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## **'POISONED BALLOTS' FURORE IN KOSOVO ANGERS SERBIA**

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Irish Times (15 October 2019)

Serbian president Aleksandar Vucic has said any bid to sideline his allies in Kosovo would be catastrophic for its inter-ethnic relations, as an investigation into poisoned ballots became the latest irritant in ties between Belgrade and Pristina.

Twenty-six members of Kosovos central election commission complained of experiencing a foul smell and itchy skin last Sunday after opening envelopes containing ballots cast in Serbia during Kosovos parliamentary election a week earlier.

Twelve of those affected are still under observation in hospital, and prosecutors have opened an investigation and announced plans to seek help from an international laboratory to identify any suspicious substances involved.

Based on samples taken from patients, we have excluded the possibility of any infectious disease or traces of any chemical agent, Lindita Ajazaj-Berisha, the head of the infectious diseases department at Pristinas University Clinical Centre, said on Tuesday.

Their condition appears stable and we will let them go home when it is deemed to be reasonable, local media quoted her as saying of the 12 patients.

### **Coalition**

The ballots in question were among the last to be counted from an election that was won by opposition parties Vetevendosje (Self-determination) and the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), while all 10 seats reserved for the countrys ethnic Serb minority were taken by Serb List, which Mr Vucic and his allies guide from Belgrade.

Vetevendosje and the LDK are in talks to form a coalition and they are constitutionally obliged to include one Serb minister in government.

Albin Kurti, the leader of Vetevendosje and likely next prime minister, has said he does not want to work with anyone from Serb List, which backs Belgrades rejection of Kosovos 2008 independence declaration and was accused by other Serb parties of using threats and intimidation to dominate the election in Serb areas.

### **Poisoned envelopes**

I would like to point to the attempts to waive the results of Serb List, Mr Vucic said on Monday during talks with senior Russian politician Valentina Matviyenko.

They invented a story with poisoned envelopes with ballot papers sent from Serbia... They obviously want to squeeze Serb List out [of parliament], Russias Tass news agency quoted him as saying. It will tell catastrophically on relations between the Serbs and [Kosovar] Albanians because there will no longer be any Serbs in the institutions of power and they will be unable to defend their freedoms and rights, he added.

We asked the Western partners not to help them. Otherwise, I am afraid, we are heading for a catastrophe. All they did, they did together, seeking to neutralise the Serb List.

Mr Vucic is keen to maintain close ties with [Russia](#) and [China](#) as a counterweight to the [European Union](#) and [United States](#), which are applying increasing pressure on Belgrade and Pristina to finally normalise their relations.

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/poisoned-ballots-furore-in-kosovo-angers-serbia-1.4051600>

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