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# **The Stigmatisation of De Facto States: Disapproval and ‘Engagement without Recognition’**

*James Ker-Lindsay*

## **Abstract**

Traditionally, the international community has rejected unilateral declarations of independence. As a result, de facto states – territories that have declared independence but are not members of the United Nations – have been stigmatised. However, not all secessionist de facto states are treated equally. Whereas some are wholly shunned, others enjoy a high degree of international interaction with the UN members that do not recognise them. This study explores why this is so and shows how levels of disapproval shapes processes of engagement with non-recognising states. It notes that responses to cases of unilateral secession by states, and thus the stigma attached to de facto states, are shaped by three broad factors: systemic factors, contextual factors and national factors. Crucially, it is shown that the stigmatisation of individual de facto states can change over time and circumstance, and with it the degree of engagement without recognition enjoyed by that de facto state can vary.

**Keywords:** recognition, secession, stigmatisation, legitimisation

## **Introduction**

Secessionist de facto states, by their very nature, sit apart from the established international order (Bahceli et al. 2004; Caspersen and Stansfield, 2011; Geldenhuys 2009; and Pegg 1999).<sup>1</sup> Having been created without the permission of the state they have broken away from, they are not regarded as ‘proper’ states by the wider international community. As a result, they are often marginalised and treated with disapproval. They are stigmatised.

In recent years, the concept of stigmatisation has started to gain greater attention in the field of International Relations. While the concept has been most obviously applied to Germany, it readily provides a useful framework in the context of de facto states. As Adler-Nissen (2014) notes, ‘any identity, attribute, or behaviour may be stigmatized’. In the case of de facto states, the source of their stigmatisation is the deep opposition states have to unilateral secession (Fierstein 2008). These territories, by their very existence, have contravened an essential and fundamental norm of modern international politics, namely the principle of the territorial integrity of states. Moreover, ‘What makes the concept of stigmatization analytically powerful is that it refers not only to stereotyping, but also to separation, status loss, and discrimination’ (Adler-Nissen 2014). Again, this holds particularly true in the case of de facto states. They are treated as separate. They do not enjoy equal status with states that are members of the United Nations, the widely accepted indicator of what is usually, though somewhat erroneously, termed ‘universal recognition’ (Keating 2008).<sup>2</sup> And they certainly suffer discrimination. Indeed, they are often treated as pariahs on the international stage (Bartmann 2004). Their stigma is even writ large in the very way that they

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<sup>1</sup> This contribution adopts the term de facto state. Other terms that are also widely used include contested states (Geldenhuys 2009), unrecognised states (Caspersen and Stansfield 2011), quasi-states (Kolstø 2006), informal states (Isachenko 2012) and pseudo-states (Kolossoff and O’Loughlin 1998). Also, the focus of the piece is on secessionist de facto states. It omits Taiwan and Palestine. Although often included in lists of de facto states, neither is a secessionist entity. Instead, they are the result of different processes in international politics, namely an act of thwarted decolonisation (Palestine) and a contested claim to be recognised as the official government of a state (China).

<sup>2</sup> Although UN membership is taken as a mark of ‘universal recognition’, there are a number of UN member states that are not recognised by every other member. The most obviously example is Israel.

are termed. It is signified by the attachment of the qualifier 'de facto' to their identity. The use of this term is designed to show that such territories are not 'de jure' states. They are not regarded as legal. While they may possess the traditional features of statehood – usually identified according to the Montevideo Criteria as a defined territory, a settled population, and effective governance. Stigmatisation runs hand in hand with the identity of a de facto state.

And yet, while de facto states as a group may not be a part of the established club of states, there is a wide variation in the way that individual de facto states operate on the international stage. The stigmatisation they suffer is far from even. Likewise, there is a wide variation in the scope and degree of interaction they enjoy with UN member states that have not recognised them. Some, such as Kosovo, not only have managed to secure considerable recognition, approximately 110 countries as of early 2018, it has also developed considerable interaction with UN members that do not recognise it. Indeed, in the view of many, it has effectively achieved full statehood, even though it has not achieved UN membership (Florea 2014). Meanwhile, others, such as Abkhazia and the 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' ('TRNC' or Northern Cyprus, as it is more colloquially known), have very little international interaction. Neither is a member of any major international organisation, and neither has extensive political, economic or cultural engagement with other states.

Using the examples of Kosovo, Abkhazia and Northern Cyprus, this piece seeks to explain this significant variation in the way that de facto states interact with UN member states that do not recognise them. (For an exploration of interactions between de facto states see Toomla 2016.) The first section explores the nature of 'engagement without recognition', and identifies the general factors that have determined the scope and extent of states' interaction, or otherwise, with de facto states on the international stage. These are then grouped together into three broad categories: systemic factors, contextual factors and national factors. The piece discusses the way in which states respond to these factors and argues that

governments can manipulate these factors to serve their own ends. Simply put, if a state wishes to avoid engaging with a de facto state, it can find ways to do so. Likewise, if it is intent on interaction, this can often be readily justified. Moreover, it is also shown that stigmatisation, and thus engagement without recognition, is mutable. Finally, it is shown that the level of disapproval faced by a de facto state, either from the wider international system or by individual states, can change over time, depending on the circumstances. This in turn can shape the scope and intensity of the interaction it enjoys with states and on the international stage more generally. Stigmatisation and engagement without recognition run hand in hand and can change, both for the better and for the worse, depending on the factors identified.

### **Forms of interaction with de facto states**

Since the end of the Second World War, there has been a fundamental change in the way that the international community has responded to secession and de facto statehood. Whereas the nineteenth century saw de facto states accepted as independent if they were able to secure the conditions of objective statehood, the second half of the twentieth century witnessed the rejection of unilateral secession and a widespread refusal to accept the legalisation of de facto statehood (Fabry 2009). States began to refuse to recognise territories that had proclaimed independence without permission as a matter of policy (Berg 2009). As UN Secretary-General U Thant declared, ‘the United Nations has never accepted, and does not accept, and I do not believe it will ever accept the principle of secession of a part of its Member State.’ (UN Monthly Chronicle 1970)

Although positions on the question of unilateral secession and de facto statehood have hardened over the past seventy years, a lack of formal recognition does not preclude international engagement with de facto states. First articulated by in the academic literature by

Cooley and Mitchell (2010), the concept of ‘engagement without recognition’ has generated growing scholarly and practitioner interest in recent years as the number of de facto states has increased.<sup>3</sup> As has been noted, there are in fact a wide variety of ways in which a state may choose to interact at an official level with a secessionist territory and yet not go so far as to extend formal recognition (Berg and Toomla 2009; Ker-Lindsay 2015). Interaction between states and de facto states can take the form of meetings between officials. Indeed, on occasion, a state may even station representatives in the de facto state. These missions will not be officially classed as embassies, as this denotes the formal establishment of diplomatic relations, and thereby recognition. Instead they are usually called liaison offices. As they are often staffed by permanent fulltime diplomats of the state in question, such liaison offices can effectively function as embassies in all but name (Berridge 2009). Additionally, a considerable degree of political interaction may take place in multilateral contexts. Under certain conditions, states are even able to enter into a multilateral treaty with a territory without having recognised it. Acceptance can also come in other forms. For instance, official documents, such as passports, issued by the secessionist administration may be recognised. One can even see a degree of economic interaction, such as trade and direct or indirect aid programmes (Kontorovich 2015). Then there are forms of sporting, cultural and educational interactions. Crucially, and underpinning all this, is the principle that recognition cannot be accidental. It requires intent (Lauterpacht 1947; US Supreme Court 2015). If a state insists that it does not recognise the territory in question, and does not cross certain boundaries, such as establishing an embassy, then there is a considerable degree of latitude as to what sort of political and diplomatic interaction can in fact occur.

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<sup>3</sup> Whereas for the last decade over the Cold War, the only secessionist de facto state was the ‘Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus’, declared in 1983, since 1990 there has been a proliferation of such territories. While the exact number of such states varies from scholar to scholar, the list of de facto states now includes Transnistria, Abkhazia, Somaliland, Nagorno-Karabakh and Kosovo.

Given that de facto states are intrinsically opposed by the international community and stigmatised, but that there is a wide degree of latitude open to states in terms of how they wish to interact with them should they so wish, the question naturally arises as to why states appear to be more willing to interact with some de facto states rather than others. On closer examination, three broad contributory sets of factors would appear to shape the decision:

### *Systemic factors*

In the first instance, policies towards de facto states are primarily shaped by the wider norms and policies of the international community towards secession. Of these, the single most important factor shaping international interaction with a de facto state would appear to be the existence of a UN Security Council resolution condemning the unilateral declaration of independence and calling on states not to recognise it. While such an act is primarily intended to try to prevent recognition, it also can have a major role in stifling other forms of interaction. This has been seen most clearly in the case of the ‘Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus’ (TRNC). In addition to Resolution 541, which called upon ‘all states not to recognise any Cypriot state other than the Republic of Cyprus’, the Council also passed Resolution 550 (1983). This called on states ‘not to facilitate or in any way assist the aforesaid secessionist entity.’ As a result, states have tended to be very reluctant to engage with the Turkish Cypriot state. Indeed, the resolution underpinned a subsequent decision by the European Court of Justice to limit the European Union’s trade with the TRNC (Talmon 2001). UN resolutions condemning the act of secession are therefore not only the most powerful symbol of stigmatisation, they can also be the most significant factor limiting engagement without recognition.

However, it will not always be possible to secure a UN resolution condemning an act of secession. This will be due to support given to the breakaway territory by one of the veto-wielding members of the Security Council. In the case of Kosovo, this is the United States, Britain and France. For Abkhazia, it is Russia. In those case where there is no Security Council resolution condemning an act of secession, states will often take their cue on how to interact with a de facto state from the position of major powers (Fabry 2009; Coggins 2013; and Sterio 2014). For instance, the high level of international engagement enjoyed by Kosovo is undoubtedly due to the strong support of the United States and most of the European Union. This has encouraged many states to agree to interact with it, even if they do not recognise it. Having said this, the role of major powers is certainly not decisive. Russia's efforts to secure greater interaction with Abkhazia and South Ossetia have achieved little, even with countries with which Russia has close relations, such as Belarus (Rukadze 2015).

A third systemic element that would appear to shape the conditions for engagement without recognition is what may be called 'the multiplier effect'. It would seem to be the case that the more states accept and interact with a de facto state, the more other states appear willing to follow suit. Especially for smaller states, there would appear to be safety in numbers. Although this hypothesis has yet to be tested in a systematic manner, it would seem to be a factor. For example, few countries now appear to be overly concerned about engaging with Kosovo, even in ways that would perhaps have been unacceptable in the years immediately following the declaration of independence. For example, over a hundred and fifty countries now recognise the Kosovo passport. Even Russia now appears to be willing to accept Kosovo's passports in certain limited circumstances, such as sportspersons taking part in international competitions ('Moscow clarifies who can enter Russia with Kosovo passport', *B92*, 31 July 2015). Kosovo also formally participates in meetings of international organisations taking place in countries that do not recognise it. For example, it officially



represented at a meeting of the Francophonie in Armenia, a country that has not recognised it, in October 2015. Interestingly, it would seem that this multiplier effect appears to be more powerful in the case of engagement without recognition than it is with full recognition. Recognition requires taking a clear and unequivocal stand that cannot easily be reversed. Once a territory is recognised as independence, it is hard to say that this was a mistake – although it has happened with Vanuatu and Tuvalu’s recognition of Abkhazia (Wyeth 2017). As will be examined in more detail later, the levels of stigmatisation can vary, and with it the levels of engagement without recognition can change.

### *Contextual factors*

The second set of factors that appear to influence the way that countries interact with de facto states relate to the specifics of the conflict in question. Significantly, the exact circumstances of the act of secession would generally appear to have little effect on engagement practices. As already highlighted, the act of unilaterally declaring independence is the very source of a de facto state’s stigmatisation. The one exception to this is Kosovo. Many of the states that supported its statehood have pointed out the gross human rights perpetrated by Serbia throughout the 1990s as a justification for doing so (see Boulton and Visoka 2010). However, this is not seen in other cases. While Georgia has been accused by the European Union of precipitating the crisis that led to Russian military intervention in 2008 (‘Georgia ‘started unjustified war’’, *BBC News*, 30 September 2009), it has not led to widespread recognition of Abkhazia and Georgia. Equally, although the Turkish Cypriots were treated harshly in the decade leading up to 1974, the invasion by Turkey is widely understood to have been contrary to international law and that the north of Cyprus is, despite the Turkish Cypriot declaration of independence, under the ‘effective control’ of the Republic of Turkey (European Court of

Human Rights 1996). It is hard to identify any examples where states have subsequently justified a decision to engage with a de facto state on the basis of the circumstances surrounding the declaration of independence.

While the exact circumstances of the act of secession would appear to have little effect on international interaction with de facto states, the behaviour of a de facto state following a declaration of independence does seem to have some effect on the way in which states subsequently interact with it. This has been seen very clearly in the case of the Turkish Cypriots. Following the 1983 declaration of independence, the TRNC was subject to a high degree of isolation. However, its leaders are now often accepted by senior officials from the EU and the United States. The most obvious explanation for this is the degree to which the Turkish Cypriot community has shown a willingness to engage with the Greek Cypriots to find a solution to the Cyprus Problem. It was only after the Turkish Cypriot showed a real commitment to reaching a settlement that their fortunes improved; a situation no doubt helped by the fact that the Greek Cypriots overwhelmingly rejected a UN sponsored plan, in 2004, thereby incurring the wrath of many international observers. For example, the European Union significantly expanded its level of engagement with the Turkish Cypriot community in the aftermath of the vote (Kyris 2015). Interestingly, when the Turkish Cypriots elected a leader who was known for his hard-line views, in 2010, the level of interaction decreased. But when they again elected pro-solution figures, first in parliamentary elections in 2013, and then in 'presidential' elections in 2015, their fortunes again improved. The US State Department (2015) even went as far as to congratulate the moderate Mustafa Akinci on his election as Turkish Cypriot leader. In contrast, international actors such as the European Union have condemned 'so-called' elections held in Abkhazia (European External Action Service 2017). While the effects of the behaviour of the de facto state in changing level of interaction is particularly pronounced in the case of the TRNC, it is also worth noting that one of the factors

that have helped Kosovo to secure greater international acceptance is its willingness to enter a direct dialogue with Belgrade. For instance, the European Union, including the five non-recognisers, has stressed that Kosovo's process of European integration is directly linked the process of dialogue with Belgrade (European External Action Service 2013).

Perhaps the most significant contextual factor shaping engagement without recognition is the extent to which the parent state seems to be willing to accept interaction between the seceding territory and third countries. It has long been recognised that the broader attitudes of the parent state towards the de facto state can have an important effect on the way in which third party states will interact with the de facto state (Lauterpacht 1947). For instance, although Serbia insists that it never will recognise Kosovo, and maintains an active policy of trying to prevent states from recognising it (Ker-Lindsay 2012), it has long since stopped taking punitive steps against countries that recognise it. Additionally, as a result of the EU dialogue, Belgrade now has frequent high level of contact with Pristina and Serbian officials often meet with Kosovo officials both formally and informally. These contacts have even included meetings between the two foreign ministers. This now means that other states that do not recognise Kosovo feel relatively comfortable about interacting with Kosovo officials, including the foreign minister. This stands in marked contrast to Cyprus, which continues to take an uncompromising stance towards any form of external engagement with Turkish Cypriot officials beyond the bare minimum required in the context of ongoing reunification efforts. However, there are signs that this opposition may not have the deterrent effect it once did. In recent years, diplomats and officials have been increasingly willing to meet with senior Turkish Cypriot figures, even to the point that the Cypriot government has issued strong statements condemning such contacts ('Ambassadors warned over visits to the north', *Cyprus Mail*, 14 June 2014).

## *National factors*

As well as the systemic factors and the contextual factors shaping processes of stigmatisation and engagement without recognition, the domestic political factors within a state also have an important impact on interaction. Most obviously, a key factor is whether a state faces an ongoing secessionist dispute of its own. Where there is seen to be a strong internal threat to the territorial integrity of a state, one can expect to see a more pronounced reluctance to be seen to engage with a de facto state. A particularly obvious example of this can be seen in the case of Spain's stance towards Kosovo, which has become increasingly hard line as Catalonia became ever more vocal in pursuing secession (Ferrero-Turrion 2017). However, while one would perhaps expect that this would play a decisive role in shaping the attitudes towards de facto states, this is not always the case. Not only have many states that face secessionist movements recognised Kosovo – such as Canada, the United Kingdom, Turkey and Somalia – there are many countries that face their own separatist threats that engage with Kosovo at a high level. Indeed, some have done so in ways that they would not want others to engage with their own breakaway territories. Cyprus is a very good example. Despite having waged a concerted effort to stop states from engaging with the TRNC, senior Cypriot officials have confirmed to the author on several occasions that they held high level meetings with Kosovo officials.

Another domestic factor to consider is the specific ties that may exist either between a state and a de facto state or between a state and the parent state. Where formal recognition is not possible, there may still be engagement. For instance, Azerbaijan maintains close ties to the Turkish Cypriots. In 2005, it even allowed a Turkish Cypriot passenger plane to fly directly to Baku, in contravention of an international ban on such flights ('Turkish Cypriot jet flies to Baku', *BBC News*, 29 August 2005). Conversely, states may not wish to interact with

a de facto state by virtue of its relationship with a parent state. For example, Bosnia and Herzegovina's refusal to recognise Kosovo is the result of opposition from Republika Srpska, the Bosnian Serb entity, to permit such a move ("Bosnia won't even consider recognizing Kosovo", *Tanjug*, 27 September 2017). Likewise, religious ties may prove significant. For instance, Kosovo has managed to gain significant recognition and legitimisation amongst the members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. Likewise, the decision of the OIC to admit the Turkish Cypriot state as an observer, in 2005, and then call for greater economic and cultural engagement with Northern Cyprus, has been an important example of engagement without recognition. But this is far from being a hard and fast predictor of state attitudes. Despite these calls, some Islamic states, most notably Iran, have steadfastly refused to interact with Kosovo or the TRNC, viewing it as a Western project.

### **Stigmatisation and engagement without recognition as changeable processes**

While the degree of interaction is largely shaped by the three broad factors identified above, it is important to acknowledge that the policies adopted by a government are far from static. Once a decision is reached on whether or not to engage with a de facto state, or to what extent to engage, it does not mean that the state is then locked into that position. The stigmatisation attached to a de facto state, and the consequent levels of engagement without recognition, are mutable. They can change. As Adler-Nissen (2014) notes, 'what counts as normal and transgressive changes over time'. So too, the way in which states view de facto states can also vary over time, both positively and negatively.

In looking at examples of engagement without recognition, it becomes clear that there is a very high degree of latitude for the government of a state to manipulate the process to suit its own policy goals, or for a new government to set a different course from its predecessor,

should it so wish. In many cases, states can have considerable leeway to determine the way they wish to interact with de facto states. While many may not wish to engage where there is a high level of international disapproval, where the international level of stigmatisation is low, or where wider levels of international interaction is moderate to high, states may often alter their positions. In doing so, they can decide how they wish to project levels of interaction to their domestic audience. Where there is a strong preference by a government not to engage with a de facto state, it is relatively easy for it to justify its position, either with reference to endogenous or exogenous factors. This can be done by emphasising external opposition to the de facto state from one actor or another, such as Russia or the United States, or by playing to domestic concerns over secession. In other words, states that do not want to interact with a de facto state can simply present it as an illegal entity that deserves to be shunned. Conversely, where there is a willingness to engage, the policy can often be justified, either by actively making the case for engaging with the de facto state or by passively interacting with it in a manner that suggests that such engagement is relatively normal.

The ‘manipulation’ of stigmatisation, and the way in which levels of engagement can change, can be seen clearly when one compares the ways in which the five EU non-recognisers have interacted with Kosovo. While they share an essential starting point concerning their wish not to recognise Kosovo, they have in fact responded rather differently to the situation in practical terms. Some members, such as Greece and Slovakia, have become more open in their dealings with Kosovo (Armakolas 2017; Nic 2017; Lezova 2013). Processes of engagement short of actual recognition, including welcoming the Kosovo foreign minister to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Athens (Hellenic Republic 2013), was seen at the time to be an attempt by Athens to slowly prepare the ground, internally and externally, for recognition in the medium term. Indeed, it has been said that Greece had been ready to recognise Kosovo. However, it had held back due to concerns about the possible implications

for Cyprus (Senior Greek diplomat, comment to the author, March 2013). Likewise, Romania also eased up on its previously hard-line stance, although it has been less accommodating in recent years (Ivan 2017). Indeed, while there is no immediate prospect of Cyprus recognising Kosovo, it too has been more open in its engagement with Pristina. Perhaps the most obvious evidence for this was the emergence of a picture of the Cypriot foreign minister having breakfast with the prime minister and foreign minister of Kosovo on the margins of the UN General Assembly, in September 2013. It later emerged that the photo was taken and disseminated on social media with the full consent of the Cypriot government, which readily acknowledged that it amounted to a trial balloon to test public reactions (Senior Cypriot official, comments to the author, August 2014). There were no adverse effects. Since then, the degree of interaction has grown, although it still remains somewhat low key, especially as compared to Greece. Meanwhile, Spain has relatively little direct contact. In fact, it seems to have become more hard line as time as passed and pro-independence efforts have increased in Catalonia, eventually leading to the unilateral declaration of independence in November 2017.

If we think of engagement without recognition as a spectrum, then we can identify the ways in which states can move along that spectrum to reflect policy changes derived from specific systemic, contextual and national factors. For instance, in some cases, while there may be an act of collective non-recognition, such as a UN Security Council resolution, which serves to prevent recognition, it may be the case that international opinion towards a de facto state becomes less hostile. In other words, the level of stigmatisation decreases. For instance, the decision of the TRNC to unilaterally declare independence, in 1983, was met with a very high degree of international condemnation. While there was obviously a wish to maintain the talks between the two sides, and thus there was always a degree of interaction with Turkish Cypriot political leaders in the context of the ongoing UN-led settlement talks, in every other way international interaction with the Turkish Cypriots was limited. However, over the years

the situation has changed dramatically. Following the decision of the Turkish Cypriots to vote in favour of the Annan Plan, in 2004, there has been a steady increase in the level of engagement with the Turkish Cypriot community by various countries. This has been seen particularly clearly in the case of Muslim states. Although the Turkish Cypriots were first accepted as observers in 1979, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) even decided to start referring to the 'Turkish Cypriot State', in 2004. More recently, its members have started to call for greater contacts with the Turkish Cypriot State (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation 2013). Similarly, OIC members have called on member states to consider recognising Kosovo (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation 2012). However, full membership for both Northern Cyprus and Kosovo is not possible given that the statutes of the OIC state that membership is only open to UN members (OIC Charter, Chapter II, Article 2). Conversely, one could also envisage the introduction of restrictions on engagement in cases where a de facto state was seen to be blocking peace moves, or acting in an otherwise undesirable manner. In such cases, the level of disapproval again increases and states respond accordingly.

## **Conclusion**

In general, there is a very strong aversion towards unilateral acts of secession within the international system. As a result, de facto states have generally been stigmatised. They are shut out of the United Nations and their international interactions are often limited. And yet, de facto states are treated far from equally. The levels of engagement without recognition enjoyed by de facto states can vary considerably. Kosovo has relatively low levels of stigmatisation and consequently enjoys a very high degree of interaction with the wider international community. Abkhazia remains all but shunned. However, the Turkish Republic



of Northern Cyprus, which has only been recognised by one state, has shown that the level of stigmatisation can change. Having once been all but isolated, it has seen its international profile improve. This contribution sought to explore the factors that shape the degree of stigmatisation endured by de facto states, both at a systemic level and in terms of individual states, and how this stigmatisation could affect the level of engagement without recognition they enjoy.

In trying to understand the factors shaping the different levels of stigmatisation faced by de facto states, it became clear that there is no simple explanation. As has been shown, there are a number of determinants that shape wider attitudes towards de facto states and play an important role in shaping the willingness of countries to interact with them. These can be described as systemic, contextual and national factors. At a systemic level, the existence of a UN resolution condemning the act of secession is perhaps the single most powerful factor shaping the level of disapproval faced by a de facto state. So too is the position of major powers. Neither, though, is wholly decisive. Contextual and national factors also contribute to the patterns of stigmatisation and engagement without recognition. For example, while the exact conditions leading to the unilateral declaration of independence are perhaps not as important as many might suppose, the behaviour of the de facto state afterwards and the extent to which the parent state engages with the de facto state certainly play a part. Also, the respective approaches of the de facto state and the parent state to efforts to resolve their differences can be very significant indeed in shaping the level of stigmatisation, and thus the degree of wider international interaction, faced by a de facto state. In terms of domestic determinants, while the specific fear of secession harboured by a state may certainly have an impact on how a state interacts with a de facto state, this is not always the case. An increasing number of states that face secessionist challenges of their own now interact with Kosovo to one degree or another. Similarly, ties of history, culture, religion or ethnicity cannot always

explain decisions regarding levels of engagement without recognition. Overall, while some may have a greater effect than others, no single explanation can be seen to provide a broadly satisfactory explanation of the level of stigmatisation and allied engagement policies in any given case. Having said this, what would appear to be important is the multiplier effect. In other words, the more acceptance and interaction a de facto state enjoys on the international stage, the more it is likely to receive.

Meanwhile, some important other observations also emerge. Most significantly, the level of stigmatisation faced by a de facto state is mutable. It can, and does, change over time. And so too does the level of engagement without recognition. De facto states that were once shunned can find themselves interacting much more freely than they might ever have thought possible. Stigmatisation is a spectrum. De facto states can move along it in response to policy changes at an international level as well as in individual states. For instance, in some cases, while there may be an act of collective non-recognition, such as a UN Security Council resolution, which serves to prevent recognition, international opinion towards a de facto state can evolve and become less hostile. Moreover, while states may treat interaction as a passive process, merely responding to external and internal factors, it can also be an active process. Countries can often manipulate the degree of opprobrium. In some cases, lessening stigmatisation may even be a way of preparing the ground for full recognition. However, in the broader scheme of things, the international community's reluctance to accept unilateral acts of secession means that de facto states are likely to continue to find it difficult to join the established club of states and engage freely with UN members on equal terms for the foreseeable future.

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