideal starting point for a new, eager cabinet.

Nonetheless, the plan is determined and all-encompassing. The aims are high and the boxes ticked by the 64-page document are high as well - all that matters now is delivering. The Republic of Kosovo has a history of box-ticking leaders who leave office with empty promises and un-fulfilled reforms. There is no other way for success but to seek out real and consequential implementation of the objectives laid out. The economic recovery measures post-COVID-19 will be the foundation for all other efforts, namely how budget funds will be allocated for infrastructure projects or sustainable agriculture development. Nurturing positive strategic partnerships with both the European Union and the United States, far from bitterness or competing stances, will also be key to ensure a successful advancement of bilateral relations, multilateral relations and Euro-Atlantic integration aims, let alone the ongoing-but-stagnant Dialogue.

There is a lot at stake. Citizens must more than ever be aware of what their new government intends to do in the next years, and therein hold their representatives accountable should expectations not be met.

## **Policy Analysis**

Policy Analysis in general is a policy advice paper which particularly aims to influence the key means through which policy decisions are made in both local and central levels of government. The purpose of Policy Analysis is to address, more in-depth, a particular problem, to examine the arguments related to a concerned policy, and to analyze the implementation of the policy. Through Policy Analysis, Group for Legal and Political studies seeks to stimulate wider comprehensive debate on the given issue via presenting informed policy-relevant choices and recommendations to the key stakeholders and parties of interest.



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