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## **KOSOVO MARCHERS AGAINST PARTIES FINANCING BILL COMPLAIN OF VIOLENCE**

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18.06.2019

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Balkan Insight (17 June 2019)

Members of civil society groups in Kosovo accused the security guards of the ruling Democratic Party of Kosovo, PDK, of pushing them away from the party building on Monday as they were protesting in a March for Refusal, as they called it, over the new bill on financing political parties.

The NGOs protested in front of the HQs of all six political parties, but were pushed away only when they arrived in front of PDKs main offices.

The NGOs promptly organised a press conference at which they called on the PDK to take responsibility for the incident, and accused of using violence.

Civil society \* invites the PDK, as the biggest party in the governing coalition, to assume the responsibility that belongs to it \* by respecting the standards of democratic societies and the fundamental rights of civil organization to freedom of expression and peaceful protests. Civil society requires the PDK to take a stand and measures on the violent actions of its staff, Ismet Kryeziu, from the Kosovo Democratic institute, told the press conference.

Representatives of 100 NGOs in Kosovo joined the march on Monday against the Bill on Financing Political Parties, and urged the parties in parliament not to pass it. They consider the bill unconstitutional and against international standards on financing political parties.

The bill decreases the supervision and control over the finances of political subjects and lowers the transparency and accountability of political subjects, the Kosovo Democratic Institute has said.

In June 2018, the Venice Commission, an advisory body to the Council of Europe, expressed serious concerns about independent audits submitted by political parties in Kosovo.

The political parties had significant amounts of unverifiable income and expenditures, persistent violation of financial accounting, internal control and reporting standards and showed instances of being in violation of the tax laws and the Law on the Prevention of Money Laundering, the commission said.

It further noted that numerous allegations of covert funding schemes within political parties had been made since 2014, recommending that regulatory agencies should be given an explicit mandate to conduct investigations when potential irregularities arise, which does not currently exist.

Civil society organisations have consistently claimed that political parties receive donations and

carry expenditures in cash, and the cash is not registered or tracked in the parties financial reports, said the Venice Commission. [They also claimed that] citizens made contributions to political parties which exceeded their annual income but no agency checked their origin.

The opposition Vetevendosje party said it supported the march and will not vote for the bill in parliament. In front of its headquarters, the party put up a banner declaring: We agree! The law shall not pass.

We do not have the power to stop it, but if the law passes, we will send it to the Constitutional Court, Sami Kurteshi, a deputy in the assembly for Vetevendosje, said.

The activists also marched past the headquarters of the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo, AAK, the Social Democratic Initiative and the Social Democratic Party, but did not meet any deputies from those parties.

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