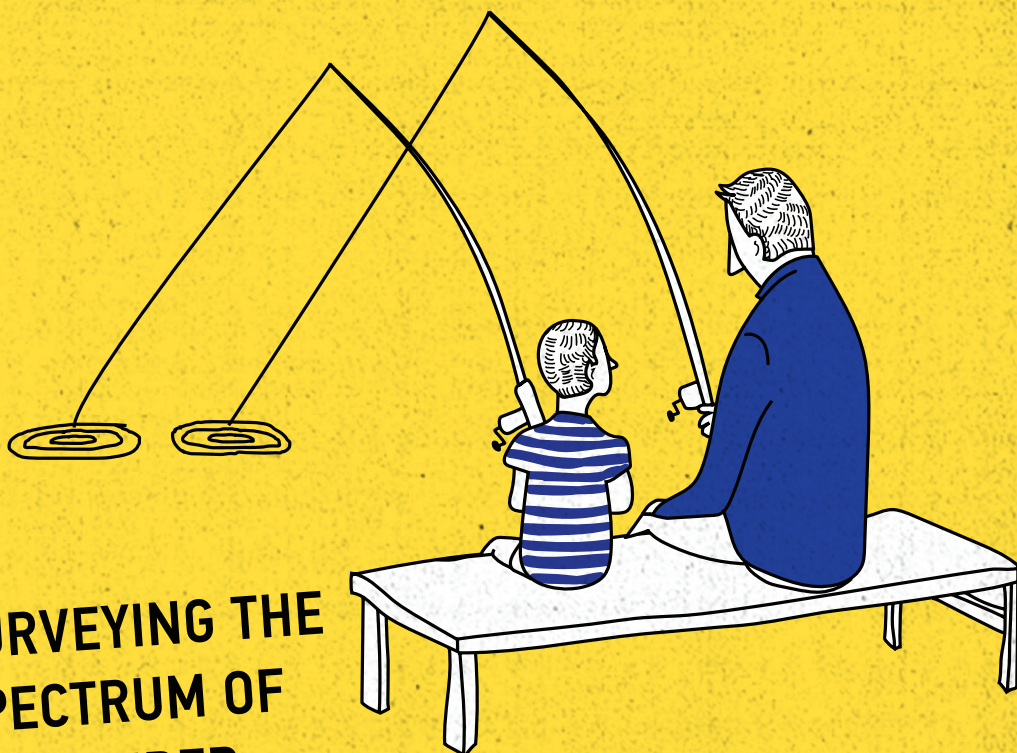


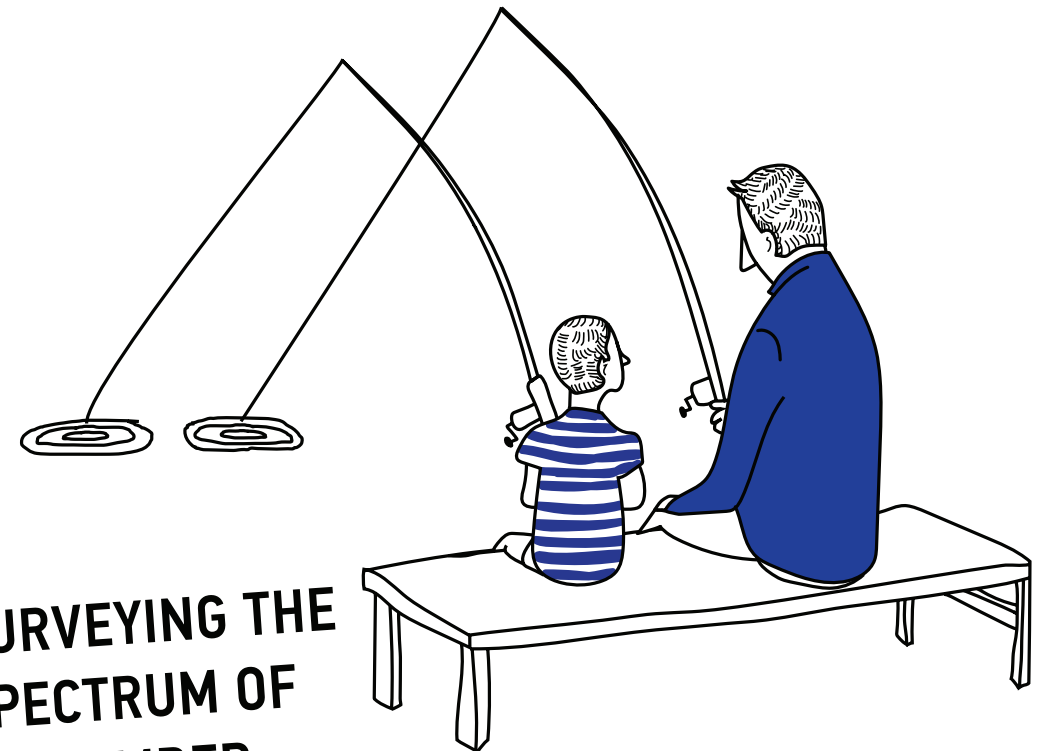
# LACK OF ENGAGEMENT?



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SPECTRUM OF  
EU MEMBER  
STATE POLICIES  
TOWARDS KOSOVO**

**JAMES KER-LINDSAY AND  
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**James Ker-Lindsay and Ioannis Armakolas**

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For more information: [info@kfos.org](mailto:info@kfos.org) [www.kfos.org](http://www.kfos.org)

Views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society - KFOS

# AUTHORS

## JAMES KER-LINDSAY

James Ker-Lindsay is Professor of Politics and Policy at St Mary's University, Twickenham, and Senior Visiting Fellow at the London School of Economics and Political Science, where he was formerly Senior Research Fellow on the Politics of South East Europe. His research focuses on conflict, peace and security in South East Europe and on secession and recognition in international politics. He is the author or editor of a dozen books, including *The Foreign Policy of Counter Secession: Preventing the Recognition of Contested States* (Oxford University Press).

## JULIA HIMMRICH

Julia Himmrich is Dahrendorf Postdoctoral Fellow at LSE IDEAS. She previously was a Research Fellow on European defence at the European Leadership Network (ELN) and taught on European and German Foreign Policy at King's College London. She holds a PhD from the LSE on Germany's recognition of Kosovo in 2008. Her wider research interest lies in European foreign and security policy and conflict settlement.

## TOMÁŠ DOPITA

Tomáš Dopita earned a PhD degree in International Relations at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague. Currently, he is a senior researcher at the Institute of International Relations in Prague and soon-to-be Editor-in-chief of *Mezinárodní vztahy – Czech Journal of International Relations*. In his research, he focuses on encounters between collective subjects in Bosnia and Herzegovina, European integration of the Western Balkans, women and gender in international development, and equal opportunities in foreign service.

## JAROSŁAW WIŚNIEWSKI

Jarosław Wiśniewski is a former Visiting Fellow at LSEE Research in South Eastern Europe, LSE European Institute. He holds a PhD in European Studies from King's College London and has previously worked as a consultant for the European Commission, Council of Europe, British Council as well as a number of European civil society organisations and various public and private institutions in the EU and in South East Europe: in Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia among others. He is currently working on a book '*Securitizing European Energy Policy*' (Routledge, 2018).

## IOANNIS ARMAKOLAS

Ioannis Armakolas is Assistant Professor at the Department of Balkan, Slavic and Oriental Studies, University of Macedonia (Thessaloniki) and 'Stavros Costopoulos' Research Fellow and Head of the South-East Europe Programme at the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) in Athens. He is also the Editor in Chief of the scientific journal Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, published by Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.

## MILAN NIČ

Milan Nič is Senior Fellow at the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) in Berlin. Until 2016, he was director of the Bratislava-based think tank within the Globsec organisation. He studied at the SAIS Johns Hopkins University Bologna Center, the Central European University and the Charles University in Prague. He worked as advisor to the High Representative/EU Special Representative in Sarajevo, analyst for the European Stability Initiative in Vienna, and advisor to the Deputy Slovak Foreign Minister (2010-12).

## PAUL IVAN

Paul Ivan is a Senior Policy Analyst at the European Policy Centre (EPC), where he works in the Europe in the World and the European Politics and Institutions programmes. Before joining the EPC, Paul was a diplomat in the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a researcher at the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) in Brussels and a researcher on EU external relations and security issues at the Romanian Center for European Policies (CRPE). Paul holds an MSc in International Relations from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and bachelor's degrees in International Relations, European Studies and History.

## ISABELLE IOANNIDES

Isabelle Ioannides is a Senior Associate Researcher in the 'European Foreign and Security Policy' cluster at the Institute for European Studies, Vrije Universiteit Brussel. She carried out her post-doctoral research on EU supported security sector reform (SSR) in Kosovo at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and completed a European Commission-funded research stay in Pristina in 2010. She has published widely on the EU's role in the world with a focus on EU peacebuilding and statebuilding in transitional societies, including the governance of rule of law and SSR, as well as on EU crisis management in the Western Balkans.

## RUTH FERRERO-TURRIÓN

Ruth Ferrero-Turrión is Adjunct Professor of Comparative Politics and European Studies at Complutense and Carlos III Universities, Co-Director, European and Eurasian Studies Group (GEurasia). She is also Senior Research Fellow at Complutense Institute of International Studies (ICEI) where she chairs Continuous Education Programs on Migrations and International Relations, Immigration and Asylum EU Policies and New Balkan Contexts. Since 1996 she has participated in different electoral processes as an international observer in Eastern European countries (Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania, Ukraine, Armenia, Russia).

## AGON DEMJAHA

Agon Demjaha holds an MA with distinction in International Relations and European Studies and PhD in Political Sciences. He has more than three decades of experience in the field of education and research with different governmental institutions and non-governmental organisations. During 2006-2010, he has served as the Ambassador of the Republic of Macedonia to the Kingdom of Sweden, while also covering the Kingdom of Norway and Republic of Finland as a non-resident Ambassador. Mr. Demjaha has also been engaged as an advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Economic Development of the Republic of Kosovo. Currently, Mr. Demjaha works as an Assistant Professor of Political Sciences and International Relations at the Tetovo State University. He also teaches and is a member of the South East European University's Board. Mr. Demjaha has published a number of articles in the field of political sciences in the international journals and is also author of several chapters in edited books published by renowned press houses such as United Nations University Press and Imperial College Press. His main interests include ethnic relations, conflict prevention and resolution, diplomacy and regional cooperation.



# Introduction

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IOANNIS ARMAKOLAS AND JAMES KER-LINDSAY

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Kosovo's declaration of independence, in February 2008, resulted in a deep division within the European Union. While 23 members recognised Kosovo, five refused to accept its statehood. At the time, many observers expected the non-recognisers to fall into line eventually and accept Kosovo. However, in the decades since then, that has not happened. If anything, the picture has become more complex. Rather than two distinct camps, four broad groups now exist. First, there are the countries that have recognised Kosovo, and have forged meaningful relations with it. These include Britain and Germany and most of the other members of the EU. At the other end of the scale there are the states that still refuse to recognise Kosovo, and continue to have very little to do with it. Spain and Cyprus fall into this category. However, between those two poles lie two other factions. Although Greece, Romania and Slovakia have refused to recognise Kosovo, they have nevertheless forged relatively good relations with Pristina. Meanwhile, the Czech Republic and Poland, while recognising Kosovo, have in fact had relatively little diplomatic interaction with Kosovo authorities over the past ten years.

This report examines Kosovo's relations with these four broad categories of states. In doing so, it shows that even within these groups - what we can roughly term 'recognisers and engagers', 'recognisers but non-engagers', 'non-recognisers but engagers', and 'non-recognisers and non-engagers' - there are significant variations in how states behave. For example, even those states that recognise Kosovo, and have done a lot to support it in the past, may now be far less engaged than they once were. Also, whereas some countries that have always been hostile towards Kosovo have seen their positions harden, rather than soften, with the passage of time, others have gone the other way and become more willing to engage with Pristina. As is shown, the reasons for these changes in positions are complex, and vary from country to country. In some cases, they reflect domestic political changes. In other cases, it is driven by external policy concerns, such as a wish to be seen to be working closely with European partners. Also, the broader international political environment can play a part. For instance, events in Spain have made many countries warier about secession.

This report tries to delve into the reasons why the nine EU members addressed here have chosen the positions that they have, and what Kosovo can do to engage with them more effectively. In doing so, two important and related points emerge. The first is that recognition, while important, is not everything. Engagement also matters. What is more important, a country that recognises Kosovo, but then has little to do with it, or a country that does not recognise it, but maintains active economic, political and social relations? All too often the emphasis is on the former, rather than the latter. To be sure, recognition is important. However, its value needs to be put in its proper context. Kosovo's place in the world is more than about numbers in the United Nations, especially as the ongoing Russia veto is likely to keep it out of the UN for the foreseeable future. In the meantime, Kosovo needs to have meaningful interaction with the international community. What matters more for ordinary citizens: counting another win on a scoreboard, or gaining investment from a major company from a non-recognising state.

Secondly, engagement is best thought of as a spectrum, rather than neat categories. Just consider the non-recognisers and engagers. There are considerable differences in how Greece, Slovakia and Romania all interact with Kosovo. Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that countries can move along the spectrum. The position taken by a state today is not necessarily going to be the position it adopts tomorrow. It can become more engaged, just as it can become less engaged. Rather than trying to move countries from non-recognition to recognition, Kosovo should also look at how it can encourage states towards greater engagement. In some cases, it is about trying to encourage states to renew their engagement, or intensify it. Crucially, while this study considers the states of the EU, many of the lessons here are equally applicable to many other countries around the world.

# 01

## THE UNITED KINGDOM

JAMES KER-LINDSAY

Over the past twenty years, the United Kingdom has been Kosovo's single most important European ally in its attempts to gain recognition and acceptance on the international stage. Having been at the forefront of efforts to secure international intervention in 1999, from the very start of the status process the British Government left no doubt that it viewed statehood as the only viable outcome - a position that went almost entirely unchallenged domestically. Once Kosovo declared its independence, in February 2008, Britain, along with the United States, led the international efforts to try

to persuade countries to recognize Kosovo and secure its place in various international organisations. This support saw Kosovo recognized by more than half the members of the United Nations and helped pave the way for Kosovo's membership of many key international bodies, including the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the International Olympic Committee. Britain also played a key role in supporting Kosovo during the International Court of Justice advisory opinion proceedings on the legality of the declaration of independence. However, while Britain continues to support Kosovo,



and presses for recognition whenever suitable opportunities arise, there is no doubt that the intensity of its lobbying activity has decreased in recent years. This is due to several clearly identifiable factors.

First, the task of securing more recognitions has now become extremely difficult. As one British official noted, ‘the low hanging fruit has been picked’. Those countries that were in any way inclined to recognize Kosovo did so long ago. The remaining 80 or so United Nations members that have not recognized Kosovo are, by and large, the tougher hold outs. As Britain sees it, these states fall into four broad categories. The first are states that have a deep aversion to secession and still regard Kosovo as a dangerous precedent. Recent developments with Kurdistan and Catalonia will only have hardened the resistance of such countries towards recognition. Then there are those states oppose Kosovo’s independence on ideological grounds. These include Russia and Iran, which view Kosovo as a ‘Western project’. The next group are those countries that would rather hold off until some sort of final settlement is reached between Serbia and Kosovo. Finally, and perhaps most importantly for Kosovo, there are what may be called ‘the inertia states’. These are countries that have not recognized because the wheels of their politics and diplomacy turn at a different pace. Many countries, especially those in further flung corners of the

world, know little about Kosovo, and care even less. It is not that they do not want to recognize Kosovo. They simply do not prioritize it. In cases where recognition requires parliamentary approval, Kosovo may simply be a victim of far other, more pressing, concerns.

Apart from the ‘inertia states’, persuading the other countries to recognize Kosovo is now incredibly difficult, if not futile. There is a sense in British official circles that the amount of diplomatic effort expended to try to encourage these hold outs is just not worth it any longer. Indeed, active efforts could in fact be harmful to Britain’s international standing. After a sustained effort to persuade countries to recognize Kosovo, the impression that London is continuing to press countries to do so, and is now simply being ignored, damages Britain’s prestige. Importantly, this view appears to be shared more widely. Other members of the Quint – the five Western Countries tasked with overseeing Kosovo’s transition to its final status – have apparently made the same observation. As one diplomat was reported to have told the other members of the group, the failure to attract further recognitions was “becoming embarrassing”. Again, this is not to say that the situation cannot change under certain circumstances. For example, if a country is signaling that it may be open to recognizing Kosovo, then Britain would be willing to assist. Such support can



be especially important when the country in question is a Commonwealth member.

Secondly, the domestic political situation in Kosovo in recent years has done enormous damage to recognition efforts. British officials express their frustration at the way in which Kosovo politicians have undermined efforts to secure further international acceptance. The disruption in the parliament, which saw opposition parties even resort to letting off tear gas, has been particularly harmful. The images were carried around the world. It was a public relations disaster. As British officials noted, they could not say that it had proven that it was a stable, well-functioning democracy when images of demonstrations, public scuffles with police and MPs in gas masks were being carried by the international news media. Although the situation may now be improving, there is little doubt that the political instability of recent years has undermined Kosovo’s efforts to gain recognition, and has made it even harder for Kosovo’s supporters to make the case for more countries to accept its independent status.

Thirdly, after almost ten years since the declaration of independence, and because they believe that Britain can no longer take the central role in trying to persuade others to recognize Kosovo, British officials believe that it is vital for Kosovo to be seen to be taking the lead in future. Again, this is not

to say that Britain is no longer prepared to play a role in trying to persuade others to recognize Kosovo, or secure Kosovo’s membership in international organizations. It will when it sees an opportunity. Instead, the British Government wants to move towards playing a more supportive role. Kosovo needs to be getting out and taking charge of such activities.

Finally, all these factors are playing out in a rapidly changing international environment. Whereas Kosovo was once high on the British foreign policy agenda, the looming prospect of Britain’s departure from the European Union raises important questions about the future direction of British external relations. London’s focus on Kosovo, or even the wider Balkan region, is likely to diminish. Notwithstanding the high-profile success of major singing stars, such as Rita Ora and Dua Lipa, Britain does not have strong ties to Kosovo. According to the last census, in 2011, the number of people born in Kosovo living in Britain was 28,000. This is tiny, especially in relative terms. For instance, there are almost 600,000 Poles in the country. Also, the economic relationship is minimal. Latest figures show that Kosovo was ranked 177th as a source of imports, and 179th as an export destination. As the main centre of British attention will need to be on building up trade ties with the world’s largest economies, such as the United States and China, or with countries





where it has close historic ties, such as the Commonwealth states, the amount of diplomatic attention that will be devoted to Kosovo, or even the wider Western Balkans, is likely to decline. Of course, many British officials recognize that Kosovo remains an important security concern. However, even on this issue, Kosovo is not ranked particularly highly in global terms. Also, some argue that the European Union should be taking a greater role in this area.

Overall, Britain remains a solid supporter of Kosovo's independence. However, its desire to actively lobby countries to recognize Kosovo, or help Kosovo join international organizations, has undoubtedly diminished in recent years. As the success rate has dropped, British policy makers have come to believe that over-vigorous lobbying reduces the United Kingdom's standing. Looking ahead, it is unlikely that this will change. Apart from anything else, Britain is going to be too focused on Brexit to take an active role on lobbying for Kosovo's recognition in the way that it once did. However, this is not to say that it will be unwilling to help. It will do so when and where it can. To this end, the Kosovo Government must take the lead on future recognition activities. It must show that it has a coherent plan of action, perhaps focused on those countries where recognition is being held up by slow political processes, and then indicate where it feels that Britain can help. Perhaps even

more importantly, Kosovo has got to provide its supporters with the best possible case to persuade non-recognizers that it is a stable and democratic society that should be accepted as a universally recognised member of the international community.



JULIA HIMMRICH

Germany's growing role in European and international affairs has made it one of the most prominent actors in the Western Balkans. Due to the diminishing attention from the United States, and because of the United Kingdom's loss of influence because of Brexit, Germany's regional role may continue to grow. This has developed into German leadership on the Kosovo-Serbia relations and on preparing the region for EU accession through the Berlin Process. For Germany, supporting Kosovan statehood is part of the strategy to build stability in the Western Balkans and

the wider integration process. It has consistently supported Kosovo's statehood since Kosovo declared independence in 2008. It has been active in gaining more bilateral recognitions and memberships in international organisations for Kosovo. German politicians openly pressure Serbia to make progress on normalisation. Within the European Union, Germany works closely with the five non-recognisers to allow Kosovo to have a European perspective.

Germany was part of the main international negotiations on Kosovo since the 1990s. Al-



though its role was limited in the early stages it developed into an important actor, considered able to build bridges with Serbia and Russia. The participation in NATO's intervention of 1999 was a controversial decision domestically but Germany still provides the largest European contingent to KFOR. Germany also laid the foundations for European integration for the Western Balkan region by initiating the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe in 1999. Along with Italy, Germany was critical of the Ahtisaari process as it failed to take Serbian considerations on board and alienated the leadership in Belgrade. When an extension of the status negotiations was agreed, a German diplomat, Wolfgang Ischinger, represented the EU and chaired the Troika with the USA and Russia. Those final Troika negotiations also failed to reach an agreement. Nevertheless, because of the chairman's engagement with several EU members, Kosovo gained more EU recognitions and the five non-recognising members agreed to find a compromise to deploy the EULEX mission on a 'status neutral' mandate. Germany was therefore instrumental in reaching high recognition numbers in the EU and to secure the role of the EU in Kosovo despite disagreement on the status among EU member states. Hesitations among German political parties were also overcome through the Troika negotiations and after recognition Germany became the most publicly outspoken champion of Kosovan statehood.

Since 2008, Germany has had several coalition governments under the leadership of Chancellor Merkel but the position on Kosovan statehood has remained consistent. In response to the Serbian request for an Advisory Opinion by the International Court of Justice, Germany coordinated the contributions of the recognising EU members to ensure the best possible representation in favour of Kosovo. Following the Court's decision German politicians became more outspoken in support of Kosovan independence. In 2011 Chancellor Merkel was the only foreign leader to publicly call for the dismantling of Serbian parallel structures in northern Kosovo. In 2012 German Members of Parliament of the CDU went to Belgrade and suggested that Germany would not allow for progress on Serbian EU accession status if it did not recognise Kosovo. This pressure by some German parliamentarians has continued over the years, although it is not official government policy. Relations with Serbia deteriorated and Germany positioned itself as a tough broker in support for Kosovan statehood but also key to Serbia's EU accession. Although relations improved under Prime Minister/President Vučić, Germany insists on continuing to discuss progress on normalisation as part of Serbian EU accession talks and wants Serbia to open chapter 35 of the acquis, on the future relations with Kosovo, as soon as possible. Within the Berlin Process Germany established Kosovo as an equal partner to its neighbour-



ing states, for example it was the first forum in which Kosovo's flag was displayed along that of other Western Balkans states.

To gain more international recognitions, Germany coordinated with the Kosovan government and key allies such as the USA and EU members. However, so as not to alienate Russia further it focussed first on Europe. Later it turned to countries which had neither a strong position for or against an independent Kosovo. For this Germany has integrated the question of Kosovo statehood into bilateral meetings when possible. Since the initial wave of bilateral recognitions has passed, Germany has been involved in working closely with the Kosovan leadership on pursuing Kosovo's membership in international organisations. These have included larger international organisations, as well as social and sports institutions. As Germany is a strong regional leader, and often one of the largest financial contributors in multilateral organisations, it has therefore been able to mobilise support.

Germany remains committed to supporting Kosovo in gaining more recognitions and joining international organisations. However, the reality of the decreasing number of potential new recognising states and the slow progress on the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue make these lobby efforts more difficult. In this context, the role of the Kosovan leadership becomes ever more important

now as much of the future of the recognition process and particularly the accession to international organisation depends on an effective strategy by the Kosovan government. Regarding the recent difficulties in gaining membership at UNESCO and Interpol, German policy makers point at international circumstances but also at miscalculations from of the Kosovan government. In the case of UNESCO, in the view of German policy makers, Kosovo had not fulfilled the protection of cultural heritage sites and was therefore applying from a weak position. Kosovo's initial decision to put a bid forward regardless was a surprise. The limited time and capacity due to the coalition negotiations made the necessary lobbying efforts impossible. Future UNESCO membership may also be made more difficult by the United States leaving the organisation and therefore Kosovo losing its strongest supporter. The difficulty in the case of Interpol was, according to German policy makers, mostly due to the role of the People's Republic of China, a non-recogniser, as the host country. Due to the inability for Kosovans to travel to China and engage in lobby work there was no realistic opportunity to engage with member states and not much Kosovan partner could do. The hope for German policy makers is that at the next annual general meeting in Dubai, UAE, a recognising state and supporter of Kosovo, the Kosovan government have sufficient time to lobby successfully for



membership and to coordinate closely with partners.

From a German perspective, Kosovo's socio-political and economic development is directly related to increasing recognitions and membership in international organisations. Kosovo needs to become more attractive as an international partner by delivering on the promised reforms. Related to this are, in the eyes of German policy makers, wider issues of EU integration such as progress on demarcation of the border with Montenegro and fighting organised crime are immediate priorities to reach visa liberalisation. Finally, the normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia is an essential aspect of this. If relations with Serbia improve, recognising Kosovo appears less as a hostile or risky act to third countries.

Due to its growing role in the European Union, Germany is the key ally for Kosovo in the European Union. Germany has also been an active advocate for Kosovan independence and recognition over the past ten years. For Germany, Kosovo's full statehood is directly related to stability in the Western Balkans and is one aspect of its regional integration strategy. Germany is spending significant political capital on keeping EU members cooperative despite their disagreement on Kosovo's status and lack of interest in enlargement. Due to this there is also a strong focus on political reforms and

Germany is unlikely to let any EU candidate country in the region cut corners before joining the union. As much pressure as Germany may put on Serbia to remain engaged and constructive on Kosovo, it will continue to be stringent on conditionality for Kosovo, for example on visa liberalisation. Regarding its international strategy towards greater recognition, Kosovo will be able to count on German support. The Kosovan government needs to provide a clear and consistent strategy that assesses risks before issuing a bid. The case of UNESCO has, in the eyes of German policy makers, damaged the Kosovan 'brand' and its prospects for membership in other organisations. Close coordination with members of organisations who can act as sponsors is essential as well as allowing sufficient time. This should likely result in a successful bid for Interpol in 2018. Bilateral full recognitions are unlikely to increase significantly in the short-term, and Serbia continues with its anti-recognition campaign. Kosovo needs to present itself as a viable and attractive partner to encourage engagement on economic and social level with new partners, even if it is not able to achieve full diplomatic recognition.

# 03 THE CZECH REPUBLIC

TOMÁŠ DOPITA

The Czech Republic's relations with independent Kosovo have been very complicated, but they have a great potential for improvement. For outside observers, the situation is difficult to understand. Although the Czech government recognised Kosovo's independence at the end of May 2008, President Václav Klaus disagreed with the decision and refused to appoint a Czech Ambassador in Pristina. Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg, however, went against the president's opinion and ensured his ministry established diplomatic relations with the Republic of

Kosovo by transforming the Czech UNMIK Liaison Office in Pristina into the Embassy of the Czech Republic. Schwarzenberg also appointed a *chargés d'affaires* to lead the embassy. While this would seem an unusual situation, it is far from unique. This kind of contradiction seems to be a 'signature move' in Czech foreign policy towards independent Kosovo. What made this combination of recognition and disengagement possible? Understanding the sources of this contradiction is a crucial precondition for thinking about improving the Czech-Kosovo relations in the future.



On the one hand, it is important to understand that the Czech people feel a cultural closeness with the Slavic peoples in the Balkans and that there is a long-term special relationship with the Serb nation that can be traced back to the pan-Slavic movement in the 19th century. In contrast, until the 1990s, there had been nearly no significant links between the Czech and (Kosovo)Albanian cultural, political, and economic spheres. Albanians, if anything, had been negatively associated with the ‘Ottomans’, ‘Turks’, or ‘Mohammedans’. In this context, they were viewed as the symbolic oppressors of Slavs and Christians in Southeast Europe. In 1993, Kosovo was mentioned in the Czech Parliament as another potential ‘security problem’ in Southeast Europe, and Albanians as a ‘militant nation’.

On the other hand, it is also crucial to consider that after the fall of the communist regime in 1989, the Czech Republic geopolitically transitioned from the East to the West and its governments usually aligned the Czech foreign policy with one of the major Western liberal-democratic countries. These countries have been the principal international architects of Kosovo’s independence, and they exerted considerable influence on other countries, including the Czech Republic, to recognise Kosovo as an independent state.

The contradiction in the Czech relationship with Kosovo has been embedded precisely

in the combination of the pro-Serb national sentiment and the pro-Western geopolitical orientation. Accordingly, many Czech politicians tended to favour the Serb national cause, but they retreated from their pro-Serb positions once confronted with their Western allies. For example, in 2013, when Miloš Zeman became the President of the Czech Republic, he stuck to Klaus’ policy of disengagement and refused to take the Czech-Kosovo diplomatic relations to an ambassadorial level. And yet, in 1999, it was the government of the same Miloš Zeman that succumbed to the Western pressure and approved the NATO air strikes. A similar combination of the Czech pro-Serb bias and international pressures lay behind the Czech government’s decision to recognise Kosovo. In fact, the first attempt to recognise Kosovo failed when the Christian Democratic Party openly questioned the legal status of Kosovo’s independence. In the end, the government recognised Kosovo in a special session in the town of Teplice, without prior notice. Even then, out of a cabinet of 18 members, only 11 ministers favoured the decision.

Thus, the contradiction in the Czech relationship with Kosovo has been contingent upon the combination of the pro-Serb domestic bias and the Western influence upon the Czech foreign policy. Interestingly, though, this contradiction has not corresponded with any other major ideological, political, or geopolitical cleavages in the



Czech politics. In real terms, it has, however, led to the establishment of two relatively stable groups of actors, whose relations with independent Kosovo have been highly contradictory. Initially, the pro-Western camp was led by Václav Havel, who was President of Czechoslovakia and then President of the Czech Republic between 1989 and 2003. Later on, this approach to Kosovo was represented mainly by Karel Schwarzenberg, who worked with Havel, and then served as the Czech Foreign Minister in 2007-2009 and 2010-2013. The pro-Western day-to-day agenda has been carried out mainly by the Czech foreign service, which has been steadily pro-Western in its approach to Kosovo, and remains so. Meanwhile, the pro-Serb group of Czech actors was initially represented chiefly by Václav Klaus, Havel’s political rival who held several high-profile political positions (Czech Prime Minister in 1992-1998, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies in 1998-2002, and Czech President in 2003-2013). However, this camp involved or still involves many other senior political figures hailing from various political parties, such as Jiří Dientsbier (Foreign Minister of Czechoslovakia in 1989-1992), Jan Kavan (Czech Foreign Minister in 1998-2000, Social Democratic Party), Lubomír Zaorálek (Foreign Minister in 2014-2017, Social Democratic Party), Jaroslav Foldyna (MP for Social Democratic Party since 2010), Vojtěch Filip (Chairman of the Czech Communist Party since 2005), and many others. Importantly,

and in line with the fact that the splits do not correspond to established cleavages in Czech politics, many of the pro-Serb actors have been otherwise staunchly pro-Western.

From Kosovo’s perspective, it may seem that the Western influence on the Czech foreign policy has been beneficial and that the pro-Western approach to Kosovo should be further strengthened and developed. However, it is important to realise that the Czech government’s recognition of Kosovo’s independence was perhaps the last and final significant achievement of the pro-Western approach to Kosovo. The process that led up to the Czech recognition of Kosovo’s independence united the pro-Serbian political actors from different segments of the Czech political scene. These actors then worked to spoil closer engagement with Kosovo as a sovereign country. The potential of the pro-Western approach to Kosovo may, therefore, have been already exhausted. As things stand, Kosovo’s Western supporters do not have any instruments to enhance social, political, or economic engagement between the Czech Republic and the Republic of Kosovo.

The one thing the two camps share in common is that neither shares an authentic appreciation of Kosovo, as such. Czech foreign policy actors approved the NATO airstrikes and recognised Kosovo’s independence primarily because of the partners in the West, not because of the consideration of



the situation in Kosovo itself. In light of the above, it appears that, with the exception of the diplomatic service, the current Czech relationship with Kosovo is nearly void of genuine engagement with the country and its people. Worryingly, it would seem that Kosovo's engagement with the Czech Republic suffers from the same problem, but even stronger. For instance, the Kosovo embassy in Prague does not produce any Czech content or English content customised for the Czech context. This shortcoming means that Czech politicians or journalists cannot start representing Kosovo more strongly, even if they wished to do so. For the sake of comparison, the Czech embassy in Pristina usually posts several contributions in the Albanian language per week. Another problem Czech officials mention is that their Kosovar counterparts tend to focus only on the issues of recognition and international status. According to Czech officials, this one-dimensional approach often jeopardised the success of other initiatives.

Overall, there is a contradiction between the pro-Western and pro-Serb approaches that defines the current Czech relationship with Kosovo. At the same time, Kosovo seems to be only interested in matters concerning international diplomacy and recognition. As things stand, there are rather unfavourable conditions for engagement and cooperation in the future. To create more openings for mutually enriching interaction between

the two countries, Kosovo needs to look beyond a policy that focuses solely on dealing with the issues of international status. It is crucial that Kosovo develops an ability to produce original content customised for the Czech context and that it starts engaging with broader audiences beyond the confines of the Czech foreign service. In this regard, Kosovo could even use the Czech pro-Serb bias to its advantage. For example, one move that could have an impact would be to appoint a Kosovo Serb as the next ambassador to Prague. Furthermore, Kosovo could use the issues of common interest, such as the process of EU enlargement, to engage more with political actors in the Czech Republic. Finally, Kosovo diplomats and officials should prepare their political and public positions on why it is important that the Czech Republic and Kosovo move to a new level of engagement. This is critical because we can expect that in the new political set-up following the October 2017 general elections, and the January 2018 presidential elections, the relations with Kosovo can, once again, become issues of high public and political contention. Kosovo representatives should be ready to publicly make the case for Kosovo when the situation demands it.



JAROSLAW WISNIEWSKI

Poland's policy towards South Eastern Europe focuses on two areas: EU enlargement and security. Both in fact converge. EU accession for Western Balkan Six (WB6) is seen, from a strategic, long-term perspective, to increase the security of the whole continent. Still, the region is not a priority area for Polish foreign policy. Also, relations with individual SEE countries are not prioritised in an equal manner. The most important partner for Poland, from among all the WB6 countries, is Serbia. This has a significant impact on the way Warsaw approaches relations with Pristina.

Poland was not an enthusiastic supporter of Kosovo's independence, even though recognition came on 26 February 2008, a week after the formal declaration. The Council of Ministers explored four options, recommended by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: (1) immediate recognition; (2) no recognition; (3) waiting to see how the situation develops and then recognise; (4) recognise but not establish diplomatic relations. Initially, the government - a coalition of Civic Platform and the Peasants Party - wanted to be among the first recognisers (reportedly under heavy pressure from Washington).





There was, however, a direct and open opposition from the presidential palace. The President of Poland was worried what impact this recognition would have on the future of separatist provinces in the former Soviet Union, notably Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria. An important context for this discord was a personal conflict between Prime Minister Donald Tusk and Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski on one side, and President Lech Kaczyński on the other; both Tusk and Sikorski were strong supporters of Kosovo's independence. Constitutionally, the government needed a presidential sign off on the decision. The final solution was, therefore, a result of a compromise, acceptable to the President - recognition, but no direct diplomatic relations. It is worth noting that Polish policy towards Kosovo did not have a negative impact on its bilateral relations with Serbia.

This dichotomy of views prevailed over the next nine years, impacting Polish - Kosovar ties. There are at least two examples of Poland's inconsistent approach towards Kosovo - the debate over opening a Trade Office/Embassy and abstention from the vote over Kosovo's UNESCO bid. In the period between mid-2010, when Civic Platform's Bronisław Komorowski became Polish President, and late 2014, when Donald Tusk left the post of the Prime Minister to become the President of the European Council, the government debated revers-

ing its original decision and establishing direct diplomatic relations. Reportedly this topic was discussed by the Council of Ministers at least twice, each time failing to find a 'convenient moment' (e.g. regional visit by the President). The idea was abandoned when Ewa Kopacz replaced Tusk as the PM. The second instance was Kosovo's UNESCO bid, and Poland's abstention. Poland based its final position on three premises: Kosovo's membership in UNESCO could disrupt the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina; UNESCO was facing important decisions regarding its future activities and financing, and Kosovo's membership would politicise its work; The 2011 Palestinian bid was a vital signpost, back then Poland abstained from voting. Still, Poland maintained that it remains a firm supporter of Kosovo's statehood, and that abstention in the vote had no impact on it whatsoever.

In practical terms, the lack of direct diplomatic ties meant that cooperation between Poland and Kosovo mainly took place in multilateral fora; bilateral work remained low key (e.g. regular consultations of MFA's at the level of Directors). Still, Poland maintained its direct presence and support for Kosovo. For example, there has been a Polish Military Contingent in Kosovo within KFOR since 1999, currently stationing in Novo Selo. Also, a Polish Police Special Unit operates in Mitrovica.



Since 2015, the foreign policy approach of the new Law and Justice government has been observably different than its predecessors. Close alignment with Germany, characteristic during the previous eight years, was to a large extent abandoned. Instead, the focus was on closer regional cooperation - primarily within the Visegrad Group, or V4. Initially, there was an ambitious political agenda to focus on the North-South axis, which would have increased Poland's presence in South Eastern Europe (closer cooperation with Albania, Croatia, Serbia, more significant support for Bosnia and Herzegovina, with Kosovo mostly absent from these debates). But an escalation of events in Ukraine since the 2014 Euromaidan has stopped that. Politicians have not however wholly abandoned those ideas, as, for example, the 2017 Three Seas Initiative summit - aimed at regional cooperation of countries between the Adriatic, Baltic and Black seas - has shown.

Currently, the establishment of direct diplomatic relations between Poland and Kosovo is out of the question and is not on the table, despite the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' support for such a step. There are three identifiable reasons for that. Firstly, current political elites follow a cautious approach of the late president Kaczyński, and there is no sign of a willingness to change the status quo. Secondly, there is an observable influence of nationalist, pro-Slavic faction within the ruling elites. And thirdly there are no firm

advocates for a change of the status quo, either within or outside of Poland (unlike in 2008).

Today's Polish policy towards Kosovo falls within a broader regional approach. Support for the EU enlargement remains a priority. Warsaw's initiatives towards the region are limited in scope, with a multilateral approach, primarily via the Visegrad Group, being the preferred option. Concerning direct, bilateral relations, Poland tends to prioritise two capitals - Belgrade and Tirana (with Albania being a strong advocate of Kosovo's agenda). More generally, Poland sees itself as a bridge between the old and the new EU member states and is an active member of the 'friends of enlargement' group within the EU. The country wants to use its experience of successful democratic transition from communism and subsequent EU accession and promote them, although this is more prominent in the case of the Eastern Partnership countries, and less so in South East Europe. This involvement varies in degree and level, ranging from small-scale projects, such as the Enlargement Academy, a training programme for civil servants, through to major multilateral events, such as the summit of ministers of foreign affairs from the V4 and Western Balkans hosted in Warsaw in November 2016. In terms of civil society engagement, cooperation exists but receives limited state support. Recognition without a diplomatic presence creates a



legal quagmire for the use of public funds. Support therefore relies mainly on European funds, such as Erasmus Plus for NGOs, Erasmus Mundus Action 2 for academics, or focuses on humanitarian assistance.

Despite the approach so far, Poland's interest in Kosovo is set to increase. One can identify three factors facilitating this change. First, Poland is deeply worried by the malign influence of external actors - especially Russia - in South Eastern Europe. It sees them as a threat to a 'fragile stability' of the whole region. Polish diplomats point out Russian influences in Serbia; the attempted coup in Montenegro; and the separatist rhetoric of Milorad Dodik in Republika Srpska, linked with his visits to Moscow. Closer attention paid by Poland to Russian actions in SEE is a consequence of the events in Ukraine after Euromaidan. Poland is one of the most active proponents of an establishment of a South East European Strategic Communications Task Force, which would mirror the work of the currently existing East StratCom Task Force focusing on the Eastern Partnership countries. Although Poland prioritises Russian threat, it also looks at the actions of other external actors in the region - China, Turkey, the Gulf countries, and non-state actors (especially extremist groups). Secondly, security concerns about SEE have accelerated since 2015; primarily due to the migration crisis. Poland calls for closer cooperation with SEE to tackle the challenges posed by

terrorism, jihadism, hybrid warfare, people's smuggling, radicalisation, the flow of foreign fighters, funding of terrorism and organised crime. Thirdly, and most importantly, Poland is set to become a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (2018 - 19). While the situation in Ukraine will undoubtedly be a priority for Warsaw, Kosovo may be given more consideration. Although, as explained earlier, Kosovo is not the most important regional partner for Poland in South Eastern Europe, United Nations may become a new platform for cooperation, going beyond the EU enlargement agenda.

For the past nine years, Warsaw has approached Kosovo as an aspect of Poland's relations with the EU and the US. However, changes in Polish foreign policy (post-2015), combined with the growing perception of threat from Russia, have led to a re-evaluation of Polish policy towards the whole region. Poland's membership in the UNSC provides an opportunity to intensify bilateral relations between Warsaw and Pristina although with the caveat that establishment of direct diplomatic relations between both countries remains unlikely.

# 05 GREECE

IOANNIS ARMAKOLAS

Greece is the non-recogniser with by far the biggest political and economic interests in the Western Balkans, a key player when it comes to EU's enlargement policy in the region, and a country with close, but often turbulent, relations with Albania. Greece is also a country that maintains its non-recognition stance, while at the same time offering glimpses of hope to Kosovars due to its strong policy of engagement with Pristina.

The background to its position on Kosovo status is Greece's Balkan policy. Back in the

early 1990s, swept by a nationalist wave over the Macedonian question and the Yugoslav wars, Greece found itself in dispute with all its neighbours and in amicable relations only with Milosevic's Serbia. This, coupled with heightened anti-Western sentiment, brought Greece at odds with all its Western partners. Changing gear after the mid-1990s, Athens tried to mend relations with neighbours. During the Kosovo war, Greece did not participate in, but offered crucial facilitations to NATO operations, and participated in the Operation Allied Harbour that managed the influx of refu-



gees. The Simitis government followed a difficult middle way between the strong anti-intervention sentiment of the vast majority (97 percent) of the public opinion, the opposition and the media, and the obligations towards its NATO allies and the regional stability.

After the Kosovo war, Greece fully subscribed to the vision of integrating the Balkans into the EU and NATO. It was at the Thessaloniki Summit, during Greece's 2003 European Council Presidency, that the Balkan countries' accession aspirations got the greatest push. Greece also helped Bulgaria and Romania join the EU. But failed attempts to resolve the name issue and, more recently, moves by the Gruevski government in Skopje which were understood as provocations in Athens pushed Greece to block both FYROM's entry to NATO and its start of EU accession negotiations.

When Kosovo declared independence Greece decided not to recognize, explaining its position with reference to the respect for international law, the territorial integrity of states as well as regional stability. The concern that Kosovo would also set a precedent for Cyprus was also in Greek policy makers' minds, even if this dimension was not explicitly mentioned. Instead, Athens declared that it would support any status for Kosovo that would result from a mutual and negotiated agreement between

Belgrade and Pristina. Importantly, Greek officials have not ruled out the recognition of Kosovo. Greece also formally aims to promote the integration of the entire Balkans, including Kosovo, into the Euro-Atlantic institutions. A reasonable assumption is that this cannot happen without Greece eventually recognizing Kosovo, which appears to contradict the thesis about the mutually agreed solution. This is an ambivalent and ambiguous position that may in the future produce friction within Greece's foreign policy aims, especially if, contrary to EU expectations, Serbia does not eventually accept Kosovar statehood in order to join the bloc.

There is very little public debate in the Greek media and public about Kosovo's status. The few exceptions include debates organized by policy think tanks, usually attended by specialized audiences, which are only occasionally picked up by mainstream media. During such debates, academics, former politicians and retired diplomats have sometimes questioned Greece's policy and argued for recognition of Kosovo. But these views have not managed to generate greater public interest or a momentum for recognition within political circles. The Kosovo issue, as foreign policy in general, is simply not a priority for crisis-stricken Greece. That said, the Kosovo issue is often used by extreme nationalist politicians in their anti-Albanian and anti-Muslim rants.



Despite non-recognition, Athens has made conscious efforts to engage with Kosovo, recognizing the new reality on the ground, and perhaps as a counter-balance for its one-sided policies in the 1990s. Greece maintains a Liaison Office in Pristina, led by an Ambassador, unlike any other of the EU non-recognisers. Numerous formal and informal meetings between top-level officials of Greece and Kosovo have taken place since 2008. Greece accepts Kosovar travel documents, and cars with Kosovar license plates can enter Greece. Athens also facilitated Kosovo's membership in the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development either by voting in favour of Pristina's application (in EBRD) or by making the quorum for the vote possible. In addition, Greece was the only EU non-recogniser that did not participate with written or oral statements during the deliberations for the case of Kosovo's declaration of independence before the International Court of Justice.

Moreover, Greek officials have over the years managed to achieve levels of visibility in Kosovo, unparalleled by any other non-recognising state. Ambassador Dimitris Moschopoulos, while in charge of the Greek Liaison Office in Pristina, was also the EU Facilitator for the Serbian Cultural and Religious Heritage in Kosovo. In this capacity, he developed a working rela-

tionship with Kosovar governmental institutions unprecedented for a diplomat from a non-recognising country. Moschopoulos was instrumental in bringing to the negotiating table the Kosovar government and the Serbian Orthodox Church, two institutions that had not cooperated formally or informally. The current Head of the Liaison Office, Ambassador Konstantina Athanassiadou, is also a very active in Pristina, and, like her predecessor, frequently appears in Kosovar media and other public fora. In addition, another senior Greek diplomat, Ambassador Alexandra Papadopoulou, is serving as Head of the EULEX Mission since July 2016.

The Liaison Office itself has been very active in organizing the visits of business delegations from Greece and generally promoting bilateral trade and investment. Economic connections between the two countries have strengthened in recent years, as have civil society and academic exchanges. Another key element of the policy of engagement was an initial agreement for the opening of a Representation Office for Trade and Economic Affairs of Kosovo in Greece, which was reached during the Kosovar Foreign Minister Enver Hoxhaj's visit to Athens, in March 2013. The agreement was criticized by the nationalist opposition in Greece, and progress in its implementation has been slow due to shifting priorities of the Kosovo government.



Greece's policy of engagement with Kosovo continued under the SYRIZA-ANEL government, even though both parties had previously held positions quite hostile towards Kosovo. While in office, MFA Nikos Kotzias picked up from where his predecessors had left off and continued to strengthen bilateral relations. During his visit to Kosovo in July 2015 he signalled that Greece would support Kosovo's applications to join Interpol and UNESCO. None such move, however, materialised, likely due to reactions by the Greek opposition and the Serbian government. While the policy of engagement has repeatedly met severe criticism by populist and nationalist political forces, members of key parties - such as New Democracy, PASOK and SYRIZA - also criticized the government of the day for allegedly overly promoting relations with Kosovo while they were in opposition. The Embassy of Serbia in Athens also issues regular protests on the policy, and there is criticism by Serbian officials in Belgrade.

Overall, the Kosovo issue exposes a fissure between a realpolitik foreign policy of engagement with Pristina, on one hand, and, on the other hand, a position akin to the one-sided and stereotypical views of the 1990s, which questions or even fiercely opposes closer cooperation. The former position seems to be better understood by professional diplomats and some prominent politicians and is fully cultivated by

the government of the day. The latter position is more emotional. It is championed by minor parties, which are fascinated by conspiracy theories and cultivate anti-Western sentiment; but it is also quite often popular among mainstream opposition parties on the look to score easy political points. What this situation reveals is that for Greek parties the easy fall back position is to revert to foreign policy views formulated in the 1990s. In that context, it is the policy of engagement with Kosovo that generates criticism and seems as a weird policy choice to most, and not the non-recognition of Kosovo.

Having not recognized Kosovo for almost a decade, it is difficult to imagine today a scenario in which Greece would recognize the new country 'out of the blue'. Inertia will tend to keep Athens along the comfortable path of non-recognition and continuing strong engagement. It is after all a successful strategy, if not for 'keeping everybody happy', at least for not 'making anyone unhappy'. For Greece to seriously consider changing its position something 'spectacular' or 'extraordinary' would have to happen. This does not seem a likely development for now. Instead, bilateral relations will have to continue being built 'the hard way'. Therefore, incremental improvement of relations between Greece and Kosovo are tremendously important if Kosovo is to maintain its hopes for eventu-



al recognition. Engagement should be continued and intensified, if necessary at the initiative and insistence of Kosovars. Importantly, though, Kosovo's insistence for full reciprocity, and for Kosovo to receive from Greece treatment reserved for recognized states, can prove counter-productive. It satisfies Kosovo's sense of self-esteem but plays directly into the hands of the Serbian diplomacy, always working to undermine Greece's policy of engagement, since it allows for the perception of Kosovars as ungrateful and greedy.

The tendency in recent years for policy coordination between Kosovo and Albania is also seen with skepticism in Athens. Generally, Greece feels uncomfortable when the Albanian-inhabited areas coordinate and behave as one. While no-one can prevent or object to intensive cooperation in cultural and low-politics issues, signals that high politics follow the same path are perceived by Greece as a dangerous development to be prevented or delayed. They naturally further strengthen the anti-recognition voices. Likewise, the anti-recognition stance will gain greater support in Greece if Kosovar officials and opinion makers appear to support Albania on issues that are highly sensitive to Greece. Athens and Tirana have several bilateral disputes that make relations extremely complicated; even if, at the same time, they share too many things to allow their bilateral relations to turn sour. Kosovo

can only lose if they uncritically support, for example, Cham activists' agenda against Greece or if they adopt a discourse of victimhood of the entire Albanian nation by its neighbours.

Lastly, the calls in recent years for unification between Albania and Kosovo can only make things more difficult for Pristina. Such calls strengthen those in Greece who are totally against any prospect of recognition and will harden their resolve. They also frustrate the efforts of those who are - reluctantly or not - ready to contemplate a change of policy. Why would someone accept the independence of a country if that very country were ready to subsequently forego its independence to join another state?

# 06 SLOVAKIA

MILAN NIČ

What is misunderstood in Kosovo is to what extent was Slovak non-recognition driven by domestic concerns and historical legacies rather than geopolitics. By the time Kosovo declared independence, Slovakia was already a self-confident member of the EU and NATO, which was aligned on major issues with its main allies. Using the fact that recognition of states is a national prerogative, and that they are some other EU and NATO members with similar concerns, Bratislava decided in 2007-2008 to define its own position on Kosovo against the prevailing Western

consensus. It has also managed to stick to it ever since, while becoming gradually more pragmatic in its European policy and bilateral relations with Prishtina.

Slovakia became an independent country in the early 1990s, through a peaceful separation from the Czech Republic. The break-up of Czechoslovakia was a result of political deal between newly elected leaders in Prague and Bratislava in 1992. In the absence of territorial disputes, ethnic issues or history of conflicts between both successor states, constitutionally driven separation





was possible. In the words of former Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg, it was a proof that there is such thing as a 'happy divorce'. In some history books, the swift and orderly break-up of Czechoslovak federation is depicted as a contrasting case to the simultaneous violent and chaotic break-up of Yugoslavia, which ended up in series of terrible wars of secession (with Serbia as dominant 'federal power') stretched over a decade. One characteristic feature of Slovak views is reluctance to acknowledge that there was simply no scope for political agreement between Serbia on Kosovo after the 1999 war, and new settlement had to be imposed from outside.

A second determinant in the Slovak perspective is a deeper historical sensitivity to issues of borders and secession of ethnic minorities. This goes all the way back to the break-up of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1918-1920 period, when Slovakia for the first time emerged on a map with territory that included ethnic Hungarian regions in the south of the country. During the World War II, Hitler's Nazi Germany rewarded its ally Hungary with restoration of old borders, which was annulled by peace settlement after 1945. Even though four decades of communism stabilized the border of southern Slovakia on the Danube River, the old sensitivities were back in the 1990s, fuelled by political parties in Budapest demanding reunification of Hungarians in the Carpathian

Basin across the borders. This deep uncertainty about borders and ethnic minorities was one of the driving factors of Slovak diplomacy a keen interest in developments in the Western Balkans in the 1990s. Several Slovak officials have played a prominent role in the region's affairs over the past twenty years. Most notably, Miroslav Lajčák, a Slovak diplomat who went on to become minister of foreign affairs, served as the EU's Special Envoy overseeing Montenegro's independence referendum, in 2006, and as the High Representative to Bosnia and Herzegovina (2007-2009).

The third element in Slovakia's approach to Kosovo was historical friendship with Serbia going back to the 19th century. Apart from the general sense of Slavic solidarity, they were also shaped by the fact that there is a small, but appreciable, Slovak community in the northern Serbian province of Vojvodina.

Almost from the outset, Kosovo has been a contentious issue in Slovak politics. The 1999 NATO campaign against Serbia was extremely unpopular in the country. However, the Slovak government of the time, under the centre-right Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda, nevertheless decided to support the military strikes and opened to country's airspace to NATO as the country was at the time waiting for the final approval of its NATO membership. Following the end of



hostilities, Slovakia decided to contribute troops to the NATO mission established to keep the peace in Kosovo (KFOR). This contribution reached a maximum of 140, before the troops were eventually withdrawn in 2010. It also contributed personnel to the UN mission in Kosovo, which was established to oversee the political development on Kosovo and prepare it for a final status process. (In 2006, 42 Slovaks military personnel and civilians lost their lives in Han air accident over Hungary as they were returning from Kosovo.) Importantly, in the mid-2000s, Slovak Foreign Ministry established a liaison office in Pristina, and kept it there ever since.

In January 2006, the UN began a process to determine the final status of Kosovo. As it became clear that the talks would not end in an agreed solution between the Kosovo provisional institutions of self-government and the Serbian government, preparation began for a unilateral Declaration of Independence. Initially positive approach of Slovak diplomacy to Kosovo's aspirations was blocked by domestic politics. Heated dispute in the Slovak parliament over the so-called Ahtisaari Plan was tuned into a bi-partisan resolution in 2007. It had a non-binding status, but passed with an overwhelming majority of all Slovak political parties (with the ethnic Hungarian party being the only one against), it determined Slovak non-recognition a year later. When, in February

2008, Kosovo declared independence, the Slovak government, along the lines of the parliamentary resolution, announced that it would not recognise it as an independent and sovereign state, and repeatedly insisted that the eventual outcome should be mutually agreed by the authorities in Belgrade and Prishtina. Later that year, Bratislava also voted in favour of a UN General Assembly resolution put forward by Serbia that passed the question of the unilateral Declaration of Independence to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). When the case came before the ICJ, Slovakia presented a written submission. Following the Court's opinion, released in July 2010, Bratislava made it clear that it would not change its stance on recognition.

Although Slovakia did not recognise Kosovo, it emerged as one of the three non-recognisers that was willing to engage with Pristina. Slovakia maintained a liaison office in Pristina even after the Declaration of Independence. Also, there have been regular contacts between Slovak officials and senior Kosovo officials, even though such activities have tended to be kept out of the public spotlight, and have received little media attention. These efforts were led by Miroslav Lajčák, who was now foreign minister. This process of engagement was made easier by the EU-led process of normalisation between Belgrade and Prishtina. As Serbia became ever more relaxed



about engaging with the Kosovo authorities, Slovakia also gradually increased its own position on Kosovo. For example, in July 2012, without much fanfare and public announcement, the Slovak government decided that it would recognise Kosovo passports. Later that year, Kosovo foreign minister, Enver Hoxhaj even visited Bratislava to speak at a prominent think tank, and held an unofficial meeting with Lajcak. The following year, a group of nine Slovak parliamentarians, from various parties, visited Kosovo.

By 2013, Slovakia seemed to have become so engaged with Pristina that it even appeared to some outside observers as though it may be preparing to recognise Kosovo. Speculation grew that this could be done as a joint initiative in conjunction with Greece or Romania, or possible both. This sense that recognition may be forthcoming was also fuelled by the March 2014 presidential election. The main independent candidate, Andrej Kiska, went on record as saying that Slovakia should recognise Kosovo - a position that was repeatedly attacked by his main challenger, Prime Minister Robert Fico as 'irresponsible'. Fico lost this election but remained head of government and leader of the ruling party. In fact, this high-profile episode had the opposite effect: foreign minister Lajcak was reminded that his own flexible approach on Kosovo is not consistent with the rigid line of his prime minister,

and newly elected President Kiska was reluctant to confrontation Fico's government over a sensitive foreign policy issue which was not even in his competence (recognition of states).

In parallel, this setback in Bratislava was reinforced by major external events. Russia's invasion and subsequent annexation of Crimea, also in March 2014, brought issues of secession and territorial integrity back to the forefront of foreign policy discussions in Europe and beyond. IN Slovakia, this was further proof of the need for the international community to respect international law and territorial integrity of Ukraine. There appeared to be strong cross-party consensus not to touch the Kosovo non-recognition, which from the Slovak perspective was consistent with position against illegal secession of Crimea. According to the Slovak constitution, recognition of states is a competence of the executive branch. However, any Slovak government that wants to recognise Kosovo, will be expected to formally initiate a new resolution in the parliament and get a majority vote. None of the four successive governments since 2007 had enough guts, interest or reasons to risk it. Nevertheless, some prominent political voices have suggested that Slovakia should accept Kosovo's statehood. For instance, the Chairman of the Slovak Parliament's Foreign Relations Committee, František Šebej, representing a civic Slovak-Hungarian party,



argued that Bratislava should accept the reality of Kosovo's independence. There was also a parliamentary hearing on the matter in 2015 organised by a local think tank.

Although Slovakia has not recognised Kosovo, the past decade has shown that Bratislava has been willing to engage with it. Slovakia maintains an official presence in Pristina and there have been frequent political contacts between Kosovo and Slovak officials. This creates ground for further engagement between the two. One option that has been suggested is the opening of a Kosovo trade or liaison office in Bratislava. Slovak and Kosovar diplomats were discreetly talking about technical and legal modalities in 2013-2014 period but the whole initiative was then put on hold. Bratislava signalled to Pristina that it is prepare to move ahead once similar office in Greece is opened, which has never materialised. Window of opportunity could have been wasted. This is important as it would allow Kosovo to establish its own presence in the Slovak capital and thus speak directly to Slovak politicians and the Slovak people. Meanwhile, a sense of pragmatism appears to continue. Slovakia supported the signing of the 2015 Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the EU and Kosovo. However, the Slovak government has also been careful not to antagonise Serbia. For example, in November 2015, Slovakia voted against admitting Kosovo to the UNESCO, even though Roma-

nia and Greece merely abstained. Lajcak later suggested that it had done this so as not to undermine the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue process. Also, Slovakia enjoys much greater trade relations with Serbia.

While the eventual end goal for Kosovo will undoubtedly be recognition, this should not be the only focus at this stage. Kosovar Foreign Ministry needs to have a clear plan with tangible results. It appears that there has been little initiative in the past year, and momentum has been lost. It is also important that civil society can play an important part. For example, the Kosovo Minister for European Integration, and a delegation of Kosovo civil society activists, visited Bratislava in September 2016 with the support of Kosovo Foundation for Open Society (KFOS). However, finally, in the context of broader changes in the EU and transatlantic relations, it is important to realise that pressure for recognition from the US, Germany and the UK in bilateral talks has weakened or fizzled out. As things stand now, there is little indication that it is going to change its position on recognition for the foreseeable future. In the meantime, a lot of work can be done to improve relations and prepare the ground for when recognition does become a realistic prospect.

# 07 ROMANIA

PAUL IVAN

As a European Union member state bordering non-EU countries to its north, east and south-west, Romania is interested in the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans, a process that would boost its own security. Over the years, Bucharest has invested in the stability of the region. Romania has participated in most of the international peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), and Kosovo.

Romania traditionally has had good relations with neighbouring Serbia. Romanians also tend to have a positive opinion of Serbia due to the historically good ties between the two nations, at least compared to Romania's relations with its other neighbours. However, relations between the two countries are not without difficulties. On 28 February 2012, Romania held up an agreement on awarding Serbia EU candidate status in the EU General Affairs Council for several hours, asking Belgrade to do more to improve and protect the rights of the Romanian/Vlach minority in Serbia. Bel-



grade's close relations with Moscow also raise eyebrows in Bucharest.

Kosovo did not figure largely in Romanian internal debates before the start of the war (1998-1999). In October 1998, Romania granted limited overflight rights to NATO aircraft for emergency and unforeseen situations – even though this was opposed by the opposition Social Democratic Party, the biggest party at that time, and the nationalist Greater Romania Party, both of which were critical of the Western intervention in Kosovo. On 30 March 1999, the parliament adopted a declaration calling for a solution to the conflict which would guarantee an end to the violence against the civilian population, especially violence against the citizens of Albanian minority in Kosovo; respect for the rights of the citizens belonging to a minority in the Yugoslav space; the return of the displaced populations; and the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Republic of Serbia. The Romanian government approved the unrestricted use of Romanian airspace for NATO operations against Serbia in April 1999, but at the same time continued to support the territorial integrity of Serbia.

The Romanian government refused to recognise Kosovo's declaration of independence, in February 2008. In fact, it was rejected by the entire Romanian political

class, apart from the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR), the main political organisation representing the ethnic Hungarians of Romania, which calls for the territorial autonomy of the Székely Land, an ethnographic area situated in Eastern Transylvania. The Parliament adopted a declaration stating that the “conditions to recognise the new entity are not fulfilled”, and that “the decision in Pristina and the potential recognition by other states of the unilaterally declared independence cannot be interpreted as a precedent for other areas”. Rejecting the recognition of collective rights for national minorities, the Romanian authorities maintained that Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence was contrary to international law and that it set a dangerous precedent that could be used by other separatist movements, such as the pro-Russian separatists from Transnistria.

Although the initial rejection of Kosovo's independence seems to have been motivated mainly by legal reasons, and is seen in Romania as a principled position, other factors also played a part, such as opposition to separatist movements. Also, the desire not to give the Romanian Hungarian leaders additional arguments to use in their push for regional autonomy played a part. The Romanian president rejected comparisons between the situation of the Albanians in Kosovo and the Hungarian mi-



nority in Romania, arguing that, unlike in Kosovo, minorities enjoy political, cultural and education rights in Romania. The historically good relations with neighbouring Serbia also played a role. While there is no real enmity between Romania and Kosovo, many Romanian experts are critical of the process through which Kosovo declared its independence, and believe that the region did not prove to be economically self-sustainable. Moreover, diplomatic pressure from its European partners, such as the UK, to recognise Kosovo's independence, or allow Kosovo to be admitted into global or regional organisations, has not been well received.

Following improvements in relations between Belgrade and Pristina, the Romanian president and the government eased their opposition to engagement with Kosovo. While in May 2011 the Romanian president cancelled his participation to a Warsaw meeting of heads of state and government from Central Eastern Europe with US President Barack Obama because of the presence of the president of Kosovo at the meeting, in the following years, Romania organised several multilateral meetings in which Kosovo took part, including at the highest level. Kosovo joined the South-East European Cooperation Process at its summit held in Bucharest on June 2014, during the Romanian chairmanship-in-office, a development made possible by the

non-institutionalized character of this regional cooperation format, by Serbia's agreement and the maintenance of the asterisk accompanying Kosovo's designation. Moreover, during Kosovo's 2015 unsuccessful bid to join UNESCO, Romania abstained from voting, together with another EU non-recognizer, Greece, and Poland, which had recognized Kosovo. (The other three EU non-recognizers, Cyprus, Spain and Slovakia, voted against the bid.) Romania, together with the other non-recognizers, also permitted the signing of the October 2015 Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the EU and Kosovo. For Romania, the agreement does not change its position on Kosovo's independence and does not constitute recognition.

At one stage, a conflict between former President Băseșcu and Prime Minister Ponta appeared to raise the prospect that Romania's position regarding Kosovo's independence could change. While the president opposed the recognition of Kosovo's independence, though less strongly than in 2008, the Prime Minister made several declarations in 2013 in favour of recognising Kosovo, suggesting this could happen when Băseșcu's second and last mandate ended, in December 2014. However, the Prime Minister's change of position seemed to have had more to do with his wish to score political points against the then president and to improve his political image vis-



à-vis Romania's Western allies than any serious internal reconsideration of Romania's position. Romania was unlikely to change its position without a good reason for doing so; even if Ponta had won the November 2014 presidential elections, which he did not. The current Romanian president, Klaus Iohannis, has maintained the same stance as his predecessor and there are no indications that this will change soon.

Despite its continuing policy not to recognise Kosovo, Romania has been pragmatic and has worked with the other EU member states on practical issues related to Kosovo's development and EU integration. Romania has been one of the main contributors to the international missions in Kosovo, such as UNMIK, EULEX and KFOR, and Bucharest has maintained its contingent of gendarmes in Kosovo after the region declared independence. In September 2011, frustrated with the refusal of some of the big EU member states to accept Romania into the Schengen Area, Bucharest decided to withdraw its policemen and gendarmes from EULEX. Nevertheless, it has continued to participate in the NATO KFOR mission, with around 50-60 Romanian servicemen in 2016-2017. Romania also allows Kosovo residents to travel to Romania, issues visas, and keeps separate records regarding trade with Kosovo. Romania has a Liaison office accredited to the UN mission. People-to-people exchanges

and visits also happen, despite the lack of diplomatic relations. For example, in April 2015 the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society and the British Council in Kosovo organised a visit to Kosovo of a Romanian delegation of journalists and analysts and several sports matches between Kosovar and Romanian teams took place since 2008.

Looking ahead, there is little reason to suggest that Romania will change its stance on recognition. The proliferation of separatist movements in the Black Sea area, including Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the annexation of Crimea by Russia, and the war in Eastern Ukraine have further complicated the situation and given Bucharest further reasons for caution. These events have also led to a decrease in the external pressure on Romania to recognise Kosovo's independence. Moreover, a new push of Romania's Hungarian minority for more autonomy for Székely Land, and public pressure from Hungary in this direction, is further driving Bucharest to maintain its position. Most recently, the 2017 independence referendums in Catalonia and Iraqi Kurdistan have given Bucharest yet more reasons to be careful. Bucharest has supported Spain's sovereignty and territorial integrity in strong terms, rejecting territorial changes made without the agreement of the state involved. As there is no indication that the other four non-recognisers are ready to move towards recognition, any



change in Romania's position would therefore stand out. This makes any change even less probable. As the reasons that made the other four EU member states reject Kosovo's independence have not disappeared - on the contrary, in cases such as Spain they have become much more acute - it is hard to expect either a coordinated move towards recognising Kosovo, or a unilateral change by Bucharest. A change in position would require a more favourable interna-

tional climate as Romania would bear costs that Bucharest is currently not willing to incur. It does not want to give the impression that the principle of territorial integrity of countries has been weakened, nor explain this change of position domestically. For the moment, Romania is therefore likely to continue to follow the development of relations between Belgrade and Pristina and adapt its position accordingly.



# 08

## CYPRUS

ISABELLE IOANNIDES

**B**ecause of the consequences of the Turkish invasion and occupation of the northern third of the island, as well as the ongoing intractability of the Cyprus problem (or ‘national problem’ as it is referred to in Greek), the Cyprus government has always positioned itself against the recognition of Kosovo statehood. The continuing stalemate has meant that there is a strong ‘values’ component to Cypriot foreign policy, which is foremost based on international law and the respect of human rights, the so-called ‘position of principles’. In that context, Nicosia has consistently insisted that the final

status of Kosovo must be reached within the framework of dialogue and negotiations between Pristina and Belgrade, and that the UN Security Council must approve the settlement. Accordingly, Nicosia closely observes that the full adherence to the international legal framework of the UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999) and the relevant Council Conclusions guide EU policy towards Kosovo. It is in this framework that Nicosia has supported the deployment of UN missions and other regional organisations there, as well as the channelling of EU humanitarian aid to Kosovo.



Likewise, in 2009, the Cyprus government submitted a written statement to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) with its views on the Kosovo situation. It argued that the Kosovo institutions did not have the legal competence to declare independence and therefore the declaration was inconsistent with international law; Kosovo's rights remained those established by UNSC Resolution 1244 (1999) and the processes it prescribes (paragraphs 192 and 193). Nicosia has also taken a hard-line position on EU visa liberalisation for Kosovo by strongly opposing the recognition of Kosovo travel documents, just as it opposes the recognition of 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' ('TRNC') passports. Nevertheless, Kosovars can enter the Republic of Cyprus with a multiple entry Schengen visa. Also, in 2015, Nicosia voted against Pristina's proposal for UNESCO membership on the same grounds.

Another factor that has shaped the Cypriot position is the nature of its bilateral ties with the Western Balkan countries. From the early stages of the conflict in Yugoslavia, in 1991, until the ultimate breakup of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) in 2006, Nicosia was a committed supporter of the Serbian cause; notwithstanding its official adherence to UN imposed sanctions. At the grassroots level, most Greek-Cypriots empathise with Serbs. They consider them victims of secessionism comparing the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo to that of the 'TRNC'. They also relate to Serbia through cultural and religious lenses of the Christian Orthodox faith. Moreover, Serbia is the only Western Balkan

country that has noteworthy relations with Cyprus in terms of trade and tourism. At the political level, Belgrade is the only capital in the region where Cyprus has opened an Embassy, and the two countries maintain regular relations. However, it is also important to note that as long as EU positions do not compromise the 'national problem', Nicosia has also shown that it can position itself politically in ways that may have seemed unlikely. For example, in 1998 and 2000, Cyprus implemented an oil and arms embargo, bans on flights and officials, and financial sanctions on the FRY.

Despite its opposition to Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence, and its strong ties to Serbia, Nicosia's discourse on non-recognition has evolved somewhat over the past decade. In 2008, the then Foreign Minister Markos Kyprianou underlined the Cypriot 'position of principles'. Nicosia went as far as to say that it would not recognise Kosovo even if Serbia does. Today, Nicosia realises that Cyprus cannot be more Serbian than Serbia, acknowledging that if Serbia recognises Kosovo, the Cyprus government is likely to follow suit.

Another factor that has influenced Nicosia's ability, or willingness, to engage with the Kosovo authorities is its so-called 'European consensus' policy. Although Cyprus remains staunchly opposed to recognising Kosovo's statehood, the Cyprus government is committed to acting as a constructive EU member state that works towards a consensus on EU policies. It does not want to stand out as the only member state to oppose an EU decision. One such example was



Nicosia's handling of the deployment of EU's Rule of Law mission in Kosovo (EULEX). While initially the Cyprus government had refused to approve the deployment of the CSDP mission, when it found itself isolated from the rest of the member states - even from those that opposed independence - it conceded to it (but through abstention on the vote). Cyprus remains the only non-recogniser that does not contribute to the mission, although it takes part in all EU meetings and decisions that concern this mission and approves its budget. (Cyprus has also contributed to the EU police missions in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).) Also, Cyprus has clearly positioned itself in favour of a European future for the region. Its six-month presidency of the EU, in 2012, was a key moment to demonstrate this commitment and to do away with the perception that Cyprus foreign policy is 'single issue'-based, that is, defined solely in terms of its 'national problem'. However, it was also noticeable that while Foreign Minister Erato Kozakou Markoulli travelled to Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and FYROM, and received Albanian and Serbian delegations in Nicosia, Kosovo was not included in the round of visits.

Following his election, in February 2013, centre-right and pro-Western President Nicos Anastasiades set as his goal to join NATO's Partnership for Peace programme and has strengthened relations with the United States. That along with the April 2013 Brussels agreement between Belgrade and Pristina, which created the context for the 'normalisation' of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, provided

Nicosia with grounds to soften its own position on normalisation of relations with Pristina. It explains why, in September 2013, Cyprus Foreign Minister Ioannis Kasoulides met Kosovo Prime Minister Hashim Thaci on the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York. At that time, there were also discussions of Kasoulides visiting Pristina and the possible opening of liaison offices in Nicosia and Pristina, none of which materialised.

Arguably, the 2010 ICJ advisory opinion on the legality of Kosovo's declaration of independence that established a clear differentiation between the Cyprus and Kosovo cases, has also acted as an unblocking mechanism for possible engagement between Nicosia and Pristina. However, the ICJ decision was not instrumentalised in any considerable manner because the popular perception of a possible precedent set by the recognition of Kosovo, which was saluted by the Turkish-Cypriot authorities. It is also worth noting that the positive climate between Nicosia and Pristina in 2013 developed in the background of a possible recognition by Athens of Kosovo. Overall, however, there is an understanding that on the Kosovo issue, Cyprus holds a clear 'principled position' regardless of a more lenient positioning in Greece.

More recently, there has been a reversal of pro-European trends. Since the emergence of tensions between Russia and the West, the smaller political parties that had become more open towards better relations with NATO, have now reverted to a far more pro-Russian position. This is in addition to the left-wing party



AKEL (Progressive Party of Working People of Cyprus), the second biggest party in the Cyprus Parliament, which has close relations with Russia. This move is largely shaped by their perception that Russia will protect Cyprus from wider international pressure on the ‘national problem’. This support for Moscow may also partly explain the distancing of Cyprus from the EU on specific issues, such as Kosovo. Moreover, the lack of substantive progress on the Belgrade-Pristina talks has created the impression that there is no real political commitment to a negotiated solution to Kosovo’s ‘status question’.

Cooperation between the civil societies of Kosovo and Cyprus is limited. Seminars to exchange lessons and experiences among NGOs from the Western Balkan region, including from Kosovo, on the challenges facing divided societies, have taken place in Nicosia. A civil society network was created and a process of developing alternative historical narratives in the Western Balkans is in progress. Moreover, Cypriot journalists have visited Kosovo and reported on their experience in the media. Likewise, following Kosovo’s admission as a FIFA member in May 2016, Cyprus and Kosovo played against each other in Nicosia, in January 2017.

In recent months, the EU has increasingly focused its work on enlargement to the Western Balkans. European Commission Hahn’s latest statements on EU enlargement to the region have also indicated openings for the future. He declared that the chances of the Western Balkan region, including Kosovo, were better

today than a year and a half ago, but pointed out that the process of getting closer to the EU meant implementation of reforms. This renewed attention on EU accession, in combination with the Cyprus government’s approach of ‘European consensus’, could provide Nicosia with the necessary incentive for re-engaging in de facto relations with Pristina. One way of gaining traction for engagement from Nicosia on Kosovo is to commit more clearly and concretely to the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue and implement what was already agreed. However, the continuing absence of resolve from other EU member states that are non-recognisers to change their position (most notably Spain), the ongoing Catalan crisis, and the latest breakdown in the bicomunal negotiations on the Cyprus problem, also provide Nicosia with sufficient reasons not to engage with Pristina.

Overall, the notions of recognition and engagement must be decoupled when looking at the position of the Cyprus government on Kosovo. Recognition of Kosovo will remain for Cyprus a question of negotiation between Pristina and Belgrade, and the settlement being approved by the UN Security Council. Engagement in de facto relations between Nicosia and Pristina, however, will be subject to identifying the right moment and making the most of a given opportunity. It will imply treading a fine line between Nicosia’s wish to safeguard its ‘position of principles’, the positions of other non-recognisers, Nicosia’s efforts to avoid being isolated in the EU context, progress on the Pristina-Belgrade talks, and shifts in the EU discourse on, and actions in, the Western Balkans.

# 09 SPAIN

RUTH FERRERO-TURRIÓN

Traditionally, relations between Spain and Western Balkans have never been very close. For most of the twentieth century, the main link between them was the presence of Yugoslav International Brigadistas in the Spanish Civil War, or the timid approaches of some Spanish politicians to follow the Yugoslav model of non-alignment. However, since the start of the 1990s and the collapse of Yugoslavia, Spain has taken a stronger political interest in the region; even if trade and other economic relations between Spain and the Western Balkans remains minimal.

As a plurinational and diverse state, Spain has always defended the existence of countries with similar features. That also applied to Yugoslavia. In 1991, Francisco Fernández-Ordoñez, the then Spanish Foreign Affairs Minister, proposed to the Foreign Affairs Council to initiate a fast-track recognition and enlargement procedure for Yugoslavia as the only way to stop the dissolution of the country. Despite this pre-emptive stance at the start of the breakup of Yugoslavia, Spain subsequently confined itself to adopting reactive positions with regards to developments in the



Balkans. This included firm opposition to secessionist movements in the region. More generally, it has tended to follow the path marked by the European Union and its partners in NATO. During the Bosnia war, Spain participated very actively in peacekeeping operations, especially in the Mostar region and in 1999, the Aznar governments joined the international alliance to bomb Serbia under the NATO umbrella, undertaken when Javier Solana was Secretary General. This important presence on the field, together with the traditional sympathy many in the Balkans have towards Spain because of the civil War, and the impression that Spain is a neutral actor, meant that many saw Spain in positive terms. This in part explains the appointment of several Spaniards to high international positions in the Western Balkans, notably the appointment of Carlos Westendorp as High Representative for Bosnia-Herzegovina and Felipe González as Personal Representative of the Chairman in Office for the FRY.

In truth, despite the neutral way Spain has tended to be perceived in the region, Spanish foreign policy towards the Balkans has generally been sympathetic towards Serbia. This is largely because it was viewed as the core of Yugoslavia. This was demonstrated by successive Spanish ministers of foreign affairs, irrespective of their political affiliation. Probably the

most active ministers have been Josep Piqué (2000-2002) and Miguel Angel Moratinos (2004-2010). The former tried to stimulate trade and investment relations between Spain and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro at that time). The latter tried to reinforce the regional dialogue and cooperation between Serbia and Kosovo. This explicit support towards Serbia has been seen in Spanish policy towards Kosovo issue, not least of all its immediate decision not to recognize Kosovo when it declared independence, in February 2008.

However, Spain's opposition to Kosovo's statehood is also shaped by two other factors. First, after the 2003 Iraq war, which Madrid supported, the Socialist government of Spain (2004-2011) became a strong defender of international law. On this note, Spain contributed both written and oral statements to the International Court of Justice advisory opinion case on Kosovo's declaration of independence. Secondly, and most importantly, Spain's concerns over the Catalonia issue has had a crucial impact on its position. In 2009, the former Foreign Affairs Minister, José García Margallo, in comments to a Kosovar newspaper (Kosovo Times), stated that Spain did not recognize Kosovo because of "principles related to Spain's Basque and Catalonia autonomous communities, although the situation is not comparable". However, he also

added that Spain will support Kosovo's development even if it will not recognize it.

When the right-wing Popular Party assumed office, in 2011, the prospects for recognition became even less likely. In 2008, it was the first political party in Spain to speak out against Kosovo's declaration of independence. This is a position that is not only favoured by the party's elites, but is also supported by its followers, who are firmly against any process of independence of any nature. This position is also supported by the right and central-right newspapers in the country, such as *La Razón*, *ABC* and *El Mundo*. On 14 March 2012, the Spanish Prime Minister, Mariano Rajoy, told the nationalist Catalan MPs that the position of Spain towards Kosovo was not going to change. In doing so, he indirectly invoked 'internal factors' to justify this stance, arguing that this decision was "the most convenient position for many Spanish people". Internal concerns over secessionist movements, especially in Catalonia, have strengthened the government's position in recent years. As tensions have grown within Spain over Catalonia, so Spain's position has hardened over Kosovo. As things stand, there will be no recognition of any state declared independent unilaterally.

This is an important point to underline. The main problem Spain has with Koso-



vo is related to the 'procedure' by which it declared independence. Spain does not oppose the creation of new states. (It recognised Montenegro in 2006, and South Sudan, in 2011.) It is, however, opposed to unilateral acts of secession. This sensitivity has become even more heightened after Catalan secessionists also unilaterally declared independence, in October 2017. Even if other EU members speak of a *sui generis* case, Spanish authorities worry about the precedent that Kosovo could set elsewhere in Europe. Spain was wholly opposed to the independence referendum in Crimea, and even expressed reservations about the referendum held in Scotland. Although they are totally different cases, Madrid's argument was always the same, 'Spain is not Crimea, not Kosovo, not Scotland.' Only a few people realized the differences between the cases.

Nevertheless, Spain supports engagement between Belgrade and Pristina. The agreement between Serbia and Kosovo is seen in a very positive light. Madrid has also been proactive in helping to bring about these agreements through its diplomatic work in Belgrade. In this sense, Spain has used its privilege relationship with Serbia, which sees it as a loyal friend, to push forward the dialogue between the sides. In addition, it should be noted that, until 2009, Spain was the sixth largest donor to UNMIK and KFOR until 2009. However, it refused to



participate in the missions led by NATO and in EULEX due to the fact they both contributed to build a new state. In 2009, Madrid announced the gradual withdrawal of all soldiers present in Kosovo.

In addition, private diplomatic initiatives have been launched with both Serbia and Kosovo. In the latter case, those contacts have been mainly through think tanks such as Real Instituto Elcano, Fundación CIDOB or European Council on Foreign Relations. They have invited academics or activists to take part in seminars focused on the situation in Kosovo. Those meetings, however, have not been made public. Participation was by invitation only. In such cases, it is also worth noting that the Kosovo participants faced difficulties in entering the country as Spain does not recognize Kosovo passports. The only way to enter is with travel documents issued by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo to permanent inhabitants of Kosovo. (Even passports issued to citizens of the Republic of Kosovo, who reside in other Schengen member states that have recognized the Republic of Kosovo, are not recognized by Spain.)

Recognition of Kosovo by Spain is not going to happen any time soon. An attempt, in March 2017, by a Catalan secessionist political party to propose this was rejected in the Senate by the main political parties.

While there are steps that could be taken that might help Madrid to engage with Pristina, such as the successful institutionalization and reinforcement of rule of law in the country, the reality is that until territorial tensions stopped in Spain, or there is a significant change in government, the chances of greater engagement, let alone recognition, are minimal.

# KOSOVAR DIPLOMACY AFTER INDEPENDENCE

AGON DEMJAHA

After the declaration of independence on 17 February 2008, Kosovo's government embarked into a difficult task of obtaining international recognition and building institutions of the country. The process of international recognition of the state of Kosovo was seen by Kosovo authorities as an indispensable and crucial step for further strengthening of the international position of the Republic of Kosovo. Today, after almost ten years

since the declaration of independence, the number of recognitions stands at 114<sup>1</sup>, with five European Union member states and two permanent members of the UN Security Council still refusing to recognize Kosovo. Official statement of Kosovo's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) regarding the international recognition of the independence of Kosovo states that by achieving the overall number of 114 recognitions, the MFA has fulfilled the initial aim of obtain-

<sup>1</sup> The issue of exact number of recognitions is rather ambiguous, with different sources citing different figures. While NFA uses the figure of 114, it is not clear whether Uganda and Nigeria have recognized Kosovo. Also, recently some media have announced that Suriname has withdrawn its recognition.





ing more than 100 recognitions. According to the MFA, the merits for achievements so far belong to “the proactive and dynamic diplomacy of Kosovo,” as well as to the international partners who lobbied for Kosovo’s recognition. However, it remains unclear which was the original time-frame for the initial aim of obtaining more than 100 recognitions and whether overall efforts of Kosovo diplomacy in lobbying for recognition of Kosovo’s independence could be considered as successful. Most importantly, the question is whether there are any lessons learned regarding policies of (non)recognition in a current state of affairs when securing more recognitions has become tremendously difficult, and when the five non-recognising EU member states still refuse to grant recognition?

Immediately after declaration of independence, “continuous advancement of the international position of Kosovo and strengthening international support for recognition of Kosovo sovereignty” was emphasized as one of the most important Kosovo’s foreign policy strategic objectives. In line with this, “ensuring recognition of the state of Kosovo” was also seen as “a precondition for internal consolidation of Kosovo state.” Consequently, immediately after declaration of independence, Kosovo started the creation of its foreign policy institutions and diplomatic service that would fully engage in lobbying for recogni-

tion of country’s independence. As a result, on 3 April 2008, the Kosovo Government has established the MFA, while already in October 2008, Kosovo has started dispatching its first ten charge d’affaires, who would effectively work as Pristina’s ambassadors in some of the major recognizing countries. Initially, intensive lobbying for recognition has been heavily supported by Western international partners, especially USA and UK. As a result, by the end of 2008, Kosovo received a total of 53 recognitions, including 22 EU member states, and a number of important states such as USA, Canada, Norway, Switzerland, Australia and Turkey. However, already in 2009 the total number of recognitions dropped to only 11, though it is worth mentioning that among these recognitions were also the very important ones from Macedonia and Montenegro as neighbouring countries. In 2010 the number of recognitions declined further, totalling only 8, although the ruling of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) regarding the 2008 unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo was seen as rather favourable by all Kosovar political elites.

When the ruling of the ICJ did not yield the expected results and the number of new recognitions dropped significantly, the MFA has in 2011 drafted the “Strategy for Achieving Full International Recognition of the Republic of Kosovo.” Such Strategy was supposed to serve as a framework for



achieving Kosovo’s strategic aim of international acknowledgment by utilizing more diverse, in-depth and comprehensive tools. Practical implementation of the Strategy was meant to be closely coordinated with Kosovo’s strategic partners and in partnership with other specific countries throughout the world. Although the document was classified as confidential, interviews have revealed that the Strategy contained different and complementary means of action for obtaining recognition. According to interviewees, it represented a clear and professional orientation platform that included first-hand information as well as concise and feasible analysis and action plans for specific regions and states. Nevertheless, the interviewees believe that failure to fully implement the strategy was mainly due to the lack of inter-institutional coordination mechanisms that were foreseen as part of this strategy. Furthermore, they claim that the shift of lobbying mainly to political levels and the lack of proper coordination with the diplomatic network was a major obstacle to an effective diplomacy. Instead of coordinating and building state culture, recognition efforts were often personalized and used by different state actors for internal political promotion, thus seriously weakening practical implementation of the strategy.

In addition to the straightforward strategy for recognition, the Kosovo MFA has in

2011 also launched an extensive multifaceted outreach campaign that for the first time employed means of public diplomacy in order to increase the overall interaction between Kosovo and the non-recognising countries and their public, especially the five non-recognising EU member states. Such aim was supposed to be achieved through establishment of channels of communication between Kosovo’s civil society, businesses, academia and media with counter-partners in the targeted countries. The first public diplomacy activities were part of the joint project between Kosovo MFA and British Government, implemented by the British Council office in Kosovo that aimed to promote public diplomacy as an instrument of strengthening relations between the state of Kosovo and countries that have not yet recognized Kosovo. The project involved advocacy and information activities to establish strong channels of communication with targeted countries by including eminent public personalities, civil society, media and genuine intellectuals. Within public diplomacy activities several visits of parliamentarians, business representatives, civil society and media from Kosovo to the non-recognising EU member states were organised. With the aim of presenting and promoting Kosovo’s national interest to increase the number of recognitions, diverse and comprehensive groups of actors from the non-recognising EU member states have also visited Kosovo.



Meanwhile, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has prioritized the Digital Diplomacy as one of the key pillars of engagement and as a vital tool to support Kosovo recognition by providing truthful and positive information from and about Kosovo. Accordingly, the Digital Diplomacy Strategy was drafted, and a plethora of activities were undertaken, mainly focusing on continued lobbying on recognition of Kosovo by the global internet infrastructure, amendment of content on major online sources of information, and boosting Kosovo narrative by pushing high-quality content to target audiences. The entire campaign represented quite a professional and innovative approach to digital diplomacy, while the strategy itself was awarded by the Turkish magazine *Yeni Diploması* as the fourth best in the world after United Kingdom, United States and Israel. Furthermore, *DigitalKosovo.org* was announced to be the best portal for digital engagement along the US State Department digital diplomacy website, while Kosovo's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Facebook page was listed as the most successful page in engaging online audiences.

Nevertheless, despite these activities, in the years to follow the number of recognitions remained relatively low, with 13 recognitions in 2011 and 2012 respectively, 7 recognitions in 2014 and only one recognition in 2015. In 2016 Kosovo managed to obtain two recognitions, while so far the

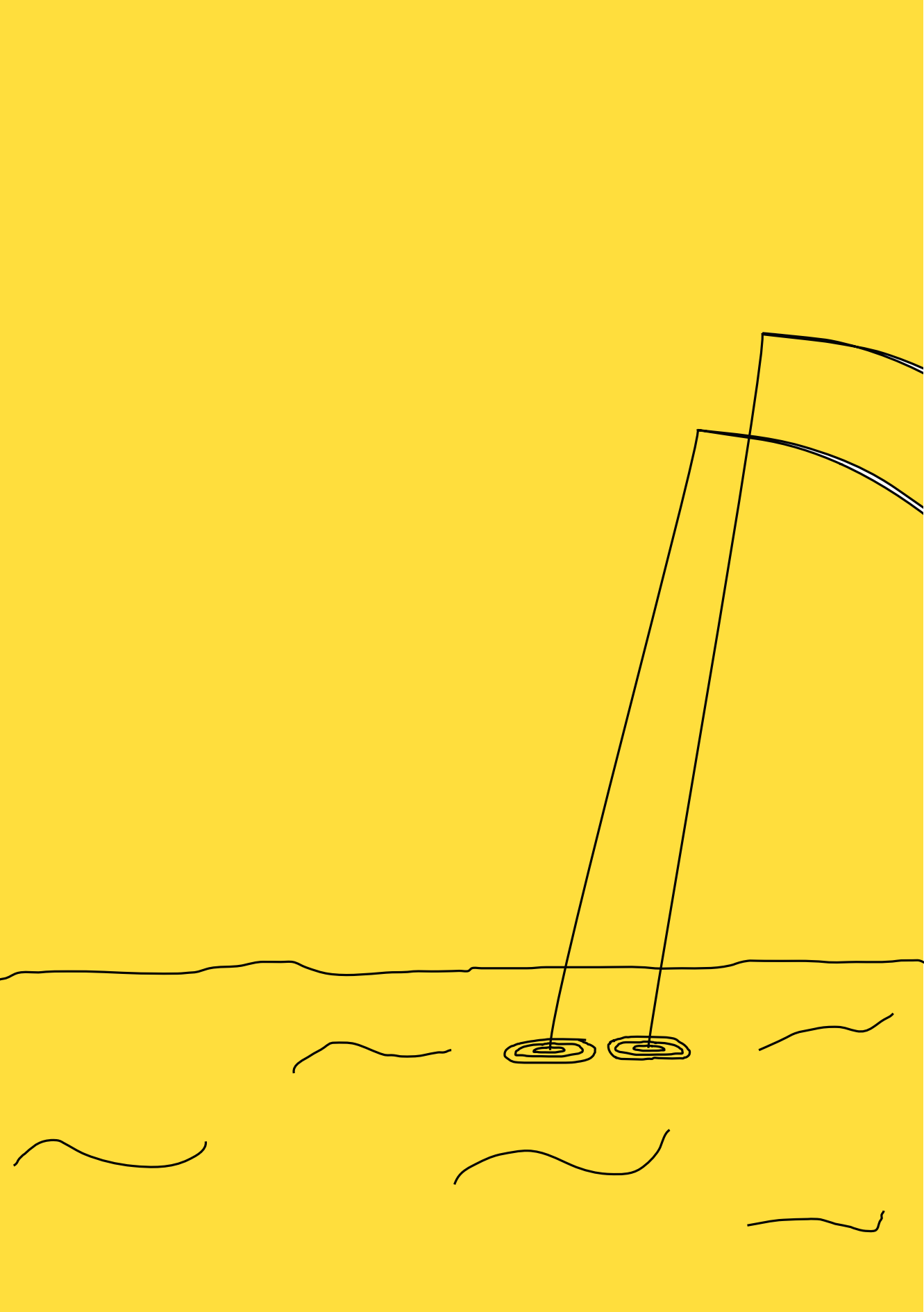
number of recognitions in 2017 is only one. According to a high official of the British Council, the conducted public diplomacy activities have managed to fill the gap in the knowledge base that non-recognizing countries in general have about contemporary Kosovo, while at the same time building initial bridges between Kosovo and the five non-recognising EU member states. However, once such activities were completed, neither there was a clear plan for specific course of action, nor were any follow-up activities undertaken. In a current situation when gaining further recognitions has become very difficult, there is a need for a well-thought and coordinated action by all foreign policy actors in Kosovo. Similarly, a former Kosovo diplomat maintains that previous foreign ministers have politicized the diplomatic service by appointing party militants, while at the same time ignoring meritocracy within the service, both in terms of appointments and promotions.

After several months of an institutional crisis, Kosovo has on 9 September managed to form a new coalitional government. In addition of having two new political parties on board, the current government has also a new Prime-minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Soon after being inaugurated, the activities of the new government were greatly hindered by Kosovo's local elections scheduled for October. Conse-



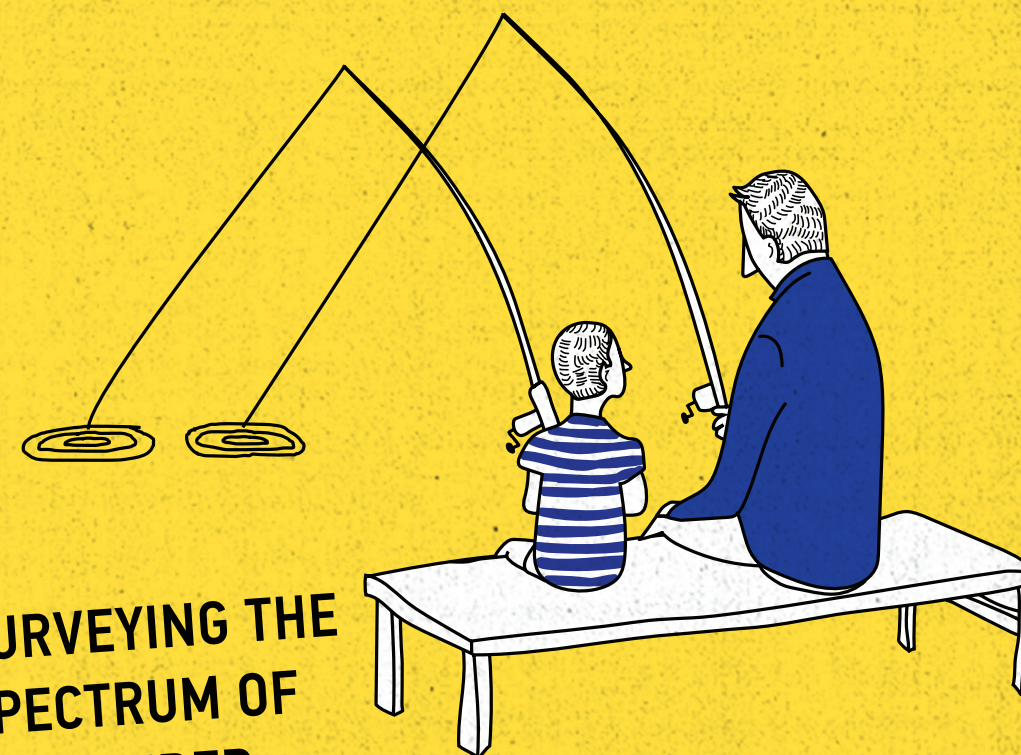
quently, since taking the office, the new government has hardly mentioned new recognitions, let alone initiated preparation of any recognition lobbying strategy, although the international partners have for years pushed the Kosovo governments to produce a comprehensive and feasible strategy to secure further recognitions. The actual situation is rather critical when it comes to further recognitions of Kosovo's independence. Easy recognitions, mainly secured through intensive lobbying of key western partners are long gone. Internal situation is plagued with corruption, organized crime and nepotism, while appoint-

ment of Kosovo diplomats lacks meritocracy, transparency and professionalism. Repetitive crises after almost every cycle of parliamentary elections have seriously damaged Kosovo's image abroad. The country urgently needs an innovative and comprehensive plan related to further recognitions as well as an inter-institutional body to foster its full implementation. At the same time, this should be complemented with a diverse and creative approach in public diplomacy that would increase communication and intensify cooperation with governmental institutions and wider public of non-recognizing countries.





# LACK OF ENGAGEMENT?



**SURVEYING THE  
SPECTRUM OF  
EU MEMBER  
STATE POLICIES  
TOWARDS KOSOVO**

**JAMES KER-LINDSAY AND  
IOANNIS ARMAKOLAS**