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# The political engagement of women in post-conflict Kosovo

## Polityczne zaangażowanie kobiet po zakończeniu konfliktu w Kosowie

**Abstract:** The Republic of Kosovo was created several years after the breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Its problems were visible during Josip Broz Tito's presidency. Over the last ten years Kosovo has had two female presidents. The question is, what is the position of women on the Kosovan political scene? This phenomenon is particularly significant from the point of view of the post-conflict reconstruction of the state. The aim of this article is to analyse the evolution of the role of Kosovo Albanian women in the politics of Kosovo at the central level. For this reason, the article includes women involved in the armed conflict in Kosovo, especially in the activities of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA, alb. *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës*, UÇK). The author also presents the role of women in the Kosovan political arena since 1999, with particular emphasis on changes that took place after the declaration of independence of Kosovo. Furthermore, the author examines the profiles of selected female politicians.

The article is based on an analysis of primary and secondary sources, the comparative and historical method, and an analysis of statistical data.

**Keywords:** Kosovo, armed conflict, post-conflict reconstruction, women, the Kosovo Liberation Army, UÇK, gender equality

**Streszczenie:** Republika Kosowa powstała w kilkanaście lat po rozpadzie Federacyjnej Socjalistycznej Republiki Jugosławii. Jednakże problemy tego obecnego terytorium państwowego były widoczne już w trakcie rządów Josipa Broza Tito. W państwie tym w przeciągu ostatnich dziesięciu lat prezydentem została dwukrotnie wybrana kobieta. Nasuwa się zatem pytanie, jak wygląda pozycja kobiet na kosowskiej scenie politycznej? Jest to zjawisko szczególnie istotne z punktu widzenia odbudowy państwa po zakończeniu konfliktu zbrojnego.

Celem artykułu jest dokonanie analizy ewolucji roli kosowskich kobiet w polityce szczebla centralnego tego państwa. Z tego względu w tekście zostało uwzględnione zaangażowanie kobiet w konflikt w Kosowie, a zwłaszcza w działalność Wyzwoleńczej Armii Kosowa (alb. *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës*,

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UÇK). Autorka przedstawia również rolę kobiet na kosowskiej scenie politycznej po 1999 r., ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem zmian, które miały miejsce po ogłoszeniu niepodległości Kosowa. W tekście zostały również przedstawione sylwetki wybranych kobiet, które od lat są obecne w polityce Kosowa.

W artykule wykorzystano analizę źródeł pierwotnych i wtórnych, metodę porównawczą, metodę historyczną oraz analizę danych statystycznych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Kosowo, konflikt zbrojny, odbudowa pokonfliktowa, kobiety, Armia Wyzwolenia Kosowa, UÇK, równość płci

## Introduction

The post-conflict state or territory has been a theme of various scientific researches. Graham Brown, Arnim Langer and Frances Stewart emphasise that *conceptualizing the post-conflict scenario is to see it not as a period bounded by a single specific event, but as a process that involves the achievement of a range of peace milestones*.<sup>1</sup> Michael J. Boyle defines a *post-conflict state by four conditions: (1) the state experienced an armed conflict between at least two parties; (2) the fighting for the war has been conducted on its territory; (3) there was an explicit and formed termination of the war; and (4) the peace settlement must last for at least one year*.<sup>2</sup> He also adds that armed conflict experienced in a territory or state causes damage to social ties and changes the political system.

According to Luca Reyhler and Arnim Langer a post-conflict state is determined by changes. These changes include democratisation, decentralisation and liberalisation of the economy.<sup>3</sup> Robert Blair points out *a set of policies and activities to manage the economic, political, social and human costs of past conflicts and prevent future ones such as: peacekeeping; security sector reform and power-sharing; elections and democratization; foreign aid and economic development; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; repatriation of refugees; transitional justice*.<sup>4</sup>

1 G. Brown, A. Langer, F. Stewart, *A Typology of Post-Conflict Environment*, "Centre for Research on Peace and Development Working Paper", 2011, no. 1, p. 4.

2 M. J. Boyle, *Violence after War: Explaining Instability in Post-Conflict States*, Baltimore 2014, p. 48.

3 L. Reyhler, A. Langer, *Researching Peace Building Architecture*, "Cahiers Internationales Betrekingen En Vredesonderzoek", 2006, vol. 75, no. 24, pp. 4-82.

4 R. Blair, *Presentation Post – Conflict Reconstruction, Trends, Concepts, Dilemmas and "Solutions"* on 13 June 2016 at the Watson Institute for International & Public Affairs, Brown University, Providence (RI).

The end of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military intervention, which took place in June 1999, was the beginning of the post-conflict reconstruction of Kosovo. Although the representatives of international organisations were mainly aligned during this process, the Kosovan community was engaged in cooperation with them. As a result, the post-conflict society was involved in all the most important events that had occurred since 1999. These events consequently led to a unilateral proclamation of independence, which was announced on 17 February 2008 by the political leaders of Kosovo.

The aim of this article is to establish how Kosovo Albanian women have been engaged in politics in post-conflict Kosovo, which is one of the components of the rebuilding of the post-conflict state. The author formulates a thesis that the role of women in Kosovo's politics at the central level has been evolving since 1999 and had nothing to do with the role of women in armed conflict in Kosovo. This evolution has caused changes in the position of women in Kosovo's social and political life thirty years after the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia broke up.

To verify this thesis the author will raise the following questions: (1) What was the role of women in actions taken by the Kosovo Liberation Army (the KLA) and in conflict settlement? (2) What was the role of women in Kosovo's politics at the central level after the NATO military intervention had ended? (3) What was the role of women in the political life of Kosovo at the central level after the unilateral declaration of Kosovo's independence had been announced?

The article is based on the comparative method, analyses of primary and secondary sources, analyses of statistical data and the historical method.

## **1. The historical background of the armed conflict in Kosovo**

In the beginning, the conflict over Kosovo was a territorial dispute between the Serbs and Albanians on the affiliation of this area.

As Paul Latawski and Martin A. Smith say, *from the nineteenth century onwards, the competing national movements of the Albanian and Serb inhabitants of the province increasingly shaped the story of Kosovo. For each group, the province was associated with historical events seen*

as central to the development of their national identities.<sup>5</sup> The Serbs see Kosovo as the cradle of their statehood. The Battle of Kosovo (*Kosovo Polje*) in 1389 between the Serb Kingdom and the Ottoman Empire is the most important symbol of Serbian national identity. On the other hand, Kosovo has been a significant place for Albanians when it comes to the development of Albanian nationalism. A symbol of the latter was a political organisation called “The League of Prizren” that was formed in 1878 in Prizren to support the Ottoman Empire’s control of the Albanian-inhabited parts of the region.<sup>6</sup> Conflict based on the historical ties of the Serbs and Albanians had been evolving for centuries and has been deteriorating since the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913.<sup>7</sup>

The status of Kosovo within ex-Yugoslavia changed several times. In 1989, Slobodan Milošević, revoked the autonomy of Kosovo. This event worsened the conflict in Kosovo.

Since 1989, the position of the League for a Democratic Kosovo (*Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës*, the “LDK”) and Ibrahim Rugova as its leader had been gaining in prominence. In July 1990, the Albanian Assembly in Pristina approved the independence of Kosovo. Nonetheless, on the same day a referendum in Serbia endorsed the imposition of direct rule on Kosovo and Vojvodina. As a result the Serbian parliament decided to dissolve Kosovo’s parliament and government.<sup>8</sup> On 19 October 1991, the outcomes of the referendum in Kosovo were announced. 99.87% of Kosovo Albanians were in favour of the independence of Kosovo. Therefore, the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, which then had been functioning illegally, confirmed the binding character of the Constitution of Kosovo, also known as the Kaçanik Declaration, which was adopted in Kaçanik on 7 September 1990.<sup>9</sup> In October 1991, Albania recognised Kosovo as a sovereign state. On 24 May 1992, both parliamentary and presidential elections took place in Kosovo. 96 out of the 100 members of parliament were members

5 P. Latawski, M. A. Smith, *The Kosovo crisis and the evolution of post-Cold War European security*, Manchester-New York 2003, p. 4.

6 Ibidem, p. 5.

7 More about the history of Kosovo in K. Mulaj, *Resisting an oppressive regime: The case of Kosovo Liberation Army*, “Studies in Conflict & Terrorism”, 2008, vol. 31, no. 12, p. 1104.

8 Ibidem, p. 1106.

9 B. Koszel, *Konflikt na Balkanach (1991-1999) a bezpieczeństwo europejskie*, “Zeszyty Instytutu Zachodniego”, no. 16, Poznań 2000, p. 38.

of the LDK. Its leader Ibrahim Rugova became the new president of Kosovo.<sup>10</sup>

To sum up, 1992 marked the beginning of the era of diarchy in the territory of Kosovo. Apart from Albania, no other countries recognised the independence of Kosovo. At the same time, the Serbs treated Kosovo as the internal territory of Serbia. At the beginning of the 90s, Ibrahim Rugova had been promoting a policy of peaceful resistance. He was often referred to as the “Gandhi of the Balkans.”<sup>11</sup> After the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords, which ended the war in Bosnia, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), which began to form in 1994, wanted to take over the fight against the Milošević regime on behalf of the Kosovo Albanians.<sup>12</sup>

Facing the problem of a developing conflict in Kosovo, in 1998 the United Nations Security Council adopted three resolutions: Resolution 1160<sup>13</sup>, Resolution 1199<sup>14</sup>, and Resolution 1203<sup>15</sup>, which called for an immediate cessation to hostilities and confirmed that the situation in Kosovo was a threat to international peace and security. In January 1999, in the village of Racak, journalists and officials of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) verified the bodies of 45 civilians, who were killed, apparently, by Serbian forces.<sup>16</sup> At that time, NATO warned both parties that if political settlement could not be found, NATO would start a military intervention. On 6 February 1999, peace negotiations in Rambouillet began. Although, the delegation of Kosovo Albanians signed an agreement, the representatives of Serbia rejected it.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, the NATO air campaign in Kosovo began on 24 March 1999. This intervention was

10 T. Gallagher, *The Balkans in the new millennium. In the shadow of war and peace*, New York-London 2007, p. 27.

11 J. N. Clark, *Kosovo's Gordian knot: the contested North and the search for a solution*, “Nationalities Papers”, 2014, vol. 42, no. 3, p. 529.

12 *Ibidem*.

13 Resolution 1160 (1998) adopted by the Security Council at its 3868<sup>th</sup> meeting on 31 March 1998.

14 Resolution 1199 (1998) adopted by the Security Council at its 3930<sup>th</sup> meeting on 23 September 1998.

15 Resolution 1203 (1998) adopted by the Security Council at its 3937<sup>th</sup> meeting on 24 October 1998.

16 M. Weller, *Peace Lost. The failure of conflict prevention in Kosovo*, Leiden-Boston 2008, p. 85.

More about the case of execution in Racak in F. Krasniqi, *Was NATO's decision to militarily intervene in the Kosovo War a 'last resort'?* E-international Relations, <https://www.e-ir.info/2017/02/11/was-natos-decision-to-militarily-intervene-in-the-kosovo-war-a-last-resort/> [24.04.2021].

17 *Ibidem*, pp. 92-95.

temporarily suspended on 10 June 1999 and formally terminated on 20 June 1999.<sup>18</sup> On 3 June 1999, Belgrade decided to accept a peaceful settlement. On 10 June 1999, the Security Council of the United Nations adopted Resolution 1244<sup>19</sup> that deployed an international civil and security presence under the auspices of the United Nations.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. The engagement of women in armed conflict and conflict settlement in Kosovo

When it comes to armed conflict in Kosovo, very little has been said about the engagement of women in it. In this particular case, experts usually emphasise the scale of sexual violence during the armed conflict in Kosovo. This matter was analysed by the following authors: Gordana Subotić and Adriana Zaharijević<sup>21</sup>, Valeza Ukaj Elshani<sup>22</sup>, Anna Di Lellio and Garentina Kraja<sup>23</sup>, Xhevdet Halili and Haxhi Xhemajli.<sup>24</sup>

Dara Key Cohen points out that *much scholarship on violence in conflict settings assumes that women are victims and men are perpetrators*.<sup>25</sup> She also adds that *some scholars have shown that women may be active fighters who, for example, are issued guns and who perpetrate violence with men*.<sup>26</sup> The position of women in the KLA is a somewhat under-researched phenomenon.

Most sources show that Kosovo Albanian women were primarily the victims of violence, especially sexual violence. Approximately

18 NATO. NATO's Role in Kosovo, <https://www.nato.int/kosovo/history.htm> [01.10.2021].

19 Resolution 1244 (1999) adopted by the Security Council at its 4011<sup>th</sup> meeting on 10 June 1999.

20 P. Szeląg, *Activity of the UN Security Council with the Aim of Restoring Stability in Kosovo in 1998-1999*, "Academic Journal of International Studies", 2013, vol. 2, no. 9, p. 439.

21 G. Subotić, A. Zaharijević, *Women between was Scylla and nationalist Charybdis: Legal interpretations of sexual violence of former Yugoslavia*, [in:] "Gender in Human Rights and Transitional Justice", J. Lahai, K. Moyo (eds.), 2018, pp. 239-264.

22 V. Ukaj Elshani, *The Legal Framework of Conflict Related Sexual Violence: The Kosovo Case* presented at the JMU-MWP 13<sup>th</sup> Graduate Symposium, EUI Florence, Italy, 7 April 2020.

23 A. Di Lellio, G. Kraja, *Sexual violence in the Kosovo conflict: a lesson for Myanmar and the other ethnic cleansing campaigns*, "International Politics", 2021, vol. 58, pp. 148-167.

24 X. Halili, H. Xhemajli, *Rehabilitation of victims of sexual violence of the Kosovo War*, "Ohio North University Law Review", 2020, vol. 46, pp. 515-530.

25 D. Key Cohen, *Female combatants and the perpetration of violence: Wartime rape in the Sierra Leone civil war*, "World Politics", 2013, vol. 65, no. 03, p. 383.

26 *Ibidem*, p. 384.

20,000 Kosovo Albanian women were raped.<sup>27</sup> However, scientists that conducted research on the structure and functioning of the KLA, admitted that women did indeed fight.

By 1997, the KLA had some 150 active members.<sup>28</sup> However by November 1999, the number of registered combatants was more than 25,000.<sup>29</sup> A typical member of the Kosovo Liberation Army was an Albanian male, 20-40 years old. Only 3.33% of registered combatants were female.<sup>30</sup> Some scholars have emphasised that the roles of women who were members of the KLA were marginalised, adding that women reported that they had often been taken less seriously by their male counterparts. This was most prevalent during operations in areas outside their own regions. Women also stated that leadership positions had been given to men from influential families.<sup>31</sup> Also, Virginia Stephens claims that women did not enact male roles. On the other hand, according to the women interviewed during her research, only one female ex-combatant described women's role in the KLA as support for men. The rest of the interviewees considered themselves as being equal to male combatants.<sup>32</sup> Stephens also points out that female combatants were excluded from the post-conflict nation-building project. It is strategic silence that can reflect gender relations in Kosovo, which are impacted by patriarchal tradition.<sup>33</sup> She also adds that ... *in post-conflict nations women actively silence their own memories and men speak up theirs, both serving to reinforce the hegemonic male narrative of conflict and nationalism, whilst encouraging the return to past patriarchal and traditional societal structures. Silence then becomes*

27 H. Marku, *No rewards for Kosovo's women of war*, Balkan Insight 2013, <https://balkaninsight.com/2013/12/18/no-rewards-for-kosovo-s-women-of-war/> [25.04.2021].

28 K. Mulaj, *Resisting an oppressive...*, p. 1111.

29 A. Özerdem, *Lessons learned from the reintegration of former Kosovo Liberation Army combatants*, "Development in Practice", 2004, vol. 14, no. 3, p. 440.

30 Ibidem.

31 D. Delia, F. Sheremeti, *Women in the Kosovo War – Complexifying the discourse. Event Report*, Berlin, 2 December 2019, <https://polis180.org/blog/2019/12/05/report-teatime-women-in-the-kosovo-war/> [25.04.2021].

32 V. Stephens, *(Re)rendering memories of the Kosovo Liberation Army: The silenced guerrilla of women*, "Culture", 2014, no. 5, p. 126.

33 Ibidem, p. 127.

*necessary to protect the masculine credentials of memory of warfare and the creation of a post-conflict nation.*<sup>34</sup>

Although Stephens mentions that female combatants of the KLA silenced their own memories, some of them spoke their minds publicly. In 2013, Teuta Hadri, a gynaecologist in Pristina, who had served as a field doctor in a KLA unit, described the position of female ex-combatants of the KLA in the following way: *during the war and the creation of a [national] movement, men were talking about 'heroines'. But the minute we won the war, that support disappeared.*<sup>35</sup> Another field doctor with the guerrillas, Iliriana Hasaj, added that *no one wants to talk about what women did during the war. We have the respect of our former brothers-in-arms – but not of the people who achieved office through our efforts.*<sup>36</sup> The voices of these women were probably reactions to the programs of disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration that started after the NATO military intervention in Kosovo had ended. These programs were established on the basis of Resolution 1244. However, the demobilisation and reintegration of the members of the KLA was regulated under an agreement entitled “Undertaking of demilitarization and transformation by the UÇK” that was a result of negotiations between officials of the Kosovo Force (KFOR) and the leaders of the KLA and was signed on 20 June 1999.<sup>37</sup> Former KLA members became the military servants of the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC)<sup>38</sup> and the Kosovo Police Service (KPS). According to Nathalie Duclos, the KPC absorbed nearly 5000 ex-combatants.<sup>39</sup> As a result, this organisation included four-fifths of the ex-combatants

34 Ibidem.

35 H. Marku, *No rewards for Kosovo's women of war*, Balkan Insight, 2013, <https://balkaninsight.com/2013/12/18/no-rewards-for-kosovo-s-women-of-war/> [25.04.2021].

36 Ibidem.

37 A. Bekaj, *The KLA and the Kosovo war. From intra-state conflict to independent country*, “Berghof Transitions Series. Resistance, Liberation Movements and Transitions to Politics”, Berlin 2010, no. 8, p. 28.

38 The Kosovo Protection Corps was deactivated in January 2009 and replaced by the Kosovo Security Force (KSF). The latter was also an organisation that gathered the ex-combatants of the KPC. According to Ade Clewlow the future KSF's strength was set at 2500, with approximately 1400 coming from within the KPC via a NATO-led selection procedure. A. Clewlow, *The Kosovo Protection Corps. A critical study of its de-activation as a transition*, Oslo 2010, p. 28.

39 N. Duclos, *The DDR in Kosovo: collision and collusion among international administration and combatants*, “Peacebuilding”, 2016, vol. 4, no. 1, p. 48.



of the KLA.<sup>40</sup> The Kosovan police force absorbed approximately 25% of the 7,000 KPS members.<sup>41</sup>

Reintegration often did not reach women or did not meet their needs. Nonetheless, the representation of women in the security forces was considered; however, after some time women left this sector, claiming that there was no place for them in it.

When it comes to conflict settlement in Kosovo, the available sources show that the role of women in this particular field was much more limited than the role of women in armed conflict in this territory. One piece of evidence is the representation of Kosovo Albanian women during peace negotiations in Rambouillet. Since July 1998, the most influential members of the KLA had been conducting talks with representatives of the Western countries. The leaders of the KLA also took part in peace negotiations in Rambouillet. The Kosovo Albanian delegation included not only them but also the members of the LDK and the United Democratic League (LBD).<sup>42</sup> Among significant Kosovar Albanian leaders was only one woman, a representative of the LDK – Edita Tahiri. Interestingly, she probably would not have arrived in Rambouillet without the Kosovo Albanian and Serbian women's lobby that pushed for the presence of women in the Kosovo negotiations team. Edita Tahiri was the candidate presented by women peace activists from Kosovo and Serbia over whom they reached consensus.<sup>43</sup>

### **3. The most important legal acts on women's rights in Kosovo in 1999-2008**

Until the unilateral declaration of independence in Kosovo, which happened on 17 February 2008, several presidential and parliamentary elections took place. During that time, all the presidents and prime ministers of Kosovo were men. However, women, such as the previously mentioned Edita Tahiri, who was a member of the LDK and in

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, p. 48.

<sup>41</sup> T. Wille, *Representation and agency in diplomacy: How Kosovo came to agree to the Rambouillet accords*, "Journal of International Relations and Development", vol. 22, no. 4, pp. 808-831.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>43</sup> A. Villellas Ariño, G. Redondo de la Morena, *An approach to the Kosovo post-war rehabilitation process from a gender perspective*, "Quaderns de construcció de pau", Bellaterra 2017, no. 2, p. 18.

2004 a creator of the Kosovo Democratic Alternative (alb. *Alternativa Demokratike e Kosovës*, ADK), were involved in politics, but in general, the role of women was then limited. Most women who were ex-combatants of the KLA were inactive in the political life of Kosovo. This role was primarily reserved for male ex-combatants of the KLA. In Kosovo Albanian patriarchal society, this fact should not come as a surprise. Mentality and illiteracy were considered to be the main reasons for limiting women's role in the decision-making process in post-conflict Kosovo. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the *situation began to change with the introduction of a quota of 30% of the seats in the Assembly of Kosovo and Municipal Assemblies, which began to be reserved for women since 2000.*<sup>44</sup>

This shift was started by Kosovo Albanian women promoting gender equality who, against all odds, were determined to make changes in post-conflict Kosovo's society and expand the role of women in politics and the decision-making process in Kosovo during its reconstruction. These women were active in the following areas: politics (individuals, who were, e.g. members of the Assembly of Kosovo and the Municipal Assembly); women from the media and economics; women from civil society.<sup>45</sup> They were supported by the international community<sup>46</sup> and the regional community.<sup>47</sup> It should be stressed that since the 2000s women-led civil society organisations have been developing in the country. In 2000, The Kosovo Women's Network was officially established. This network includes women's organisations across Kosovo and its ethnic backgrounds and has worked in various fields.<sup>48</sup> Women's organisations in Kosovo were consultative bodies, especially for the UNMIK, which collaborated with them during legislative processes. *Women have participated in Kosovo's political de-*

44 L. Zymberj, N. Zogiani, *Women's participation in decision-making in Kosovo*, Kosovar Gender Studies Center, Pristina 2017, p. 11.

45 A. Villellas Ariño, G. Redondo de la Morena, *An approach to...*, p. 16.

46 The international community as an advocate of gender equality in Kosovo was represented by the following: the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General; UNMIK's Office for Gender Affairs (OGA), the Organization of Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and certain international NGOs and donors, *ibidem*, p. 15.

47 The regional community also consisted of women from the political field and women from other professional fields, such as media, academia and business, *ibidem*.

48 *Ibidem*, p. 18.

velopment since the NATO victory by drafting laws, joining working groups, and advocating to the Assembly and the Special Representative of the Secretary General. This involvement demonstrates their ability to meaningfully participate in the political process.<sup>49</sup>

According to, Ana Villellas Ariño and Gema Redondo de la Morena institutionalization of the goal of gender equality in post-conflict Kosovo results from: a) a combination of a strong and active local women's movement advocating and working to the promotion of women's rights and for the advancement of women's status; and b) specific international partners promoting gender equality in post-war Kosovo through funding, training and advocate work, as well as from an international context and community committed in formal terms to address gender with a framework of so-called international standards with include non-discrimination and gender equality.<sup>50</sup> It is certain that local Kosovo NGOs developed their skills in promoting women's rights and gender equality, which not only had an impact on changes in the engagement of women in politics but also on the area of peacebuilding.<sup>51</sup>

The activities of Kosovo Albanian women in regard to gender equality as well as the reform in that field promoted by international and regional communities resulted, in 2004, in the Law on Gender Equality (Law No. 2004/2) being passed by the Assembly of Kosovo. *It establishes gender equality as a fundamental value for the democratic development of Kosovo society, providing equal opportunities for both female and male participation in the political, economic, social, cultural, and other fields of social life. This law defines equal gender participation as achieved in cases where the participation of the particular gender in the institutions, bodies and or at the level of authority is 40%.*<sup>52</sup>

Antidiscrimination in social and political life was also guaranteed in Article 24 of the Constitution of Kosovo, which was adopted in 2008.<sup>53</sup>

49 N. M. Cal, R. D. Bhatia, *Learning to work with both hands. A close examination of women's political and economic participation in post-conflict Kosovo*, Washington 2016, p. 15.

50 A. Villellas Ariño, G. Redondo de la Morena, *An approach to...*, pp. 16-17.

51 A very peculiar example of it is the Women's Peace Coalition. This joint platform of Kosovo Albanian and Serbian women peace activists was formally established in 2006. Its aim was to monitor the status negotiations and promote women's participation in them and also promote the mainstreaming of gender in the negotiations. *Ibidem*, p. 18.

52 N. M. Cal, R. D. Bhatia, *Learning to work...*, p. 15.

53 Article 24 Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, Republic of Kosovo, Ministry of Local Government Administration, <https://mapl.rks-gov.net/en/legjislacioni-dhe-politikat-en/kushtetuten>

Another legal act that was connected with the engagement of women in politics in Kosovo was the Law on General Elections in the Republic of Kosovo (Law No. 03/L-073), adopted in 2008 by the Assembly of Kosovo. Under the provisions of these Laws, *in each Political Entity's candidate list, at least thirty percent (30%) shall be male and at least thirty percent (30%) shall be female, with one candidate from each gender included at least once in each group of three candidates, counting from the first candidate in the list.*<sup>54</sup> The Law on Local Elections in Kosovo also required at least thirty percent (30%) participation of women in each Political Entity's candidate list.

## 4. The changes of women's engagement in Kosovo's political arena since 2008

Two former leaders of the KLA established their own political parties. Hashim Thaçi created the Party for the Democratic Progress of Kosovo (Alb. *Partia e Progresit Demokratik të Kosovës*), which soon afterwards became known as the Democratic Party of Kosovo (Alb. *Partia Demokratike e Kosovës*, PDK).<sup>55</sup> A former commander of the KLA – Ramush Haradinaj established another political party – the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (Alb. *Alliance për Ardhmërinë e Kosovës*, AAK).<sup>56</sup> Both parties as well as the LDK became rivals in Kosovo's political arena. They were followed by the creation of other parties.<sup>57</sup> The constitution of the new parties in Kosovo is another outcome of the changes that have happened after the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo. Some of the above-mentioned parties, such as the New Kosovo Alliance (Alb. *Aleanca Kosova e Re*, AKR), The Alternative (Alb. *Alternativa*) and *Guxo!* (Eng. Dare!) were established by women.

After 17 February 2008, the presence of Kosovo Albanian women in politics grew. According to the Agency for Gender Equality, women's

e-republikes-se-kosoves-en/ [26.04.2021].

54 Article 27 Law No. 03/L-073 on General Elections in the Republic of Kosovo, The Assembly of Republic of Kosovo.

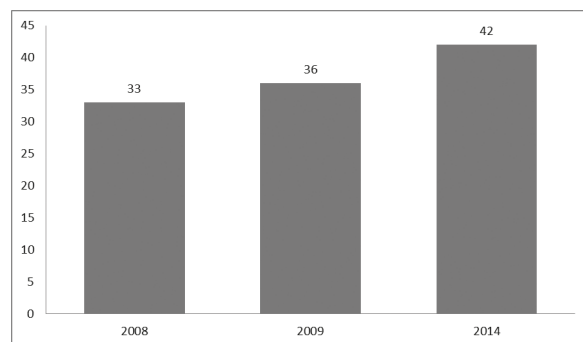
55 A. Bekaj, *The KLA and...*, p. 31.

56 Ibidem.

57 See more on political parties in Kosovo in: A. Beha *Between stabilization and democratization. Elections, political parties and intra-party democracy in Kosovo*, Pristina 2017.

participation in Kosovan ministries has increased from 33% to 42% over the years (Graph 1).<sup>58</sup>

**Graph 1. The changes in women's participation in Kosovan ministries over the years (in percentage)**



Source: Own elaboration based on L. Zymberi, N. Zogiani, *Women's participation in...*, p. 15.

However, quotas in public administration were considered as good during 2009-2011, when leadership positions in Kosovo were still dominated by men. Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that during that period, women became noticeable in both national and international politics in Kosovo.<sup>59</sup>

In 2011, Edita Tahiri, a Harvard University graduate and PhD in political sciences from Prishtina University in cooperation with Johns Hopkins University SAIS in Washington DC, became the deputy prime minister, responsible for foreign policy and national security. In 2011-2017 she was also a chief negotiator at the EU-facilitated dialogue between the Republic of Kosovo and the Republic of Serbia.<sup>60</sup> In 2014-2017, she was also a 'minister of dialogue' for the Republic of Kosovo.

Tahiri was not the only woman in Kosovo's politics who became popular. In 2011, the Assembly of Kosovo elected Atifete Jahjaga to the position of president of the Republic of Kosovo. The then nearly 36-year-old deputy general director of the Kosovan police force was the first non-partisan candidate and the youngest women to become

58 L. Zymberi, N. Zogiani, *Women's participation in...*, p. 15.

59 Ibidem, p. 14.

60 Edita Tahiri, Academia, <https://harvard.academia.edu/editatahiri/CurriculumVitae> [26.04.2021].

the head of state.<sup>61</sup> During her five-year presidency, President Jahjaga brought awareness to gender issues in Kosovo. She supported gender legislation as well as civil society initiatives. In 2015, she established the “Heroinat” monument in Pristina to commemorate the importance and sacrifices of women’s work during the armed conflict in Kosovo.

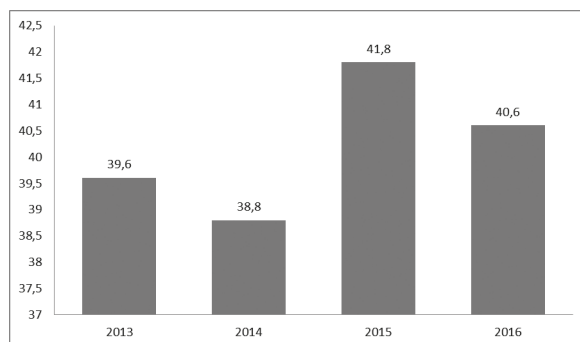
During Atifete Jahjaga’s presidency, a new Law on Gender Equality (No. 05/L-020) went into force. *The Law stressed that equal participation and representation is achieved when representation of a minimum of fifty percent (50%) in the governing and decision-making bodies of all legislative, executive, judicial and other public institutions is achieved.*<sup>62</sup> The changes in the Law on Gender Equality meant that most Kosovan ministries did not comply with the new provisions.<sup>63</sup> In 2014, 50% of ministries in Kosovo complied with the provisions of the Law on Gender Equality of 2004, whereas in 2015 only 15% of them complied with the provisions of the Law on Gender Equality of 2015. In 2016, women’s representation in government as a whole (ministries and the office of prime minister) was 40.6%. In addition, in 2015, women headed only 5.2% of leadership positions in government.<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, it should be noted that even though the percentage of women’s representation in government did not comply with the provisions of either the Law on Gender Equality of 2004 or the Law on Gender Equality of 2015, since 2013 the number has been increasing (Graph 2).

61 D. Duhaček et al, *Women’s Rights in Western Balkans*, Policy Department for Citizens’ Rights and Constitutional Affairs, Directorate General for Internal Policies of the Union, PE 608.852, European Parliament, 2019, p. 15. In early 2000 she served as a police officer, progressing at a regional level and gradually promoted to higher ranks. She completed her studies at the Faculty of Law of the University of Prishtina. In 2006-2007, she attended a postgraduate certification program in police management and penal law at the University of Leicester in the United Kingdom, Postgraduate Certification in Crime Science at the University of Virginia in the United States of America. President Atifete Jahjaga, 12 March 2012, Wilson Center, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/president-atifete-jahjaga> [26.04.2021].

62 L. Zymberi, N. Zogjani, *Women’s participation in...*, p. 14.

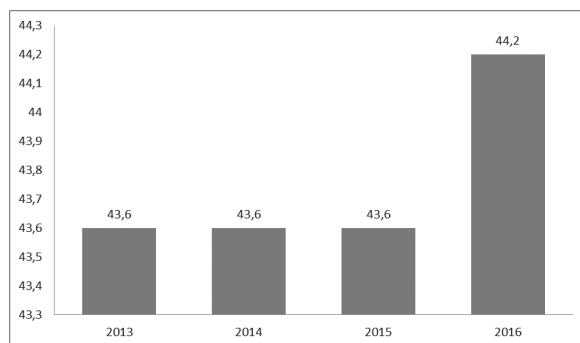
63 *Ibidem*, pp. 18-19.

64 *Ibidem*, p. 9.

**Graph 2. Women's representation in the Government of Kosovo (in terms of percentage)**

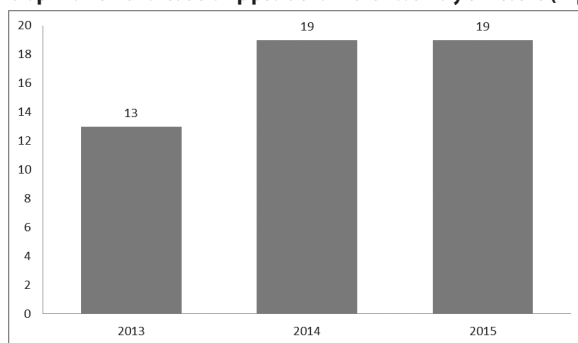
Source: Own elaboration based on L. Zymberi, N. Zogiani, *Women's participation in...*, p. 17.

What is interesting is that female representation in the Assembly of Kosovo in 2013 and 2014 complied with the provisions of the Law on Gender Equality of 2004, whereas in 2015 and 2016 it did not comply with the provisions of the Law on Gender Equality of 2015. On the other hand, the representation of women in the Assembly of Kosovo has increased since 2013 (Graph 3).

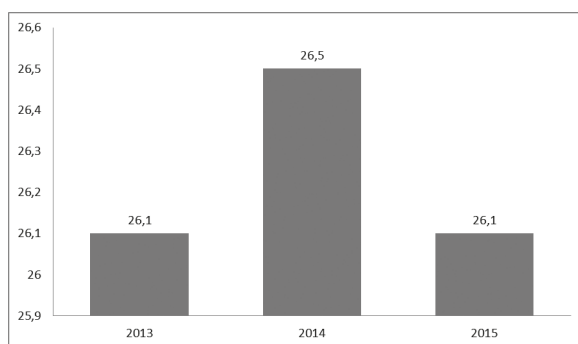
**Graph 3. Women's representation in the Assembly of Kosovo (in percentage)**

Source: Own elaboration based on L. Zymberi, N. Zogiani, *Women's participation in...*, p. 23.

Also, in 2013-2015, the leadership position of women in Kosovo was quite low and far from the quotas. However, even though the number of women's leadership positions in the Assembly of Kosovo increased (Graph 4), the number of women's leadership positions in the government of Kosovo remained almost the same (Graph 5).

**Graph 4. Women's leadership positions in the Assembly of Kosovo (in percentage)**

Source: Own elaboration based on L. Zymberi, N. Zogiani, *Women's participation in...*, p. 23.

**Graph 5. Women's leadership positions in the Government of Kosovo (in percentage)**

Source: Own elaboration based on L. Zymberi, N. Zogiani, *Women's participation in...*, p. 21.

Nonetheless, even though the number of women's leadership positions in Kosovo has been low since the end of Atifete Jahjaga's presidencies, a couple of female politicians in Kosovo have strengthened their positions on Kosovo's political scene.

One of them is Mimoza Kusari-Lila. From February 2011 to October 2013, she served as deputy prime minister and minister of trade and industry. From December 2013 to July 2017, she was the mayor of Gjakova. She was the first women mayor in the history of Kosovo.<sup>65</sup> In 2017, together with Ilir Deda, she established the Alternative party and became its president.

<sup>65</sup> Mimoza Kusari-Lila holds an MBA from Duquesne University (Pittsburgh, PA). Vocal Europe <https://www.vocaleurope.eu/team/mimoza-kusari-lila/> [27.04.2021].



Two other significant female politicians in Kosovo became popular in 2019.

After the parliamentary elections that took place in October 2019 in Kosovo, Vjosa Osmani was elected president of the Assembly of Kosovo, and Arbërie Nagavci became the deputy president of the Assembly.<sup>66</sup> Vjosa Osmani was, before her election, nominated as the LDK candidate to become the prime minister of Kosovo.

What is more, in the parliamentary elections of October 2019, women were directly elected by popular vote to the parliament rather than receiving seats due to quota alone. Also for the first time, the government of Kosovo, led by Albin Kurti, had 30% of its highest-ranking positions filled by women. They led the Ministry of Economic Development, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Local Government.<sup>67</sup>

Even though the new government of Kosovo collapsed on 25 March 2020 after a vote of no confidence for Prime Minister Albin Kurti, the historical changes in women's parliamentarism became a reality. Since that time Vjosa Osmani's<sup>68</sup> political carrier has gained momentum. Since the collapse of the government of Albin Kurti, the leader of Vetëvendosje, Osmani has been supporting Kurti, who wanted to hold new parliamentary elections. Osmani became an opponent to her colleagues in the LDK, which resulted in her leaving the party in September 2020.<sup>69</sup> In November 2020, Hashim Thaçi resigned as president of Kosovo and surrendered to the Kosovo Specialist Chambers

66 Lejla Gačanica et al., *Women's Rights in Western Balkans. Women in politics, gender-based violence and security for women human rights defenders in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia 2020*, The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, Johannesburg 2020, p. 7.

67 Ibidem.

68 Vjosa Osmani holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Prishtina and a master's and doctorate degrees from the University of Pittsburgh. She taught at the University of Prishtina, at the American College of Kosovo and at Pitt Law as a visiting professor. Before running for parliamentary elections, Osmani served as chief of staff and foreign policy advisor as well as legal advisor to the president of the Republic of Kosovo. Pitt Law Alumna Vjosa Osmani nominated as LDK candidate for prime minister of Kosovo, University of Pittsburgh, School of Law, <https://www.law.pitt.edu/news/pitt-law-alumna-vjosa-osmani-nominated-ldk-candidate-prime-minister-kosovo> [27.04.2021].

69 K. Pawłowski, *Przedterminowe wybory parlamentarne w Kosowie (cz. I): sukces demokracji czy kolejna odsłona wewnętrznego kryzysu politycznego?*, "Komentarze IeŚ", no. 338 (35/2021), 23 lutego 2021, <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/przedterminowe-wybory-parlamentarne-w-kosowie-cz-i-sukces-demokracji-czy-kolejna-odslona-wewnetrznego-kryzysu-politycznego/> [27.04.2021].

that was established in 2015 to try former Kosovo Liberation Army guerrillas for wartime and post-war crimes.<sup>70</sup> Thaçi vacated the post, and Vjosa Osmani was approved as interim president by the parliament of Kosovo. Osmani then founded the independent political list *Guxo!*, which on 14 February 2021 contested the parliamentary elections in coalition with Vetëvendosje.<sup>71</sup> Vjosa Osmani received around 300,000 votes. A similar number was received by the father of the nation, former President Ibrahim Rugova.<sup>72</sup> On 4 April 2021, Osmani became the new president of Kosovo, elected by the Assembly.<sup>73</sup> In *Guxo!* she was replaced by Donika Gërvalla-Schwarz, who in Kurti's government also served as the second deputy prime minister of Kosovo and minister of foreign affairs.

The new cabinet consists of 15 ministries, among which five are led by women. This fact has been criticised by the Kosovo Women's Network, claiming that this small (33%) representation of women in the government cabinet contradicts the Law on Gender Equality.<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, the KWN considered the last parliamentary elections as a historic victory for the women's movement in Kosovo, which has been supported for more than 15 years by civil society organisations working for women's rights, such as the KWN and the Kosovo Lobby for Gender Equality.<sup>75</sup> According to the Kosovo Women's Network, the last parliamentary elections brought *change and hope for the participation and representation of women in politics and decision-making processes. Compared to the elections in 2019 the representation of women in the Assembly of Kosovo has increased by five seats. Out of a total of*

70 The same charges were indicted against Kadri Veseli, Rexhep Selimi and Jakup Krasniqi. J. Robinson, *Kosovo Ex-president Thaci denied release by Hague judge*, 27 January 2021, Balkan Insight, <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/01/27/kosovo-ex-president-thaci-denied-release-by-hague-judge/> [27.04.2021].

71 M. Citaku, *New President of Kosovo. Vjosa Osmani*, 05.04.2021, Fredrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, <https://www.freiheit.org/western-balkans/new-president-kosovo> [27.04.2021].

72 *Kosovo poised to elect Vjosa Osmani as a new president*, 3 April 2021, <https://www.trtworld.com/europe/kosovo-poised-to-elect-vjosa-osmani-as-new-president-45583> [27.04.2021].

73 A. Domachowska, K. Pawłowski, *Vjosa Osmani prezydentem Kosowa*, "Komentarze IES", no. 365 (62/2021), 8 kwietnia 2021, <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/vjosa-osmani-prezydentem-kosowa/> [27.04.2021].

74 KWN Urges the new government to implement law on gender equality when appointing its cabinet, 20.03.2021, Kosovo Women's Network, <https://womensnetwork.org/kwn-urges-new-government-to-implement-law-on-gender-equality-when-appointing-its-cabinet/> [27.04.2021].

75 *Kosovo poised to...*

120 seats, there will be 44 female deputies (36.6%), whilst in the previous legislature there were 39 female deputies (32.5%).<sup>76</sup> In addition, only 11 out of the 44 female deputies that were elected required a quota to secure a seat. The other 33 women won a seat without the gender quota.<sup>77</sup> In addition, as the KWN emphasised, *over 60% of women in Kosovo participated in voting, and a woman became the most voted for person in history since the declaring of independence in 2008.*<sup>78</sup> The outcomes of elections were all the more interesting because women were underrepresented on the electoral list of political parties and not equally represented during television debates, campaigns or on newspaper covers. Despite this fact, four out of ten of the most voted for candidates were women.<sup>79</sup>

## Conclusions

Taking into account the latest events in Kosovo, it is evident that the political role of women has been evolving since 1999. Nevertheless, even though, in 2021, there is still an underrepresentation of women and a non-compliance with legal acts<sup>80</sup>, including the Law on Gender Equality, the available data show that the percentage of women's leadership positions in the government of Kosovo and the Assembly of Kosovo has been increasing. Also, the percentage of female deputies to the Assembly has been increasing.<sup>81</sup> As a result, Kosovo Albanian women's participation in the political life of this state has been strengthened. Women's engagement in politics has been supported by the international community and civil society organisations. The

76 KWN: Elections proved the strength of women – efforts for equality continue, 05.03.2021, <https://womensnetwork.org/kwn-elections-proved-the-strength-of-women-efforts-for-equality-continue/> [27.04.2021].

77 Ibidem.

78 Ibidem.

79 Ibidem.

80 The provisions of the Law on Gender Equality are not in line with the provisions of the Law on General Elections in the Republic of Kosovo.

81 It should be emphasised that the statistics of the elections from 2013 to 2016 and from 2019 to 2021 are not comparable. The first set included all the women who worked in ministries and the office of the prime minister, whereas the second one included women who were deputies of the Assembly of Kosovo and held leadership positions in the Assembly and government. Despite this fact, data shows that both in 2013-2016 and 2019-2021 the number of women who were active in politics increased on the national level.

initial gender quotas guaranteed women's participation in the political scene of Kosovo. Nowadays, during parliamentary elections in Kosovo, women are able to win seats without relying on the gender quota. The new generations of Kosovo Albanian female politicians are well-educated, open-minded and socially engaged. They are very different from the male politicians who have been present in Kosovo's political life since 1999 and were members of the KLA or LDK. Female ex-combatants of the KLA, who in 2019 were around 600<sup>82</sup>, are mostly not present in the political sphere. They have been replaced by a younger generation of women who would like to change not only political life but also the mentality of society, which is still patriarchal. However they are doing it based on their own rules and hard work and with the backing of civil society organisations that promote women's rights and dialogue, especially between the Kosovo Albanians and the Serbs.

So far, the engagement of women in civil society organisations in Kosovo has been an informal method to become present in the country's political and social development. Now, it might be seen that women can use formal means to be a part of the political life of Kosovo, which are elections and the holding of office.

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