CONFRONTING MULTIPLE CRISES: LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON POLICY-MAKING IN KOSOVO

EDITED BY

IOANNIS ARMAKOLAS
STEFAN BOUZAROVSKI
AGON DEMJAHA
AROLDA ELBASANI
GËZIM KRASNIQI
STEPHANIE SCHWANDNER-SIEVERS

CONFRONTING MULTIPLE CRISES: LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON POLICY-MAKING IN KOSOVO

EDITED BY

IOANNIS ARMAKOLAS
STEFAN BOUZAROVSKI
AGON DEMJAHA
AROLDA ELBASANI
GËZIM KRASNIQI
STEPHANIE SCHWANDNER-SIEVERS

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

ABOUT THE EDITORS

IOANNIS ARMAKOLAS

(PhD, Cantab) is Associate Professor in Comparative Politics of South East Europe at the Department of Balkan, Slavic and Oriental Studies, University of Macedonia and Senior Research Fellow & Head of the South-East Europe Programme at the Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP). He's a member of the Europe's Futures network of the Institute for Human Sciences-Vienna and the Erste Foundation as well as Editor of the 'Political Trends and Dynamics' the regional journal of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung-Dialogue Southeast Europe (FES SOE, Sarajevo). His previous affiliations include: Editor-in-Chief of the scholarly journal 'Southeast European and Black Sea Studies' (Routledge journals, Taylor & Francis); ESRC Fellow at the Department of Politics, University of Oxford; Research Fellow at Nuffield College, University of Oxford; Director of Research at the 'US-Greece Task Force: Transforming the Balkans' (joint project of the Hellenic Centre for European Studies and the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies); Region Head for South East Europe at Oxford Analytica; Tip O'Neill Fellow in Peace and Conflict Studies at INCORE-Northern Ireland (Ulster University & United Nations University). Ioannis Armakolas has extensive experience as a consultant with USAID, DFID and OSF projects in the Western Balkans.

STEFAN BOUZAROVSKI

is a Professor of Human Geography at the University of Manchester, and an Associate of the Institute of European Energy and Climate Policy. His work on energy justice, socio-technical governance and urban transformations has led to over 120 scientific papers, three single-author monographs, one co-authored textbook and four edited books. He has led or consulted for over 50 projects on energy justice and urban transformations, while providing expert advice to the European Parliament, European Commission, United Nations, World Bank and International Energy Agency. He is a member of the editorial boards of six international journals, as well as ten advisory and governing boards for research projects and non-governmental organizations in the energy and environment sector. He has previously been appointed to visiting professorships or fellowships in Bergen, Gdansk, Berlin, Brisbane, Bruges and Prague. Between 1999 and 2007 he was based at the University of Oxford, where he held a Larkinson Scholarship at St Hugh's College, and a Junior Research Fellowship at Christ Church. As the chair and founder of the EU Energy Poverty Observatory, in the 2019 EU Protects campaign he was named an 'ordinary hero' for his efforts to combat poverty and inequality across Europe. His work on energy communities was shortlisted for a Times Higher Education Prize, as well as a Falling Walls prize.

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 Associate Professor of Political Sciences and International Relations at the Tetovo University. 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, Imperial College Press and Palgrave Macmillan. His main interests include ethnic relations, conflict prevention and resolution, diplomacy and regional cooperation.

AROLDA ELBASANI

is a visiting scholar at the Center for European and Mediterranean Studies, New York University. She has a PHD in Social and Political Sciences from the European University Institute, Florence and held research positions at the Robert Schuman Center for Advanced Studies, Florence; Columbia University, NY; WZB, Berlin; European University of Tirana; and Free University, Berlin. Her articles have appeared at the *Journal of European Public Policy, Europe-Asia Studies, Democratization, and Southeast Europe and Black Sea Studies* among others. Her edited books include: *EUropean Integration and Transformation in the Western Balkans* (Routledge 2013, 2014); *The Revival of Islam in the Balkans* (Palgrave 2015; with Olivier Roy); the special issue *Governing Islam and Religious Pluralism* (Balkans and Near East Studies 19(1), with O. Roy); and the special Issue *Local Islam(s)* (Nationality Papers, with Jelena Tosic). Her current research interests lay at the intersection of EU promotion of Rule of Law and democracy; corruption and political Islam with a focus on Southeast Europe and Turkey.

GËZIM KRASNIQI

is Lecturer in Nationalism and Political Sociology and MSc Nationalism in Global Perspective Programme Co-Director at the University of Edinburgh, UK. He holds an MSc in Nationalism with distinction from the Central European University (CEU) in Budapest and a PhD in Sociology from the University of Edinburgh in the UK. He has published extensi3vely on issues of state-building, nationalism, citizenship, and religion, often with a focus on South-East Europe. His co-edited book, Uneven Citizenship: Minorities and Migrants in the Post-Yugoslav Space (with D. Stjepanovic; Routledge 2015) focuses on the relations between citizenship and various manifestations of diversity, including, but not exclusively, ethnicity. His forthcoming book Albanian Nationalism(s) and Power Struggles in Kosovo: The Rise of a Polycentric Nation, examines nationalism, power struggles and old and new state-nation configurations in the Balkans, with a focus on the case of Albanians. His current research involves the study of old and new state-nation configurations in South-East Europe and citizenship in contested/liminal polities. Currently he serves as a Steering Committee Member of ASEN (The Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism) and Associate Editor of Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power journal.

STEPHANIE SCHWANDNER-SIEVERS

 (MA, Berlin; PhD, London) is Associate Professor in Applied Anthropology at Bournemouth University. She has an academic background in social anthropology and area studies (Southeastern Europe) within which she specialised on Albanian cultures and societies, both, in the region and transnationally. At Bournemouth University she co-directs the university's Research Centre for 'Seldom Heard Voices: Marginalisation and Societal Integration' and teaches across sociology, criminology, and anthropology programmes. Her ethnographic research (since the late 1980s) among, about and with Albanians in post-socialist Albania, post-conflict Kosovo, and as migrants in translocal contexts, has led to numerous publications focusing on questions such as identity constructions in recourse to contested pasts. More recent publications focus on topics such as Transitional Justice, epistemic justice, and participatory arts-based research methods and interventions in Kosovo and Albania. She currently leads the academic research component of a UK government-funded development collaboration project, RAYS (Palladium International), which critically explores the role of Albanian hip-hop for youth engagement in Albania. In collaboration with her colleagues at University of Prishtina, she recently concluded the 'Kosovo-Strand' projects of an AHRC/GCRF-funded international project of working with young people and civil society through the arts in post-conflict countries world-wide, known as Changing the Story. Since 2018, she has also led two large Erasmus schemes, enabling multiple student and staff exchanges between University of Prishtina and Bournemouth University.

INTRODUCTION

**Ioannis Armakolas, Stefan Bouzarovski, Agon Demjaha,
Arolda Elbasani, Gezim Krasniqi, Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers**

Russia's aggression against Ukraine brought war back to the European continent for the first time since the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. It has also become the first war involving major countries in Europe since the end of the Second World War. The Russian invasion is reshaping the geopolitical, security and public policy landscape in Europe, and in an unprecedented manner. Countries associated with international neutrality for many decades are in the process of joining NATO. The transatlantic relationship is again strengthening, after the negative experience of the Trump presidency. The EU has for the first time formally extended the accession perspective to Eastern Neighbourhood Policy countries, accepting as official candidates the embattled Ukraine and Moldova. Europe is facing major economic and inflation pressures and an energy crisis unseen at least since the 1970s. Domestic policy pressures in the EU countries are multiplying.

In the context of such earth-shattering developments, policy making in the Western Balkans has become much more complicated, especially for Kosovo, a new country challenged domestically in its state-building process and internationally in its efforts to consolidate its statehood status. The enormous pressures brought about by the war in Ukraine came to sit on top of previous crises, from the COVID-19 pandemic, to energy trasition, the permanent crisis mode in bilateral relations with Belgrade, the difficulties in integrating the Serb community of Kosovo and many others. This 'multiple crises' landscape of policymaking seems to be becoming a permanent state of affairs for Kosovo and deserves its place in the title of our book.

The edited volume is made up of five parts. All chapters are engaged with the crisis-ridden reality in response to which Kosovo needs to develop its policymaking. Even though the concept of crisis per se is not theoretically or conceptually elaborated in this volume, it is clear that all chapters are analysing policy areas that are challenged by the complex geopolitical and socio-economic setting. Part I, entitled 'Old and New Boundaries: Community Dynamics and Identity Constructions', focuses on community and societal questions. Four chapters in this part tackle various aspects of community boundary-making; not only along the traditional ethnic dimension and its official manifestations epitomised in the Prishtina-Belgrade negotiations, but also in relation to how young Kosovars negotiate their identity, their place in and relationship to Europe, how school textbooks deal with the recent traumatic past and how feminist civic activisms in Kosovo and Serbia rediscover cross-border solidarities.

The next two parts of the volume deal more directly with key problems in the new crisis-ridden policy agenda. Part II, entitled 'COVID-19 Crisis: Education and Social Policy Response' focuses on the current global pandemic and the policy dilemmas and pressures it exerts on Kosovo's limited financial and governance resources. This part includes two chapters, which focus on gender perspectives of the impact of the pandemic on business and on the challenges that the pandemic poses for educational authorities, education practitioners, pupils and parents respectively. Part III, entitled 'The Challenges of Climate Change and Energy Transition', tackles the policy area that has been possibly affected the most from the Russian aggression on Ukraine. Two chapters in this part focus on the policy landscape of energy transition in Kosovo and on energy poverty and the dire state of many energy consumers respectively. Put together, the two chapters illustrate the major difficulties facing Kosovo's authorities and population even before the dramatic changes brought about by the Russian invasion.

The final two parts of the volume deal with European integration and Kosovo's foreign relations respectively. Part IV, entitled 'Revisiting European Integration in Times of Crises', reviews the difficult terrain of EU enlargement in the Western Balkans, in which, arguably, Kosovo has received the rough end of the stick, given the fact that it remains unrecognised by five of the Union's member states.

The two chapters included in this part focus on the issue of rule of law in the context of the EU's new enlargement methodology and on the place of the Western Balkans in the agenda of the current Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU respectively. The analyses demonstrate that the European perspective of the Western Balkans, and of Kosovo in them, has not strengthened, despite the new methodology that was introduced only a couple of years ago and despite the calls for a 'geopolitical enlargement' of the EU in light of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. In fact, the EU seems to continue its sleepwalking to geopolitical disaster in the Balkans, despite the frequent 'wake-up calls' in recent years.

Finally, Part V, entitled 'Kosovo's Foreign Relations in a Volatile International Environment', turns our attention to two under-studied elements of Kosovo's foreign relations. One is the role of Chinese diplomacy in Kosovo's efforts to consolidate its international status. The other is the question of Turkey's soft power policy in Kosovo and Romania. Relations with both of these important countries, China a global power and a key non-recogniser and Turkey an important regional player and a significant recogniser of Kosovo's independence, are crucial for Prishtina's foreign policy.

In what follows, the editors of the volume engage conceptually and critically with the themes of the five parts of the book as well as provide brief outlines of the different chapters.

PART I — OLD AND NEW BOUNDARIES: COMMUNITY DYNAMICS AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTIONS

What do we mean by 'the local'? The concept of 'the local' has long been defined in contrast to, and as mutually constitutive with, 'the global', marked by the transfer of people, technologies, ideas, finances, information and more. Anthropologist Appadurai (1995) famously suggested exploring 'translocal'

'flows' or 'scapes' (ethnoscapes, technoscapes, ideoscapes, financescapes, and mediascapes) as global sites of such transfers between different localities. Notable for this approach, 'the local' cannot be studied without 'the global': community dynamics and identity constructions at local level are always related to, and interlinked with, wider, translocal or transnational, movements, processes and dynamics.

By this token, the concept of 'the local' clearly lends itself to discussions of how international and national policies affect the intended beneficiaries ('the locals') and how people at local levels respond to, integrate, or transform, the intended idea-transfers. These questions have been subject of the 'local turn' in peace studies (Mac Ginty & Richmond 2013). Such an approach advocates a focus on the interrelatedness and practices of the intended beneficiaries, both among each other, and within the wider networks of international intervention scenarios. Mac Ginty (2015, 851) defines 'the local' in this school of thought as "a system of beliefs and practices that loose communities and networks may adopt". He emphasises that 'local agency' in this might be under the radar of "statist or institutional domains" (2015, 848) which guide international intervention aims, yet such agency in all its forms is powerful, shape and transform intended outcomes, and it is to be taken seriously not least as a matter of epistemic justice. For critical analysis, according to this argument, the term's contingency from power and interests at any level requires decoupling it from static territorial notions and, instead, focussing on the complexity and fluidity of people's actions and activities, ideas and imaginations, networks and relationships, social capital, and resources.

In contrast to these post-modernist approaches, recent sociological expansions of the concept, inspired by human geography and phenomenology, re-emphasise the need to recognise the distinctiveness of 'the local' as 'a place'. According to Roudometof (2019), 'the local' should not be understood in relation to processes of globalisation or 'glocalisation' alone. He emphasises that 'place' is different from the more generic concept of 'space', exactly because it is imbued with meanings, experiences, and memories by

those who inhabit and relate to it. Although epistemologically reterritorializing the concept, this approach has in common with the above that a local 'place', either way, results from the agency and imagologies of people associated with a place. 'The local', in this argument, emerges from social processes of 'place-making', which can be simultaneously physical and symbolic.

The social constructivist and interactionist underpinnings of all of the above approaches are reminiscent also of cultural anthropological classics such as Barth's (1969) seminal work on the construction of ethnic boundaries as a social process. Here, ethnic boundaries (symbolically demarcated as well as materalising in physical separations) result from the locals' agency in continuously ascribing and self-ascribing criteria of cultural distinction. The approaches described above, including Roudometof's (2019) focus on the agency of place-making, are predicated on social (sometimes political) processes of, both, physical and symbolic boundary constructions: 'locals' construct communities and identities, define inclusion and exclusion, similarity, and difference, in relation to place and shared meaning associated with it, be this in terms of legal entitlements or their emplaced, collective memories.

The contributions assembled in Part I explore changing boundary constructions at the interface of global and local, social and political agency in 'place-making' (ideologically or concrete) from different disciplinary angles, united by the weighting given to taking into account local perspectives from within Kosovo. Both, symbolic and physical, 'place-making' processes described are all related to, and interlinked with, wider dynamics - national, regional, international, translocal or transnational – yet they are simultaneously anchored in, and shape, local community and identity constructions.

Rooted in IR and political studies, Ardit Orana's chapter falls well within the 'local turn' associated with peace studies. It skilfully unpacks the dissonance between internationally brokered 'place-making' and its local reception, contestations, and transformations. He exemplifies this process through the failed implementation of the EU-facilitated *First Agreement on the Normalization between Prishtina and Belgrade*, specifically those

policy components relating to the creation (2013) and implementation (2015) of the Association of Serb-majority Municipalities (ASM). However, his focus is only partly on local resistance to, and local contestations of, this agreement (as previously studied by Troncota 2018; cf. also Beysoylu 2018). The originality of Orana's contribution lies in exploring Kosovo's new, local, political actor constellations as a critical juncture out of which new opportunities might arise for reframing the ASM and possibly overcoming the protracted deadlock of the EU-facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia.

Intriguingly, in his problem analysis, Orana traces the deadlock to the agreement's linguistic elasticity which he identifies as part of a deliberate EU strategy known in the literature as 'constructive ambiguity'. On the one hand, this refers to the EU's lack of clarity regarding the scope of the agreement, which Orana shows to effectively obstruct ownership for relevant stakeholders, such as the Kosovo Serbs. On the other hand, it is evident in terminological choices found in translations: what translates as 'community' in Serbian, translates as 'association' in Albanian. Such 'elasticity of language' has long facilitated negotiations between international, regional, and national stakeholders in Kosovo since the internationally facilitated peace and disarmament agreements in 1999 (Schwandner-Sievers 2010, 163). As Orana demonstrates for the *Normalization Agreement*, such linguistic elasticity imbues the same locally situated rights with different meaning for the two main local ethnic communities, respectively. The stalemate between Belgrade and Prishtina appears doomed to continue unless such divergence of meaning can be unpacked, renegotiated, and synchronised.

Jeta Abazi Gashi's contribution shifts attention to young local Kosovars' identity negotiations vis-à-vis the metaphorical space of hegemonic Europe. Her study can be situated within the field of semiotic sociology (Heiskala 2021), which is rooted in the symbolic interactionist tradition of Erving Goffman (1959). Aware of the sensitivities involved in generating local young people's discourses of 'Europe' and 'Self' as well as of their perceptions of how 'Europe' sees them, she introduces the method of photo-elicitation, here orig-

inally applied for the first time to the critical study of Kosovar identity con-structions. The method has long been known to respond well to sensitive and emotive themes, in this case arising out of a geopolitical context perpetuating an exclusionary visa regime and local isolation. Abazi Gashi used photos se-lected by her student research participants; a range of pre-selected photos depicting the plurality of European religions; and, finally, the 2010 'Young Europeans' self-branding campaign video, to trigger responses and generate discursive data.

On the one hand, it emerges that this young generation's simultaneously local and translocal forms of 'place-making' might have changed from the older generations of Kosovars who tended to emphasise strongly their European belonging through metaphors, symbols and tropes highlighting a common Christian heritage. Abazi Gashi's discourse analysis suggests that the older generation's concrete references were missing from the young people's utter-ances. Religion, overall, was not a theme they raised without prompting; yet, when prompted, they still downplayed (stereotypical) Muslim identity signifi-ers. On the other hand, establishing commonality – one strategy of affirming collective self-worth - remained a strong antidote to experiences of, or per-ceived, rejection, exclusion, or humiliation by 'Europe' and the underpinning symbolic hierarchies long evidenced for the wider region (Spasić 2017; Luci and Schwandner-Sievers 2020). The pertinence of underpinning sensitivities became evident in local, everyday nationalism constructions (e.g. highlighting Kosovar sports personalities' success) in the young people's discourses. They were also evident in the semiotic dichotomies distilled from the discursive material (e.g. old/young; weak/strong; progressive/backward; safe/unsafe) as well as in distinct emotions expressed (anger, shame etc.). For example, the respondents asserted their place as Europeans by conveying a strong identification with liberal values such as human rights, including specifically LGBT+ rights, and religious pluralism. Some also highlighted their potential as a group (their youth as a value of benefit and juxtaposed to 'old Europe'). Con-versely, 'place-making' was also evident in expressions of anger and shifted preferences (the US is more important!) in one student's reaction to the ex-clusionary politics experienced.

Rodoljub Jovanović's work falls again within the wider framework of peace studies, here, specifically the fields of Transitional Justice and Dealing with the Past. The focus of his study is on history teaching in Kosovo. Based on existing critical analyses of Kosovo Albanian textbooks (e.g. Gashi 2012), Jovanović explores particularly the ways in which local teachers fulfil the Kosovo Albanian majority's internationally required 'special responsibility' to "promote interethnic dialogue and tolerance at central and local level in order to bridge divides between communities and promote reconciliation" (OSCE 2021). His original research, including in-depth interviews with twelve local Kosovo Albanian teachers about how they teach the subject, specifically, of the 1999 war at levels 9 and 12, benefits from strong theoretical guidance. His findings identify specificities of history teaching practices in Kosovo through comparison with, and learning from, studies on such practices in other fragile (post-)conflict contexts, namely Israel and Rwanda.

The specific Kosovar example suggests a generally weak background in local teachers' training of how to navigate complex and painful local and national histories both sensitively and critically; and it stands out through a strong and unpredictable reliance on individual teachers' personal experiences, initiatives, and interpretations of this history. Their practices and messages were found to differ according to generation (only older teachers were able to convey personal stories of pre-war, interethnic coexistence). The teachers improvised and moderated learning contents according to their individual knowledge of a given local community, its memories and perceived social-psychological needs. The unstructured reliance on personal interpretations furthermore led to unintended transformations even where multi-perspective contents had been introduced (albeit patchily only) via NGO-led teacher training initiatives: rather than critically and reflectively contextualising and juxtaposing different perspectives as anticipated, some individual teachers used the introduction of multiple perspectives to validate their own ethno-national position alone. They thereby affirmed, rather than bridged, symbolic and political boundaries of difference.

Jovanović's conclusion logically points to the need for systematic teacher training in contemporary history education. Specifically, training is needed to boost understanding of how to better balance 'patriotic' and criticality requirements. However, he also highlights the importance of the local teachers' own insights. Accordingly, promoting a better balance might remain inevitably thwarted as long as the political situation between Belgrade and Prishtina remains unsolved. Peace education, as made explicit in some of the local teachers' views, can only come after political stability (recognition) has been achieved.

Finally, IR scholar Adelina Hasani investigates the new symbolic and social boundaries that have emerged between local feminist activists from Kosovo and Serbia since 2000. In the 1990s and earlier, feminists from either locality collaborated in transnational solidarity against Milosević's oppressive regime, nationalism, war, and war denial. It was the shared purpose of anti-war and anti-Milosević activism which provided strength and the ground for feminist, political solidarity beyond borders. Closely relying on Fridman's (2011) observations, Hasani posits that the loss of the common enemy explains why nowadays this solidarity seems diminished, fragmented, and less 'organic'. She also points to generational changes that diminished communication, such as the disappearance of a common language (previously Serbian, or Serbo-Croatian, which is not anymore part of Kosovo Albanian curricula). Clearly, the 'place-making' references shifted from the shared geographical space of the former Yugoslavia to two separate spatial reference points, Serbia and Kosovo, respectively.

Hasani describes how nationalist discourses prevail in both countries today. Cross-border activists risked being branded 'traitors' in the past just as in the present. After 2000, as her literature review suggests, the classic feminist slogan 'the personal is political', for example, in Serbia was translated into 'the personal is national' (Papić 2002, 193). Hasani points to the existence of a handful of cross-border feminist NGO-initiatives active still today. As one of her contemporary research respondents, who attended an associated event, explains: "I realised that you are either a feminist or a nationalist; you cannot

be both". However, Hasani argues that such views and initiatives nowadays are isolated. Overall, nationalism has divided post-Yugoslav feminism: feminist 'place-making' now seems mostly inward-looking and bound to either Serbia or Kosovo alone. Hasani, however, ends on a positive note regardless, suggesting discernible potentials for future cross-border solidarities in the fields not just of feminism, but also of environmental or cultural activism.

As all four contributions discussed in this section demonstrate, local 'place-making' – physically or symbolically - must be studied both at micro, meso, and macro levels to understand its power, impact, and potentials. On the one hand, attention needs to be paid to local actors' ideations and experiences, practices, and agency from within, when exploring local community dynamics and identity constructions. On the other, the ways in which these are simultaneously contingent on, responding to, and shaping, the wider contexts require keeping their interrelatedness with policies and processes in view at different scales, ranging from local, to national, regional, translocal, or international.

PART II COVID-19 CRISIS: EDUCATION AND SOCIAL POLICY RESPONSE

Frequent border changes and state transformations and (violent) dissolutions in the past thirty years have had a profound impact on citizenship rights of individuals, often resulting in political oppression, economic deprivation, forced migration, and violence. While issues of conflict, state-building, inter-ethnic relations in Kosovo have drawn extensive attention locally and internationally, social policy areas including but not limited to welfare, work, education and healthcare have, to a large degree, been overlooked in both scholarship and policy analysis. In other words, there has been little attention on the way Kosovo institutions and society responds to people's needs for security, education, work, health and wellbeing.

All these important aspects form the backbone of social citizenship and the welfare state. According to T. H. Marshall (1950), the welfare state—with social citizenship as its hallmark—synthesises community and state. Moreover, social citizenship is an important precondition for democratic inclusion. Social inclusion and participation in democratic institutions don't depend only on civic and political rights, but on socio-economic rights and wellbeing, too. In the case of Kosovo, as well as the Balkans more broadly, due to the past thirty years' national(ist) and ethnic struggles, institutions of the educational system and social services have been on a downward spiral, with tremendous consequences for citizens. Therefore, the idea of social citizenship remains fundamental in recasting key concepts such as democracy, human rights, and citizenship.

The role of social citizenship and social policy has been spotlighted in the past two years as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has had a profound impact on societies worldwide with many social sectors facing multiple shocks. While the long-term impacts of these shocks require time to be accurately estimated, the short-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on businesses and education is particularly devastating in developing countries, such as Kosovo. The pandemic has deepened pre-existing inequalities and exposed vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath have posed a myriad of challenges to businesses in Kosovo, but these challenges have been different depending on the sectors and owners of the businesses. Hana Bacaj's study suggests that in Kosovo the pandemic had a greater impact on women-led businesses, since women are under-represented as entrepreneurs in Kosovo and so tend to operate smaller businesses that are concentrated in sectors that were hit hardest during the pandemic. Based on interviews with Kosovo women entrepreneurs, the five key challenges faced during the pandemic included a fall in customer purchases, the need to remodel the business, the threat to existence, and decreased business size.

The unprecedented impact of COVID-19 measures on businesses left many owners struggling and without answers to pressing issues. The crisis prompted a government response – but often this was too late, inadequate or short

sighted. Kosovo institutions adopted various policy measures in response to COVID-19, focusing on social wellbeing, business support, and grant supervision but, overall, they had a limited impact. Politically unstable Kosovo was unprepared when the pandemic struck. The government proved unable to create a well-thought-out strategy and implementation plan that took into consideration all the relevant factors when designing its measures. Considerable shortcomings emerged due to the misreading of the situation and of the specific problems that women-led businesses faced. Importantly, since most institutions in Kosovo do not have gender-disaggregated data, it was difficult for it to create policies that took the gender factor into consideration.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted structural issues and inequalities in Kosovo's education sector. In response to COVID-19 lockdown, Kosovo's educational authorities made attempts to ease the process of transitioning to online learning by providing lessons which were broadcasted on the national TV and created a platform (*E-shkollori*). They also provided one-day trainings for the teachers to understand and be able to use this platform. However, the hastily introduced online teaching during the pandemic found the schools lacking the needed infrastructure for successful teaching and learning, and most teachers unprepared in terms of using technology in learning. Successive governments in Kosovo have focused on building new school premises rather than developing teaching capacities of the schools that already exist. In education institutions across Kosovo there is a general lack of information and communications technology (ICT) equipment, teaching materials, school libraries, labs and computers. The problem is particularly acute in rural schools, which also lack reliable internet.

Nora Nimani Musa's study has identified numerous challenges that teachers faced during online learning, the chief among them being lack of knowledge in using technology, which, in turn, undermined their confidence and raised anxiety and stress during this period of teaching. Therefore, it is unsurprising that all the teachers who participated in this study have reported to prefer classroom-based schooling to online teaching. Parents seem to share similar views, too. Almost all of them stated that their children are more motivated

during school-based learning. Data suggests that problems with internet connection, inability to access online learning without direct supervision from parents, lack of information available to them, and the inability to express themselves clearly during online classes have all contributed to low children satisfaction with online learning.

PART III — THE CHALLENGES OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY TRANSITION

The juxtaposition of global energy and climate crises creates a unique challenge for policy-makers and citizens in Kosovo, due to the country's historical and geo-economic circumstances. Kosovo is one of the world's most coal-dependent states – a specific infrastructural legacy that can be attributed to a series of choices made over a prolonged period of time, partly in response to the country's rich endowments with the hydrocarbon resource. The predominance of solid fuels in Kosovo's energy mix, however, has led to a series of policy and environmental issues as a result of interactions with broader social, economic and spatial problems during post-communism in particular.

Throughout Central and Eastern Europe, the movement towards a market-based economy in the early 1990s was followed by the institution of a new energy regulation landscape, inspired by the principles of the Washington consensus. Among other dynamics, this entailed changes in energy pricing structures, as well as the privatization of energy companies (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe 1991). The role of the state in the formulation and delivery of energy policy was radically transformed, with private and third sector actors increasingly taking centre stage to the detriment of roles previously assumed by central or local government. Post-communism also saw the dismantling of the centrally planned system of infrastructure development, and the introduction of market-oriented frameworks of residential supply and demand (Bouzarovski 2010). In cultural terms, there was

a backlash against the dense public transport and energy provision systems inherited from the centrally planned economy, in favour of individualized energy provision and greater automobile use.

In the case of Kosovo, the post-communist transformation, the gaining of independence, and the process of European Union accession have all led to deep infrastructural and policy reforms in the energy sector. The electricity sector has been formally unbundled and liberalized, with different legal entities being charged with separate activities relating to the generation, transmission, distribution and supply of electrical power. The existence of a parallel energy regime in the north of Kosovo has posed a series of challenges, in addition to unresolved regulatory and ownership issues between Kosovo and Serbia (Obradovic-Wochnik and Dodds 2015). Internal dynamics to the energy market, including corruption, vested interests and the need for technological upgrades, have also been associated with distinct impacts, aside from broader processes linked to the expansion of income poverty and social inequality, and the relatively low level of networked infrastructure provision and economic development in the country as a whole.

As a whole, Kosovo provides a unique window to study how political, material and institutional path-dependencies can influence the operation and evolution of large technical systems (Marvin 2012; Rutherford and Coutard 2014). Following broader scholarship in science and technology studies, these dynamics show how infrastructural formations are capable of driving political choices and trade-offs at multiple scales of governance, the provision of infrastructure services to various economic sectors, as well as deeper processes of exclusion and marginalization. In contrast to approaches that view energy poverty and environmental degradation as relatively narrow phenomena linked to particular forms of energy use or air pollution, such thinking highlights the embeddedness of health or material deprivation in the entire system of energy policy, regulation and service delivery (Ban et al. 2021).

The two chapters in this section powerfully illustrate the systemic nature of ongoing challenges at the climate-energy nexus in Kosovo, and their immer-

sion in multiple crises. Blin Berdoniqi uses a multi-level governance framework to explore decarbonization challenges and trajectories in Kosovo's energy sector. Using interviews with EU and Kosovo officials, policy researchers, academics and civil society representatives – as well as a multitude of secondary evidence – the chapter interrogates both the positions of, and interrelations among, different institutional actors on the path to a low-carbon future. It provides a governance map to scrutinize the complex roles of different stakeholders in this process, as well as the types of organizations that either promote or hinder transformation dynamics. The chapter also traces the contours of a substantial shift of power and authority from the central state onto a wider range of local, non-governmental and trans-national structures.

Marta Szpala focuses on both the regulation and lived experience of energy use to explain how domestic energy deprivation in Kosovo is connected to wider injustices of policy recognition and resource distribution. Her chapter is based on interviews with stakeholders who represent vulnerable groups, as well as desk research and discussions with energy policy experts. It analyses the socio-technical and regulatory contexts in which domestic energy inequalities arise, while illuminating the multiple strategies that households use to overcome the structural vulnerabilities that they face. The chapter is permeated by insightful comments on the mismatch between donor and government priorities, on the one hand, and the actually existing patterns of inequality, on the other.

PART IV REVISITING EUROPEAN INTEGRATION IN TIMES OF CRISES

The processes of European Integration in the Western Balkans have long been held as the anchor keeping the region tied to ongoing reforms as much as the goal of regional stability and good neighborly relations. The 'transformative power' of Europe, more recently, has been under question as the enlargement towards the Western Balkans has stumbled and delayed. The

promise of enlargement itself is being questioned amidst EU member states citizens' waning appetite for enlargement, concerns on the EU's capacity to absorb new members, looming international crises in the Eastern flank of the Union, and growing evidence about the fake style of reforms across the region.

EU members' veto to progress of enlargement -more recently Bulgaria's veto to opening accession negotiations with North Macedonia, years after the Commission's assessment that the country had complied with the load of required conditions - shows the EU's difficulty to maneuver between a formal commitment to enlargement, the lack of consensus on the issue and the complicated EU decision making process. Alejandro Esteso Pérez's and Petr Čermák's chapters take stock of the setbacks of Balkan enlargement and bring in new evidence of the EU efforts to reinvigorate the process, but also of the many factors that hinder actual progress.

Both chapters acknowledge the many struggles and dilemmas that overshadow the Western Balkans' EU accession. Čermák, who focuses on the power of EU presidencies to set the agenda and prioritise the enlargement issues, suggests that even Balkan-friendly presidencies have not been able to push forward the issue given "the long-term ambiguity of the EU approach maneuvering between the commitment to enlargement and the emphasis on EU's capacity to absorb new members". Perez's chapter on the rule of law as the focus of enlargment conditionality also notes that the EU's approach to the issue left much to desire for: "bureaucratic reform process that did not allow for thorough evaluation and a well-thought feedback, the mistaken implementation of a one-size-fits-all model of rule of law reform, and the lack of reliable monitoring instruments together with a lack of political will in candidate countries led to an unpolished transition [and]... a wave of democratic backsliding in the target countries soon after enlargement."

The chapters by Čermák and Perez also pinpoint at the EU efforts to re-envision and reinvigorate its enlargement policy. Perez's analysis shows that the EU continuously sought innovative avenues to its rule of law policy and its

conditionality framework in general. Accordingly, "Conditionality, as such, has transformed in form and substance and it has introduced new aspects, broadening its span while evidencing the EU's internal concerns and balances." The new enlargement methodology, adopted more recently, seeks to make the process "more predictable, more dynamic and more political." The new methodology is, thus, a potentially new stage in the process of transformation of the EU's rule of law and anti-corruption conditionality because of its explicit focus on the *monitoring* dimension and the *involvement of Member States*.

Čermák analysis of the priorities of the Czech presidency (July-December 2022) notes that the new Czech government has inherited the Balkan priority from the outgoing government. Accordingly, "the agenda-setting of the previous government, albeit a populist one, already positioned the Czech Republic as a prospective active player in the Western Balkans during the 2022 Presidency." The region has been a permanent issue within the Czech foreign policy agenda because of both strategic and normative concerns. "Strategically, the Czech Republic perceived the region as a latent source of instability that could potentially spill into its own neighborhood and threaten the security of the European space. Normatively, the special interest in Southeast Europe was based on a combination of perception of historical ties with the South Slavic nations and a newly formulated universal emphasis on democracy promotion and development assistance."

Last but not least, both chapters reveal the many hurdles that continue to hamper the progress of European integration. These hurdles are even more pertinent in the case of Kosovo. The chapter on the rule of law highlights both the EU- and domestic-related obstacles. Accordingly, the EU's failure to approve the visa liberalisation for Kosovo, despite the Commission's affirmation of the country's progress on required reforms, including those in rule of law, shows that even when and where the country has delivered, the EU has not. Still, Kosovo is also a case that shows reform implementation remains the utmost pending subject. Under these conditions, the advancements brought about by the new enlargement methodology will most likely put further into question the current enlargement framework. The chapter on the

the Chech presidency's priorities to push forward the Western Balkans' EU accession, also shows that the war in Ukraine "has quickly overshadowed the Western Balkan agenda". The new priorities have mainly concentrated on "issues of energy security, management of migration flows as well as accelerated European integration of Ukraine and other post-Soviet states." Overall, the two chapters portray a not very optimistic picture of the Western Balkans' European integration, especially in light of more urgent issues loading the European foreign policy agenda.

PART V — KOSOVO'S FOREIGN RELATIONS IN A VOLATILE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The illegal and unprovoked aggression of Russian forces has not only violated Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, but it has also undermined the European and international security. It has also shown to the entire international community how precarious and fragile is the peace in the world when faced with aggressive acts of the rogue big powers. At the same time, concerns were raised that Russia might also try to destabilize the Western Balkan region to deflect attention from its military aggression in Ukraine. Russia has for years strengthened its influence in the region through strong political, military, and soft power (Pan-Slavism and Christian Orthodoxy) connections, as well as energy dependency. Given its strong relationship with Serbia and Republika Srpska, there are justified fears that Western Balkans might turn into a new source of turmoil in Europe.

The European Union, NATO, the United States, United Kingdom, and other liberal democracies around the world have responded with unprecedented unity to Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression on Ukraine. From the very beginning they have consistently demanded that Russia immediately cease its military actions and unconditionally withdraw all its forces and military equip-

ment from Ukraine. At the same time, wide-range sanctions have been adopted by the Western countries and institutions against Russia, including a significant number of persons and entities. These measures aimed at weakening Russia's economic base by depriving it of critical technologies and markets, while also significantly curtailing its ability to wage war. On the other hand, the West has provided Ukraine with political, financial, military and humanitarian support.

In such a reality, Kosovo, where public sentiment is strongly pro-Western and anti-Russian, has fully aligned its position with the EU and US, and was the first country in the Western Balkans to adopt sanctions on Russia. Among others, the sanctions included freezing the assets of sanctioned persons, banning their travel and the movement of their assets outside of Kosovo. Kosovo also condemned Russian invasion, showed support to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and expressed its readiness to host up to 5,000 Ukrainian refugees. However, the crisis in Ukraine has also greatly increased concerns over Kosovo's own security.

As a result, the Kosovo Assembly has asked the government to take all the necessary measures to submit applications for membership in NATO, the European Union, the Council of Europe and other international organizations. Consequently, the government has called for the country's faster path toward NATO membership and for opening of a permanent US military base on Kosovo territory. In light of the current conflict, it has also pledged to bring defence spending up to the NATO benchmark of 2 percent of GDP, and has even established a "security fund" in which citizens and private companies can contribute to the budget of armed forces.

Furthermore, following the Russia's suspension from the Council of Europe, Kosovo has on 9th of June 2022 applied to become a member of the organisation. Only a day later, Prime Minister Kurti announced that Kosovo will apply for European Union candidate status by the end of this year. However, it seems that Kosovo's hopes for membership with accelerated procedures in NATO and the European Union are not too realistic. According to NATO officials, Kosovo's request to join NATO appears highly unlikely due to a lack of consensus

between members, and because there are no mechanisms in place that would speed up the process. On the other hand, a resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 6th of July 2022 stresses that "there is no fast-track procedure for any candidate or potential candidate country and recalls that all countries aspiring to become Member States will be judged on their own merits in terms of fulfilling, implementing and complying with the set of criteria and common European values." Still, the same resolution "fully supports Kosovo's application for membership of the Council of Europe and calls on all the EU Member States to support its bid, as well as its bids to join other international organizations".

Following the war in Ukraine, the Western Balkan countries had high hopes on the EU-Western Balkans meeting that was held in Brussels on 23rd of June 2022. However, the outcome of the meeting again left Balkan leaders disappointed and frustrated. Albania and North Macedonia did not get a breakthrough to begin accession negotiations, Kosovo was not granted visa liberalization, and contrary to Ukraine and Moldova, the EU countries showed apparent disunity on granting Bosnia and Herzegovina a candidate status. The EU's continuous apathy and lack of a coherent strategy towards the Western Balkans has enabled Russia, Turkey and China to engage more actively in the region and increase their influence.

In recent years, Russia has invested heavily to stop the rapprochement between the Western Balkan states and the EU and NATO. In addition to more traditional soft power and trade approaches, its activities have also included widespread use of disinformation, cyberwarfare, as well as intelligence operations. On the other hand, since adoption of its neo-Ottomanist policy, Turkey has engaged in increasing its influence in the former Ottoman territories of the Western Balkans. It did so by fusing Ottoman culture, nationalism and Islamic values. Islam was utilized as a key power-element of Turkish foreign policy, especially in countries of the region with majority or considerable Muslim population. Finally, China has also in the past decade, increased its presence in the Western Balkan, especially since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative and the 17+1 cooperation platform between China and Central and Eastern European countries. To intensify its influence, China has tar-

geted countries in the region with various Chinese initiatives aimed to boost trade, investments, infrastructure projects and development cooperation. Unless, the EU steps up its engagement in the Western Balkans and tackles the integration of the region in a much serious manner, we might witness an ever growing influence of the above mentioned non-European powers.

The final Part of the volume begins with Ana Krstinovska's chapter which aims to shed light on China's role in the issue of Kosovo's international recognition, by analysing China's current position and the likelihood for China to become more active in obstructing Kosovo's recognition efforts. In doing so, the paper adopts the neoclassical realist lens and examines the external and internal factors in foreign policy making which could shape China's future role. The paper shows that under Xi Jinping's leadership, China has the power capabilities and willingness to be more engaged in global issues. Moreover, it also has specific experience in using "transactional diplomacy" tools for the de-recognition of Taiwan, which could be replicated to support Serbia in the case of Kosovo. Still, although China's domestic opinion is largely supportive of Serbia and negative towards Kosovo, the analysis has found no hard evidence that China has directly helped Serbia's de-recognition efforts to date. The chapter concludes that a potential increase in China's engagement on the Kosovo issue will depend on the global landscape and China's relations with the West, particularly the USA.

The chapter by Adriana Cupcea aims to analyse the role of religion in Turkey's kin state policy in the case of Muslims in Kosovo and of the Turkish and Tatar communities in the Dobruja region in Romania. The analysis draws on Rogers Brubaker's triangular relationship of the national minority, the nation state in which the minority lives, and the homeland to which the ethnic group belongs. Considering the post 9/11 context, when Turkey assumed the role of the moderate Islamic power in the region, a fourth element of relationship to the previous three was added: transnational Islam. The paper further examines whether Islam can be considered a main field of interaction between the Turkish state and the Muslims in Kosovo and Romania and one of the main sources of Turkey's soft power. The paper shows that Turkish and Tatar com-

munities in Romania depend on Turkey for the preservation of their Islamic religious identity and are soft-power sources constituted through the support mechanisms put in practice by Turkey. In Kosovo, according to the analysis, the religious influence of Turkey is more extensive and its various target groups are a basis for the continuous expansion of its religious soft-power. The paper concludes that belonging to the Ottoman-Turkish cultural-religious zone, practicing the Sunni Hanafi Islam that is supported by Romanian and Kosovar authorities as moderate and adapted to local specificities, remains a base for both Turkish-Kosovo and Turkish-Romanian relations.

References

Appadurai, A. 1996. *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.

Ban M., J. Brajković, S. Bouzarovski, Š. Lončarević, J. Maras, S. Robić, K. Stupin, D. Šantalab, A. Tos, M. Zidar. 2021. *Study on Addressing Energy Poverty in the Energy Community Contracting Parties*, Vienna, Energy Community Secretariat

Barth, F. 1969. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Prospect Heights, IL, Waveland Press.

Beysoylu, C. 2018. Implementing Brussels Agreements: the EU's facilitating strategy and contrasting local perceptions of peace in Kosovo, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 18, no. 2, 203-218

Bouzarovski S. 2010. Post-socialist energy reforms in critical perspective: Entangled boundaries, scales and trajectories of change, *European Urban and Regional Studies* 17, no. 2, 167–182

Fridman, O. 2013. Structured Encounters in Post-conflict/ Post-Yugoslav Days: Visiting Belgrade and Prishtina. In O. Simić and Z. Volcić eds, *Transitional Justice and Civil Society in the Balkans*, 143 – 162. New York, Springer.

Gashi, S. 2012. *Kosova 1912-2000 in the History Textbooks of Kosova, Albania and Serbia*. Prishtina, KAHCR.

Goffman, E. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York, Anchor Books.

Heiskala, R. 2021. *Semiotic Sociology*. Palgrave Studies in Relational Sociology. London, Palgrave Macmillan.

Mac Ginty, R. & O. P. Richmond, 2013. The Local Turn in Peace Building: a critical agenda for peace, *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 5, 763-783, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2013.800750

Mac Ginty, R. 2015. Where is the local? Critical localism and peacebuilding, *Third World Quarterly* 36, no.5, 840-856, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2015.1045482

Marshall, T. H. 1950. *Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
Marvin S. 2012. Conceptual framework: Governance, Transitions and Cities Introduction, in S. Guy, S. Marvin, W. Medd, T. Moss, eds. *Shaping Urban Infrastructures: Intermediaries and the Governance of Socio-Technical Networks*, London, Routledge.

Obradovic-Wochnik J. and A. Dodds. 2015. Environmental governance in a contested state:the influence of European Union and other external actors on energy sector regulation in Kosovo. *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 33, no.5, 935–949

OSCE 2021. Community Rights Assessment Report – 5th Edition. Pristina: OSCE Mission in Kosovo. https://www.osce.org/mission-in-kosovo/493675 (last accessed 20/07/2022).

Papić, Z. 2002. Europe After 1989: Ethnic Wars, the Fascination of Social Life and Body Politics in Serbia. *Letnik* 23, no. 2, 191-204.

Roudometof, V. 2019. Recovering the local: From glocalization to localization. *Current Sociology* 67, no. 6, 801-817. DOI: 10.1177/0011392118812933

Rutherford J. and O. Coutard. 2014. Urban Energy Transitions: Places, Processes and Politics of Socio-technical Change. *Urban Studies* 51, no. 7, 1353–1377

Schwandner-Sievers, S. 2010. Bridging gaps between local and foreign concerns? Communication across symbolic divides in the transformation of the security forces in Kosovo, In Laura Montanari, R. Toniatti and J. Woelk, eds, *Il Pluralismo nella Transizione Costituzionale dei Balcani: Diritti e Garanzie* (= Quarderni Del Dipartimento di Scienze Giuridiche), Trento, Università degli Studie di Trento, 145 – 169.

Troncotă, M. 2018. 'The association that dissociates' – narratives of local political resistance in Kosovo and the delayed implementation of the Brussels Agreement, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 18, no. 2, 219-238,
DOI: 10.1080/14683857.2018.1474585

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. 1991. *Energy Reforms in Central and Eastern Europe*, Brussels, UNECE
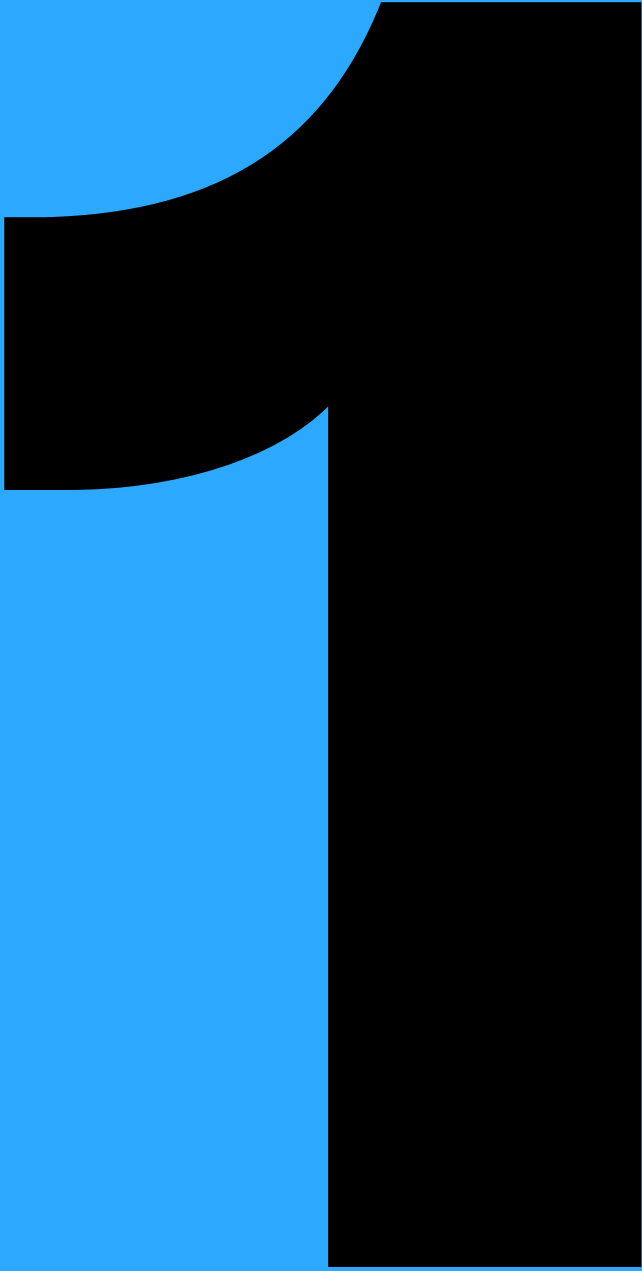
OLD AND NEW BOUNDARIES: COMMUNITY DYNAMICS AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTIONS

ARDIT ORANA

Out of the Stalemate: Reframing the Scope and Ownership of the Association of Serb Municipalities (ASM)

— ARDIT ORANA

Ardit Orana has significant experience in working in both the CSO and government sector. He has served as Policy Advisor on EU Integration and Justice Reforms to the Deputy Prime Minister of Kosovo. He has represented the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) in participating in numerous working groups at the government level as well as drafting national positions in relation to high-level EU-Kosovo inter-institutional mechanisms. Ardit Orana has authored and co-authored numerous reports on the topics of Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, EU integration, electoral system reform, public administration reform and enhancing gender-mainstreaming at the local and central legislative levels for various think-tanks and NGOs based in Prishtina. He holds an MSc in Public Administration: International and European Governance and a BA in International Studies with an Area Specialization in Sub-Saharan Africa, both from the University of Leiden in the Netherlands.

Abstract

The chapter is organized in three sections. The first section provides a background analysis of the negotiations of the ASM and the context of its significance in relation to the progress on the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia and Kosovo's internal relations with its Serb community. The second section explores the challenges that impeded the implementation of the ASM in its current format. Specifically, it identifies *the ambiguity regarding its scope* and *contested ownership* as fundamental issues that have rendered the ASM open to continued political contestation between Kosovo and Serbia. The third section explores opportunities and constraints to reframe these two issues through exploring narratives on ASM perpetuated by Prime Minister Kurti, political parties as well as Kosovo Albanian and Serb experts.

Introduction

This chapter examines the opportunities and constraints in reframing the Association of Serb Municipalities (hereafter ASM) as a result of the novel constellation of political actors in Kosovo. With regards to theory, the chapter applies the concept of critical juncture to assess the conditions that account for a possible opening in reframing the ASM. While the previous two agreements titled *First Agreement on the Normalization of Relations between Prishtina and Belgrade* (commonly referred to as the First Brussels agreement) signed in 2013 and the *General Principles/Main Elements* signed in 2015, paved the way for the creation of the ASM, they both remain unimplemented. Specifically, the EU's facilitation methodology, compounded by Kosovo and Serbia's incompatible interests on the issue, has seemingly led to a deadlock in the implementation of ASM. The chapter identifies 1) ambiguity on the scope of ASM (encompassing its means for creation and competencies) and 2) politicized ownership as significant hindrances that enable involved parties to botch any significant implementation of the agreement in its current format.

Given the single party majority in the Kosovo Assembly since the electoral victory of Lëvizja VETËVENDOSJE![1] (hereafter LVV) in February 2022 and the new political setting in general, a reframing of the ASM would carry political, legislative, and executive weight and legitimacy internally in Kosovo. The current Prime Minister, Kurti, himself, has spoken on numerous occasions of the incompatibility of the current format of ASM with the constitutional order of Kosovo, while also delineating what choices would be acceptable and legally implementable regarding both the scope of ASM and its local ownership. The study explores the opportunities and constraints in framing those choices in the context of the most recent 'critical juncture' in Kosovo.

---

1 Kosovo's LVV (or Self-Determination in English) party led by current Prime Minister Albin Kurti has been in power since March 2021. LVV was also in power in the period February to June 2020 when a no-confidence cut their mandate short in the previous ruling coalition with the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK). The position of LVV and Albin Kurti vis-à-vis ASM are used interchangeably in this paper as Prime Minister Kurti communicates the official position of his party.

The paper develops its argument through three main sections. First, it provides a background analysis of the negotiations of the ASM and the context of its significance in relation progress on the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. Second, it analyses the challenges on the implementation of ASM in its current format due to its regression as an agreement subject to continued political contestation. Third, it examines the effects of the new actor constellation in Kosovo and the openings to steer and clarify contentious points of the ASM.

This paper draws on qualitative methodology and within-case study focused on examining the potential of the Kosovo government to reframe contentious points of the agreement on the ASM. The study similarly utilizes discourse analysis as the analytical approach across the two overall sections. In examining the ASM as an arena for continued political contestation, the paper draws from a range of primary and secondary sources. With regard to the former, it draws insights from the First Brussels agreement (2013) and the agreement on general principles/main elements of ASM signed by Kosovo and Serbia under the auspices of the EU. It also draws from an extensive range of expert, civil society and academic literature developed on the overall framework of the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue and the ASM in particular.

In the second section, the study examines the potential for reframing the ASM through analysing the public remarks of a range of political actors in Kosovo including, the President, the Prime Minister and political party representatives. Additionally, it explores potential openings for reframing contentious points of the ASM through in-depth semi-structured interviews with nine Kosovo Albanian and Serb experts

The Agreements that Were Never Implemented

The dialogue for normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, as facilitated by the EU, marked a significant breakthrough in 2013, when the

Prime Ministers of the two countries signed the '*First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations*' (commonly referred to as the First Brussels Agreement). The main goal of the agreement was to facilitate the integration of the predominantly Serb populated north of Kosovo (Municipalities of Leposavic, North Mitrovica, Zvecan, and Zubin Potok,) into the country's institutional and legal framework, including their participation in the municipal elections (ICG 2021). The first part of the 15-points Brussels Agreement is dedicated to the establishment of an *Association/Community of Serb-majority Municipalities* (A/CSM, hereafter ASM) in order to strengthen the right of the Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo to self-government in accordance with Kosovo's legislation. The Brussels Agreement includes competences such as the "full overview" in areas related to economic development, education, healthcare, urban and rural planning.[2] As such, the ASM consists of a power-sharing formula to facilitate integration of the Serbian community in Kosovo's institutions. That would also end the so-called parallel or illegal structures in the north of Kosovo, which challenge the authority of Kosovo laws and institutions. The Brussels Agreement was ratifed in 2013 by the Kosovo Assembly with 2/3 of the members of the Assembly voting to approve the Law on the Ratification of the First International Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations between the Republic of Kosovo and the Republic of Serbia. In 2015, Kosovo and Serbia reached another agreement with respect to the ASM, called the agreement on the '*Association/Community of Serb majority municipalities in Kosovo – general principles/main elements*' in order to support establishment of the ASM, and this has been seen as an implementing protocol (Weber and Bajrami 2018).

However, despite the two agreements on the ASM, there is little progress with respect to its actual establishment. The agreements themselves can be partly blamed. Specifically, instead of clarifying the ambiguous terminology developed in the Brussels Agreement in 2013, the 2015 agreement only exacerbated the in-

---

2 See the Brussels Agreement, available at: https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/docs/First_agreement_of_principles_governing_the_normalization_of_relations_April_19,_2013_Brussels_en.pdf

herent ambiguity regarding the scope and ownership of the ASM. Additionally, an important section of the Kosovo social and political scene featured strong resistance to the establishment of the ASM. VV (in opposition until 2021) but also some members of the civil society community in Kosovo were vocal against the establishment of the ASM, and kept drawing comparisons with the *Republika Srpska,* in Bosnia and Herzegovina (ICG 2021). For much of the international community, the expectation has been that the dialogue should continue and both sides fully implement the obligations stemming from the Brussels Agreement (Orana and Ilazi 2021; 2022). For Kosovo, this entails implementation of the ASM.

The overwhelming victory of the VV in Kosovo's national elections in February of 2021, has added further uncertainty to the prospects of the establishment of the ASM to the extent that they brought in power the party that had campaigned against the establishment of the ASM in the format it had been negotiated.[3] Yet, the elections also created an 'opening' in articulating new options in reframing issues related to the dialogue and add clarity to some of its ambiguous elements that inhibit implementation. As noted by a recent ICG report "[the new government] will need to leave behind the crutches of prior talks- [emphasis on technical issues and reliance on ambiguity]- and be clear that the objective is to resolve the recognition[4] issue once and for all" (2021, 23). While past studies have sought to conceptualize the EU's *'constructive ambiguity'* as a facilitation methodology (Beysoylu 2018) and noted the role of local resistance to the existing agreements (Troncota 2018), there has been little to no consideration of how new actor constellations in Kosovo could create an opportunity to reframe the agreements and advance their implementation.

---

3 Although VV had won the elections back in 2019, it did not secure the same majority it did in 2021. In 2019, VV was required to form a coalition with the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) in order to form a working majority within the Kosovo Assembly and elect a government.
4 Despite the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 2010 ruling that Kosovo's declaration of independence did not violate international law, there is a general consensus among states that Kosovo must successfully conclude the dialogue with Serbia in order to consolidate its international standing and pave its way towards the EU and other international organizations.

Reframing the ASM: Relaxed Structural Constraints and the Potential of a New 'Juncture'

Theoretical conceptualizations of 'junctures' define them as "situations in which structural influences on political action are significantly relaxed for a [certain] period" (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007, 342). As such, junctures tend to produce two main consequences: 1) expand the "range of plausible choices open to powerful political actors"; 2) augment "the [effects] of decisions for a [given] outcome of interest" (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007, 343). The new institutional and political scene following the 2022 election in Kosovo has the potential to create a new juncture in reframing the debate on ASM.

The landslide electoral victory of the VV, in February 2021, promised to be such a watershed moment for Kosovo's political agenda. These elections brought to power a party which has openly contested the negotiated settlement on ASM; moreover, for the first time in Kosovo's parliamentary history, an opposition party, which had never participated in previous ruling coalitions, was able to form the absolute parliamentary majority. The incoming majority marked a move away from the complex coalition formation and political bargaining that had characterized Kosovo for the past decade (Pula 2018). It also enabled a first of its kind, political consensus and institutional cooperation between the new Prime Minister, the Speaker of the Assembly, and the President – all key figures of the winning coalition. The electoral results, furthermore, weakened potential dissent on key political issues to the extent that they sidelined the former ruling elite and the main parties that had ruled Kosovo since independence. The new political landscape, featuring a new set of actors, a powerful decision-making majority, a first ever cross-institutional collaboration and consensus, and no substantial dissent from opposition parties has all the features of a critical juncture with the potential of redefining Kosovo's political agenda.

This is especially true for the ASM, an 'open' issue which goes to the very core of the progress of the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, and as such tops Kosovo's domestic and international agenda (Andric, Rakic and Ilazi 2021). Recent pleas of the international actors for Kosovo to propose "modalities that do not threaten [its] independence" (Borrell 2021; Escobar 2022; Lajcak 2022), suggest that the international community also sees the ASM as an agreement that requires necessary clarification for Kosovo in order both rule out fears for the Kosovo side, as well as ensuring its eventual implementation. In the new political setting, alternative proposals would carry both political, legislative, and executive weight, thus holding the potential to unlock the stalled progress in the implementation of the ASM and the general normalization process with Serbia.

Any such clarifications of the ASM would have to first deal with the long-running problems, but also key points of contestation that have emerged during the implementation and have obstructed its very existence, particularly 1) the ambiguity of ASM, and 2) its ownership. The first refers to the lack of clarity on the scope of the agreement –its requirements, participating actors, and competences. The second refers to the overpoliticization of the dialogue and shift of attention away from one of the key stakeholders, the Kosovo Serbs.

Ambiguities Regarding the Scope of ASM

The EU's facilitation of the dialogue[5] between Kosovo and Serbia has become to be understood by the very notion of 'constructive ambiguity' (Berridge, 2008; Beysoylu 2018). Accordingly, the EU strategy, which aims at ensuring the continuous engagement of both sides throughout dialogue, incorporates ambiguity as a necessary format to bypass obvious points of contention and keep the parties on the table of negotiations. As Beysoylu (2018, 211) puts it, "constructive ambiguity has further facilitated the process by convincing actors to sign agreements when it was difficult to come to concessions'".

---

5 The EU's facilitation methodology of 'constructive ambiguity' includes contents of the First Brussels Agreement. The substance of ASM also falls into this category. As such, both the first agreement on ASM in 2013 (in the First Brussels Agreement) and the subsequent 2015 agreement titled **'general principles/main elements',** have both been subject to a significant level of ambiguity related to their implementation.

This strategy was also supposed to help subsequent cycles of negotiations: "ambiguous aspects of primary agreements lead to partial implementation and when the implementation gets blocked, the parties return to the table to clarify disagreements" (Beysoylu 2018, 212). Yet, those ambiguous aspects especially regarding the conditions, actors, and competences of ASM have also turned into areas of permanent contestation and disagreement among the involved actors, thus blocking any meaningful progress towards implementation.

When the 2013 agreement first introduced the ASM, it was already marred in ambiguous language. The foremost point of disagreement for both parties, the extent of competencies, was made apparent through the dissimilar terminology used to label the body - *Association* in Albanian and *Community* in Serbian. According to Troncota (2018, 224), the very process "of 'naming' it became a tool of political contestation and resistance".

Among its few specifications, namely establishing a statute as a prerequisite for its creation and singling out participating municipalities as primary stakeholders in its formation and dissolution (EEAS 2013), the agreement pointed at who was entitled to participate in the process. The 2015 agreement on *'general principles/main elements'* of the ASM, however, deviated from this point. Specifically, the second point of the 2015 agreement, asserts that the Kosovo government would 'adopt a decree directly applicable' for the establishment of the ASM (EEAS 2015). While the 2013 agreement gave precedence to participating municipalities in establishing the ASM, the 2015 agreement also included the government of Kosovo as a stakeholder in its creation. The discrepancy between the two agreements spilled over the public discourse and exacerbated conceptual differences inherent in the initial conflicting terminologies - *Association* and *Community.*

Given the different language used in the 2013 and 2015 agreements (See more: Andric, Rakic and Ilazi 2020), the latter agreement only complicated the conditions for the formation of the ASM by shifting responsibility away from participating municipalities to the government of Kosovo. The 2015 agreement is also particularly problematic and conducive to the current status-quo as

it would require Kosovo to undertake necessary legal and constitutional amendments that fall outside of current legal framework that regulate the formation of *Associations.*[6] The disparity concerning the legal framework relates to the extent of competencies awarded to the ASM. Serbia's insistence on '*executive competencies'* entails that the ASM's jurisdiction would encompass competencies that are currently exercised exclusively by the central or municipal institutions. This would have considerable implications for the constitutional order of Kosovo given that the constitution clearly distinguishes between two levels of government: central and municipal (Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, Article 4 and 12). A recent expert report developing scenarios on the implementation of the ASM establishes that should the ASM be endowed with decision-making power to directly regulate areas of Kosovo Serb interest, it would directly encroach upon the competencies of the central and local governments (Andric, Rakic and Ilazi 2020). As such, it would require necessary constitutional changes delineating types of governance as well as additional changes in the Constitution, Law on Local-Self Government and Law on Inter-Municipal Cooperation, thus recognizing the ASM as an additional layer of governance (Orana and Ilazi 2021; Andric, Rakic and Ilazi 2020).

This is especially difficult to settle given the lack of clarity and competing views on whether the ASM is a body centered on **community rights protection** or **service delivery.** The primary objective for the formation of ASM is to integrate the remaining Serb parallel structures operating in the north of Kosovo. Following the Brussels Agreement, judicial and police structures-until then operating illegally in the north of Kosovo- were integrated into the Kosovo system. The agreement also enabled integration of northern Serb-majority municipalities through the promotion of active participation in municipal elections. While the results were hailed as an unprecedented success in both International and Kosovo elite political discourse, the agreement failed

---

6 According to Law no.06/L-043 on Freedom of Association in Non-Governmental Organizations **Association(s)** can only be formed as non-governmental organizations. The law does not foresee or regulate the role of the government of Kosovo in divising the founding acts of Association, except for approving or rejecting their registration through the relevant government authorities.

to deal with the remaining Serb structures in the field of healthcare, education, rural planning, and other service delivery related issues. As per the 2015 agreement's article on objectives, Kosovo Serb integration in these areas was conditioned on the formation of the ASM. The extent of this integration is still subject to contending views on the competences and essence of ASM, which remain vivid to date. For Kosovo Serbs, the ASM is viewed as a necessary body which directly exercises "executive powers" in the forementioned areas (Balkans Policy Research Group 2016; Nesovic and Celeghini 2015; Zeqiri et al. 2016). Kosovo Serbs seem to believe that only through the insulation of an 'autonomous body' with executive competences can their living conditions in Kosovo improve, in addition to protecting them from what they refer to as "majorization" (Nesovic and Celeghini 2015). As such, the ASM would not only ensure that service provision in education, healthcare and social welfare is effectively insulated and provided for, but it would also assume an additional role in community protection alongside existing constitutional and legal mechanisms.

While competencies in service delivery are less contentious, the expectation on additional community rights protection, and the executive autonomy it entails, remains a point of debate. According to Zeqiri et. al. (2016, 15), the ASM "cannot be vested with full and exclusive authority" to represent Kosovo Serb interests vis-à-vis central institutions in Kosovo. The duality of expectations regarding competencies of community rights protection and service delivery, however, can be found throughout the 2015 agreement (Troncota 2018). As long as it is unclear whether the ASM seeks to advance community protection and/or service delivery, Kosovo institutions remain dubious on how it impacts country's constitutional division of powers (between central and municipal levels of governance) and thus hesitant to discuss its implementation.

Contested Ownership

Another significant point of contention related to ASM is whether it effectively addresses the needs of Kosovo Serbs. Although much of the EU-facilitated

dialogue has centered on the level of Kosovo Serb integration into Kosovo institutions, Kosovo Serbs have not been sufficiently included in the process (Orana and Ilazi 2021). Both the process of negotiation and establishment has seen little to no participation by them. The implementing plan for the First Brussels Agreement foresaw the creation of a Management Team that would be tasked with drafting the statue of the ASM (Zeqiri et. al. 2016). Originally, the Management Team was tasked with drafting the statute in 2013, however, it did not become fully functional due to lack of political will (Bajrami 2017). In the 2015 agreement, the team was yet again (re)introduced as a means to finalize the drafting of the statue (Article 20, 2015). Despite the team's re-establishment in September 2016, it again failed to fulfil its mandate and draft a statute that would serve as the basis for discussions on the ASM's formation.

The composition of the team was especially problematic and served as a point of contention between Kosovo and Serbia (Andric, Rakic and Ilazi 2021). Even after its re-establishment, the composition of the team did not reflect the needs of Kosovo Serbs across Kosovo. This to a large extent was because the team was composed of representatives of only northern Municipalities in Kosovo (Zeqiri et. al. 2016). These representatives were directly affiliated with Srpska Lista, a Serb-majority political party whose very existence hinged upon the support and guidance of Serbia.[7] Except for the composition of the Management Team tasked with drafting the statute of the ASM, Kosovo Serb participation in the process was severely limited (Andric, Rakic and Ilazi 2020). Although the work of the management team was seen as the only attempt to "institutionalize the role for Kosovo Serbs in the Brussels process", its functionality largely hinged on the political will of Serbia (Andric, Rakic and Ilazi 2020; Zeqiri et. al. 2016).

The political contestation on the composition of the management team was reflective of Serbia's intentions to exercise control over the process of negotiating the ASM. For Kosovo Albanians, the extent of Kosovo Serb integration within Kosovo institutions was considered to be a domestic issue (Orana and

---

7   Interview with Kosovo Serb Expert 1, 2022

Ilazi 2021). According to them, the right to the creation of Associations of municipalities had long been enshrined in Annex 3 of the Comprehensive Proposal for the Settlement of Kosovo Issue (Ahtisaari plan). In addition, Article 3 on the rights of communities and their members delineates that "[communities] may establish associations for culture, art, science, and education as well as scholarly and other associations for the expression, fostering and development of their identity". The Ahtisaari plan, had thus established the necessary legal instruments for associations to safeguard community identities. Given that Serbia had boycotted the signing of the Comprehensive Proposal facilitated by the UN-Special Envoy Mati Ahtisaari in 2007, Kosovo effectively assumed responsibility over the creation of practical, legal and constitutional mechanisms for the protection of community rights. By signing the First Brussels Agreement in 2013, Kosovo re-opened negotiations on the extent of community rights and integration that had been initially regulated through the Ahtisaari plan.[8] This was specifically the case with the ASM, an issue which had a legal basis clearly established in the Ahtisaari plan, and now, through the First Brussel's agreement, was open to further negotiations and adjustment.

The agreement, among others, established Serbia as a credible stakeholder in negotiating the extent of Kosovo Serb integration within Kosovo. As noted by Nesovic and Celeghini, while the EU pressure forced Serbia to give up administrative control over certain areas, it also gave it "the opportunity to exercise influence through the ASM" (2015, 10). As such, contents of the First Brussels Agreement in 2013, could only be implemented if both sides were ready to accept them (Orana and Ilazi 2021). In that context, the creation and scope of the ASM would become an issue actively promoted, negotiated and challenged by Serbia rather than the community it serves to, the Kosovo Serbs (Zeqiri et. al. 2016). This shift gave way to the politicization of the future formation of ASM, effectively alienating Kosovo Serbs and leaving space for the manipulation of public narratives regarding its scope and progress (Andric, Rakic and Ilazi 2020).

---

8   Interview with Kosovo Albanian Expert 2, 2022

Opportunities and Constraints to Clarify Points of Contention

Numerous studies have recognized the role of local resistance in the non-implementation of the ASM (see Troncota 2018, Beysoylu, 2018). In most accounts, the role of VV. has been highlighted as one of the main drivers shaping Kosovo Albanian skepticism over the implementation of the agreement. Considering that LVV had not been part of any ruling coalition up to 2020, it never had to consider the outcome of Kosovo's assumed obligations stemming from the Brussels Agreement. Following LVV's reelection in March 2022, however, Kurti would now be tasked with shaping the very outcome of Kosovo's unfulfilled obligations on the ASM. Kurti signaled a new institutional constellation and leadership in relation to their past opposition to the ASM. Shortly after his reelection, Kurti was asked about the government's position regarding the obligation of establishing the ASM (DW, 2021). Taking note of the repercussions of the lack of transparency in the swift ratification of the 2013 agreement by the former ruling coalition, Kurti argued: "the [current] heads of institutions are individuals who in 2013 were against the agreement, while today, those three, Vjosa Osmani, Glauk Konjufca and Albin Kurti, have achieved a plebiscite victory on February 14th" (Kurti 2021). The reaffirmation of Kosovo's new representatives speaks to Kurti's challenge of the scope and content of the First Brussel's agreement and its subsequent ratification in the Kosovo Assembly. Considering the unprecedented landslide victory in the most recent elections, Kurti has portrayed this outcome as direct citizen support for the new ruling elite's political agenda, including non-implementation of the ASM in its current format.

Although Kurti has spoken of the infeasibility of ASM in its current format, his public rhetoric hints at some elements that would be legally acceptable to Kosovo, hence the 'clarification' of current ASM into a modality that is acceptable to the current ruling party in Kosovo. By highlighting the non-compatibility of ASM's ethno-centric composition and extent of competencies

with the constitution of Kosovo, Kurti has flagged the types of composition and competencies that would be possible.

Kosovo Albanian citizens have certainly shown public support for Kurti's position. The most recent Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) Security Barometer has found that 53.3% of respondents believed that Kurti's position in the dialogue was in par with citizen expectations (KCSS 2021). Similarly, 78.4% of respondents believed that Kurti wants the dialogue to be successful (KCSS 2021). This highlights that Kosovo Albanian citizens similarly believe that the dialogue requires fundamental changes to advance further. Asked about potential solutions to the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, only 0.5% of respondents indicated that the establishment of ASM with executive competencies would be a necessary compromise for mutual recognition (KCSS 2021). 74% believe that mutual recognition should be the outcome of the dialogue process. However, Kosovo Albanian citizens are divided on optimal outcomes for the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia. They do also highlight a deep-rooted Kosovo Albanian disenfranchisement with the potential for the implementation of the ASM given its ambiguity and contestation. Changing the discourse is very much dependent on Kurti and the LVV, seeing that their popular support drove the skepticism over ASM to begin with. The findings from the public perception measurement signal that Kurti has the necessary public support to steer the dialogue (and the ASM component) accordingly.

Additionally, opposition parties in parliament have not mounted any significant obstruction to Kurti's approach to the dialogue. While Kurti's LVV has sought to undervalue the first Brussel's agreement and other outcomes of the dialogue in the past, the current opposition, led by the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) and the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), has effectively given Kurti leeway to frame the dialogue accordingly (Orana and Ilazi 2022). Following a meeting between the leader of LDK, Lumir Abdixhiku and Kurti in 2021, the former pointed out: "any agreement that ends with mutual recognition, recognition from members of the EU and membership into NATO, is acceptable to us" (Abdixhiku 2021). This general view focusing on the outcome

of the dialogue process reflects the flexibility Kurti has in setting Kosovo's negotiating position. A similar claim was made public by the leader of PDK, Memli Krasniqi. Asked about PDK's position vis-à-vis the dialogue, Krasniqi argued that: "Kurti has a better position than any prime minister has had in the past. He has strong parliamentary power and has an opposition with state-building [experience] that understands the relevance of this process" (Krasniqi 2022). Both cases are indicative of low levels of parliamentary dissent, effectively allowing Kurti to decide Kosovo's negotiating position without any substantial domestic constraints.

The flexibility to reframe issues was evident in the last high-level meeting between leaders of Kosovo and Serbia. In July 2021, delegations headed by Kurti and Vucic were convened in Brussels for a second time[9] with the facilitation of the EU Special Representative, Miroslav Lajcak. The meeting, among others, aimed to identify the agenda of the dialogue process in addition to defining the scope of issues to be included for deliberation (Lajcak 2021). Following the meeting, Kurti publicly announced that the Kosovar delegation had submitted a proposal with four points to be considered by the Serbian side. One of the four points covered the issue of community rights framework, whereby, Kosovo suggested that a reciprocity of rights be established between Kosovo and Serbia (Kurti 2021). This reciprocity would entail that Kosovo would reproduce the same community rights mechanisms (for Kosovo Serbs) evident in the Serbian legal framework for its Albanian minority (Kurti 2021). While this proposal was swiftly rebuked by the Serbian side, it is important for two reasons.

First, through the proposal, Kurti recognized that the status of the Kosovo Serb community was an open issue to be still discussed and determined in the framework of the EU facilitated dialogue. Second, it highlights Kurti's willingness to negotiate alternative solutions to Kosovo Serb integration. The First Brussels Agreement set the precedent: the extent and modalities of Kosovo Serb integration was to be mediated through the high-level dia-

---

9 The first meeting was held in June 2021 and marked the transfer to the high-level dialogue as heads of state from both Kosovo and Serbia met. The first meeting was largely uneventful as it featured the first introduction between the leaders and was an attempt to re-establish high-level commitment for the dialogue.

logue. The ASM became an extension of this as it covered community rights through integration in remaining areas. Despite Kurti's open dismissal of the ASM in its currently ambiguous and contested format, the proposal on the '*reciprocity of minority rights*' indicates that there is a willingness to discuss the form and modalities of Kosovo's overall community protection framework and Kosovo Serb integration. Hence, there is an attempt to reframe the ASM by providing concrete alternatives along the issues identified: the ambiguity on the scope of the agreement and its ownership.

Reframing the Ambiguity on the Scope of ASM

Following the political uncertainty that surfaced after the signature of the 2015 agreement on the *'general principles/main elements'* of the ASM by then Kosovo Prime Minister, Isa Mustafa, and President Aleksandar Vucic of Serbia, a constitutional review of the document was mandated by then President of Kosovo, Atifete Jahjaga. The constitutional judgment, among others, noted that the basis of the 2015 document was not in full harmony with the constitution of Kosovo (Constitutional Court 2015; Andric, Rakic and Ilazi 2021; Weber 2018). Most notably, the judgment called for clarity on the relationship between the ASM and central authorities as well as the respect for ethnic diversity as a cornerstone component of Kosovo's constitutional order (Constitutional Court 2015; Weber 2018). As such, the constitutional court established that any future draft statute of the ASM must be in harmony with a set of eighteen articles of the constitution and must be reviewed by the Constitutional Court (Constitutional Court 2015; Andric, Rakic and Ilazi 2020). Despite having found the 2015 agreement incompatible with numerous articles in the constitution, the court also emphasized that having ratified the First Brussels Agreement in its national Assembly, Kosovo made the ASM a part of the 'internal legal system', hence, a 'part of the constitutional order' (Constitutional Court 2015; Weber 2018).

In his public statements, Kurti has consistently recalled those 'constitutional incompatibilities' to indicate his reservations vis-à-vis the ASM. Asked about its prospective implementation during a press conference held in 2021, Kurti suggested:

"The constitutional court judgment suggests that none of the 7 articles of the ASM are in full harmony with the Constitution of Kosovo. Additionally, the agreement isn't in harmony with 24 articles of the Constitution of Kosovo. As a result, it has not passed the test of the constitutional court" (Kurti 2021).

Vjosa Osmani, the President of the Republic of Kosovo, has also prioritized this narrative of the ASM being incompatible with Kosovo's legal framework. When asked about the issue in a televised debate, Osmani noted that "as to whether there may be another model, the model is already provided in the law on local self-government" (Osmani 2022). Osmani further extended her explanation by arguing that the ASM can only be viewed as an NGO, effectively narrowing down its scope to the principles of freedom of association. For both Kurti and Osmani, as well as the country's highest court, a key indicator on any further discussion on the implementation of the ASM must be its harmony with Kosovo's existing constitutional and legal framework.

For Kosovo Serbs, the existing framework of freedom of association would provide no tangible incentives for further integration. Accordingly, there would be no legal precedent to ensure that their needs in key areas are coordinated effectively (Orana and Ilazi 2021). Experts, however, believe that a middle ground is possible within the law on local self-government. A recent expert report on the topic finds that the ASM is more consistent with inter-municipal cooperation in accordance with articles 28 and 29 of the law on self-government than the article(s) on association (Andric, Rakic and Ilazi, 2020). In line with Kosovo Serb needs, the current law on inter-municipal cooperation prescribes a range of joint municipal entities that may be formed to support the pooling of enhanced competencies in areas such as education, health, culture, social protection, and service delivery (Law on Inter-Municipal Cooperation 2011).

As a Kosovo Serb expert from a northern Municipality elaborated: "Both agreements (the First Brussels Agreement signed in 2013 and the 2015 agreement on general principles/main elements of ASM) point to the existing

legal framework of Kosovo".[10] Following the safeguards provided by the constitutional judgment, the Kosovo government is in an optimal position to propose alternatives on the formation of the ASM in accordance with the Law on Inter-Municipal Cooperation and the Law on Local Self-Government. As noted by a Kosovo Serb CSO activist: "We have not seen any discussion of ASM as a technical body. Dialogue on ASM needs to be process oriented rather than product oriented".[11] In support of the need for technical deliberation on the formation of ASM, the activist also suggested:

"It is interesting that the Serb List [Srpska Lista] has never launched [the technical discussion] to see how the Kosovo government would react. I assume they never did this for two reasons: 1) [The technical] proposals could get accepted by the Kosovo government and that is not in line with what the Serb List wants and 2) [the Serb List] would sideline Serbia and they would effectively sever ties and negatively impact the parallel structures."[12]

In this view, the perception that that ASM can only be formed within the framework of the existing constitutional principles and law on freedom of association, is rather limiting. In line with the framework of inter-municipal cooperation and local self-government, the Ministry of Local Governance Affairs (MLGA) has the mandated legal authority to determine the extent of the ASM and the relevant acts that regulate it.[13] Opting to emphasize these alternatives on the process of the technical formation of the ASM, would provide necessary clarity and rule out perceived threats.

The extent of competencies of the ASM has also been a major point of contention in Kurti's position. He has contested particularly the ethnic character of the ASM's mandate. Asked about the scope of competencies of the ASM, Kurti insisted that "an association on ethnic grounds" isn't

10 Interview with Kosovo Serb Expert, 2022
11 Interview with Kosovo Serb CSO Activist, 2022
12 Interview with Kosovo Serb Expert 3, 2022
13 Interview with Kosovo Serb Expert 3, 2022

possible within Kosovo's constitutional and legal framework. His rhetoric on the ethnic character of the ASM highlights that incompatibility of the body centered exclusively on safeguarding the position of Kosovo Serbs in Kosovo. Kurti's objection of ASM's ethnic elements is in par with the inconsistencies noted in terms of the ASM as a community rights protection mechanism. Interviewed experts agree that Kurti's objection is valid as the body requires necessary clarification in order to ensure it addresses the genuine needs of Kosovo Serbs. To some, the genuine interests do not correspond with claims that the ASM is vital for ensuring the protection of Kosovo Serbs as a non-majority community. As noted by a Kosovo Serb CSO representative:

"I agree that [the ASM] should not be another community rights protection mechanism. There is virtually no need for it. Currently, there is nothing that could be of greater interest to [Kosovo Serbs] than the [minority veto in the Kosovo Assembly]."[14]

While Kurti is hesitant to commit to community rights protection competencies of the ASM, he offers plenty of insights on what forms of ASM would be acceptable. Kurti's view on the range of possibilities that the ASM can take provides significant space to clarify its competencies along coordinating and improving the efficiency of service-delivery. In the same press conference discussing the scope of the ASM, Kurti noted that:

"There may be an association of municipalities on a developmental basis, there may be one on a geographical basis. But an association based on ethnicity cannot pass the constitutional filter." (Kurti, 2021)

Kurti's view on the range of competencies that associations can have provides nuance on the possible direction of reframing ASM away from its current format. Kurti's remarks suggest that a body centered on *service-delivery* would be possible. The body, however, would need to ensure that services are

---

14 Interview with Kosovo Serb CSO Representative, 2022

equally prioritized for all other non-majority communities in these municipalities as to not violate the constitutional principle of diversity. Experts are similarly in favor of a reframing the agreement by focusing on the service-delivery aspect, as long as it is elaborated along a process of technical rather than political deliberation. In support of this shift, a Kosovo Serb expert noted:

"I see [ASM] as a coordinating body of local government. In these ten Municipalities it should be tasked with coordinating education, healthcare and other service-related tasks. As any other body of local government, all their decisions must be sent to the legal office of the MLGA".[15]

A technical-level discussion of the extent of competencies of the ASM is therefore crucial, but it has never been really considered or elaborated. According to an expert, "the range of resource sharing, coordination and joint implementation of municipal services has never been really considered in public discourse".[16]At the same time, concerns that the ASM would assume competencies that are constitutionally delegated to Municipalities would be directly avoided by the applicability of Article 40 of the Law on Local Self-Government which limits delegation of competencies by municipalities along several areas[17] (Law on Local Self-Government, 2008).

Reframing the Ownership of the ASM

Another point of contention that inhibits the implementation of the ASM has been the ownership of the process (Orana and Ilazi 2021; Zeqiri et. al. 2016). The general perception has been that the ASM is a structure actively promoted by Serbia and not Kosovo Serbs (Zeqiri et. al. 2016). Kosovar Albanians particularly tend to believe that Kosovo Serbs are instrumentalized by Belgrade, and the agreement caters to Belgrade's needs more than the practical

---

15 Interview with Kosovo Serb CSO Representative, 2022
16 Interview with Kosovo Serb Expert 1, 2022
17 Interview with Former Kosovo Albanian Government Official, 2022

needs of citizens in the north of Kosovo (Orana and Ilazi 2021).[18] This argument has been consistently picked up by Kurti to highlight the discrepancy between Belgrade's intentions in relation to the ASM and the actual needs of Kosovo Serbs. During a recent press conference, for example, Kurti stated:

"This has never been a request by Kosovo Serbs, they want justice and employment. We need to distinguish between requests that come from below and have a democratic character and requests that come from above and are of an undemocratic hegemonic character." (Kurti 2021)

Kurti further elaborated on the disparity between Kosovo Serbs needs and the political intentions of Serbia, when explaining:

"I believe that even Serbs in Kosovo, [as all other communities in Kosovo] are in need of justice and employment, and not for Associations that raise tensions, undermine our relationships, and make someone in Belgrade happy." (Kurti 2021)

Expert interviews, however, note that addressing the problem of ownership in the negotiation one the ASM would be a major challenge given the complex scene of Kosovo Serbs' representation. Srpska Lista's monopolization of political representation of the Kosovo Serb electorate ensures that citizen perspectives are effectively filtered by this particular structure prior to their official communication with public institutions in Kosovo (Orana and Ilazi 2021; Radosavljevic and Nicic 2021). As one Kosovo Serb Expert explained: "The only way to ensure that Kosovo Serbs are heard is that Belgrade sings off and supports Srpska Lista to discuss with the Kosovo government."[19]

Although Kurti has rightfully stated that the ASM is not a direct request or desire of Kosovo Serbs, the reasons for their animosity towards any forms of association have been somehow mis-interpreted by him. According to a

---

18   Interview with Kosovo Serb Civil Society Representative, 2022
19   Interview with Kosovo Serb Expert 3, 2022

Kosovo Serb activist from the north: "When it comes to ASM, the Kosovo Serbs would be much more radical than Belgrade. They simply do not want any integration [into Kosovo]".[20] For Kosovo Serbs, the ASM entails their inherent integration within Kosovo institutions, effectively severing the existing ties and support they receive from Serb parallel institutions operating in the north. Any attempt to reframe the integration of Kosovo Serbs through the ASM must address those factors that strengthen their socio-economic dependence on existing parallel structures (Orana and Ilazi 2021). As stated by a Kosovo Albanian CSO representative, "Public institutions in Kosovo must garner trust among Kosovo Serbs that they will be able to fill the gap in addressing their practical needs once parallel structures are abolished" .[21]

Irrespective of the scope of competencies and ownership, ASM will have fundamental consequences for the form and administration of the Kosovo state. Integration of parallel structures, especially in education and healthcare, entails a complete overhaul of how these systems have functioned and how they offered services to Kosovo Serbs in the north of the country for more than two decades. An estimated 12,000 individuals are employed by these structures and will require integration within the Kosovo system.[22] In 2019, Serbia's draft law on the budget expected an estimated 89 million euro investment in Kosovo (Kossev 2020). Exact figures on the extent of Serb financing of parallel structures in Kosovo remain unclear, but they are substantial.[23] Should education and healthcare systems be integrated within the Kosovo system, Kosovo budgetary sources and quotas will most likely lead to significant job loss for the Kosovo Serb population (Balkans Policy Research Group 2017; Nesovic and Celeghini 2015). In the context of the high-level dialogue, neither Serbia, nor Kosovo, have initiated any substantial debate on how the issue of "redundant" employees resulting from the abolishment of parallel structures will be addressed (Nesovic and Celeghini 2015). Kosovo's state budget on the

---

20 Interview with Kosovo Serb Activist, 2022
21 Interview with Kosovo Albanian CSO Representative, 2022
22 Interview with Kosovo Serb 2, 2022
23 Interview with Kosovo Serb Expert 2, 2022

other hand, clearly cannot allocate the necessary financial support to cover the job loss from the integration of the structures.[24] (Balkans Policy Research Group 2017).

At the same time, Kosovo Serbs continue to rely on parallel structures for their basic welfare (Orana and Ilazi 2021). The chances that Kosovo Serbs will voice their needs and requests to the Kosovo government are highly unlikely given the current reliance on the parallel structures. As such, ownership over the ASM can be reframed in relation to minimizing existing fears among Kosovo Serbs on the effects of integration for their basic livelihoods. As has been the case with the integration of police and judiciary structures, any shift of ownership necessitates a change of narrative and building trust that Kosovo public institutions can effectively regulate sectors and deliver services that were originally offered by parallel institutions.

Conclusions

The paper has examined the potential for reframing ASM as an opportunity for the Kosovo government to usher in progress on the EU-facilitated dialogue with Serbia. It has established that that the implementation of the ASM in its current format is problematic due to the ambiguous regulation on its scope and the lack of inclusion of Kosovo Serbs in the process. Contending views between Kosovo and Serbia on these issues, in addition to the EU's facilitation methodology of 'constructive ambiguity', has made convergence of expectations in their current form implausible. Furthermore, its implementation in the current form is even more problematic given the election of LVV headed by Kurti, a former opposition political party known for garnering citizen support driving skepticism over the ASM.

---

24 Interview with Kosovo Albanian Expert 1

Moreover, theoretical considerations on *critical* junctures have served to provide nuance on the significance on the contingency and the possibility for change. The empirical evidence suggests that the landslide victory of the new Kurti LVV-led government fulfills the widely deliberated norms of junctures. First, the new government's inexperience in ruling coalitions gives it the necessary space and unpredictability in framing policy issues. With a clear parliamentary majority and institutional cohesion, Kurti is in an optimal position to embark upon a possible change on the discourse and trajectory of the ASM. Both international and domestic actors, have given the new government considerable leeway in proposing modalities to the ASM in accordance with Kosovo's constitutional and legal framework. Second, any potential change proposed by the government has both citizen and institutional legitimacy among Kosovo Albanians. The clear Kosovo Albanian support for Kurti's position in the dialogue with Serbia suggests that a choice to reframe the ASM can have considerable weight in Kosovo. While the study does suggest that the current trajectory is a juncture per se, it does recognize that its elements are apparent. After all, the *criticalness* of the juncture can only be evaluated in the future, and this indicates an opportunity for further research.

Although a potential proposal's success hinges on acceptance by Serbia, the new government is still in an optimal position to develop relevant modalities that do not hinder Kosovo's legal and constitutional framework and suggest a readiness to engage on the issue of the ASM. While Kurti has dismissed the implementation of the ASM in its current form, his public discourse suggests that there is possibility for a fundamental redesign and clarification of the ASM. This clarification would entail the addressal of two major points of contention according to Kurti's remarks: ASM's compatibility with the Constitution of Kosovo and the ownership of Kosovo Serbs. Additionally, his discussion on potential forms of Associations (i.e., developmental basis, or geographical) demonstrate a willingness to rework modalities related to a potential ASM.

Kosovo Albanian and Serb expert consultations highlight that reframing the scope and ownership is preferred and possible in order to overcome the current status-quo in the dialogue. Well-established public and political perceptions

that the ASM can only be accommodated through the constitutional and legal provisions on freedom of association are indeed limited. Considering the centrality of service-delivery related competencies envisioned in the ASM by Kosovo Serbs, there are ample opportunities to frame the body in full accordance with Kosovo's Law on Inter-Municipal Cooperation. The issue of securing the ownership of Kosovo Serbs, however, provides for a more contentious point. While Kurti is right to stress that the ASM is not a request by Kosovo Serbs, experts suggest that addressing genuine requests is implausible due to Kosovo Serb economic reliance on Srpska Lista. The most tangible change that the ASM will have on the lives of Kosovo Serbs relates to the transfer of administrative positions from the parallel system to Kosovo institutions. Experts and media reports have highlighted that the budgetary burden to accommodate this would be far too great for Kosovo and would potentially alienate Kosovo Serbs who would be risk-averse to the potential loss of basic welfare. First and foremost, any reframing of the ASM would entail the development of an elaborated plan for the institutional support that Kosovo will provide in lieu of parallel administrative structures. Only once this is addressed, a trust-building initiative can be launched in order to ensure Kosovo Serbs that a legally and constitutionally compatible ASM would provide for better safety nets than current parallel structures. Whatever the case may be, the reframing of the ASM hinges on the willingness of the current government clarify and rule out perceived threats through modalities that move away from the current ambiguity.

Acknowledgments

List of Interviews

Interview with Former Kosovo Albanian Government Official. Prishtina, November 2022.

Interview with Kosovo Albanian Expert 1. Prishtina, April 2022.

Interview with Kosovo Albanian Expert 2. Online, April 2022.

Interview with Kosovo Albanian CSO Representative. Prishtina, November 2022.

Interview with Kosovo Serb Activist. Online, March 2022.

Interview with Kosovo Serb CSO Representative. Prishtina, April 2022.

Interview with Kosovo Serb Expert 1. Online, April 2022.

Interview with Kosovo Serb Expert 2. Online, April 2022.
Interview with Kosovo Serb Expert 3. Online, April 2022.

References

Ahmeti, A. 2022. "Krasniqi after the meeting with Escobar and Lajcak: PDK supports the dialogue with mutual recognition, without threatening the country's sovereignty". Albanian Post. https://albanianpost.com/memli-krasniqi-pas-takimit-me-escobar-e-lajcak-pdk-e-mbeshtete-dialogun-me-njohje-te-ndersjelle-pa-cenuar-sovranitetin-e-vendit/

Andric Rakic, M., and D. Ilazi. 2020. "Balkan Dialogues: Establishment of the Association/Community of Serb Majority Municipalities in Kosovo: Challenges and Opportunities". BFPE. https://en.bfpe.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/03/Andric-Rakic-and-Ilazi-Establishment-of-the-ASM.pdf

Bajrami, A. 2017. "Association of Serb Majority Municipalities in Kosovo (Association Impasse). Group for Legal and Political Studies (GLPS). : http://legalpoliticalstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/The-Association-of-Serb-Majority-Municipalities-in-Kosovo-Association-Impasse.pdf

Bajrami. A., and Gj. Mushkolaj. 2020. "Kosovo and Serbia dialogue". Kosovo Academy of Science and Art. http://www.ashak.org/repository/docs/Dialogu_Kosove-Serbi_WEB_Reduced_840378.pdf

Balkans Policy Research Group. 2017. "The Association of Serb Municipalities: Understanding conflicting views of Albanians and Serbs". BPRG. https://balkansgroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/BPRG_Pub-02_ASM_ENG_WEB.pdf

Berridge, G.R. 2003 . Constructive ambiguity. In A dictionary of diplomacy. http://www.grberridge.co.uk/dict_comp_a_e.htm.

Beysoylu, C. 2018. Implementing Brussels agreements: the EU's facilitating strategy and contrasting local perceptions of peace in Kosovo. Southeast European and Black Sea Studies 18 no. 2

Capoccia, G. and D. Kelemen. 2007. "The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism". World Politics. Vol.59, no.3.

Council for Inclusive Governance. 2014. "Relations between Kosovo and Serbia: Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities and Dialogue". CIG. http://www.cigonline.net/docs/Relations%20between%20Kosovo%20and%20Serbia.%20Association%20of%20Serb-Majority%20Municipalities%20and%20Dialogue.pdf

Council for Inclusive Governance. 2018. "The Politics of the Association/Community". CIG. http://www.cigonline.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/The-Politics-of-the-Association_Community-1.pdf

Council for Inclusive Governance. 2017. "What Should the Association/Community of Serb Municipalities look Like?. CIG. http://www.cigonline.net/wpcontent/uploads/2017/06/April_2017_Belgrade_Association-1.pdf

European External Action Service. 2015. Association/community of Serb majority munici-palities in Kosovo. General principles. 25 August. https://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/docs/150825_02_association-community-of-serb-majority-municipalities-in-kosovo-gener-al-principles-main-elements_en.pdf

European Commission. 2013 . Belgrade and Prishtina: Historic agreement paves the way for de-cisive progress in their EU perspectives . Press Release . Brussels , April 22

Gashi, F. 2021. "LDK will vote on the Association if it undergoes the constitutional filter". Koha. https://www.koha.net/arberi/273832/ldk-ja-e-voton-asociacionin-nese-i-nenshtrohet-filtrit-te-gjykates-kushtetuese/

International Crisis Group. 2021. "Relaunching the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue".https://d2071andvi-p0wj.cloudfront.net/262-kosovo-serbia-dialogue_0.pdf

Kurti, A. 2021. "Interview of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo, Albin Kurti, given to Deutsche Welle". https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/intervista-e-kryeministrit-te-repub-likes-se-kosoves-albin-kurti-dhene-per-deutsche-welle/

"Kurti and Borrell clash over the Association". KosovaPress, 2022. https://kosovapress.com/kurti-dhe-borrell-perplasen-per-asociacionin/

Nesovic, B. and R. Celeghini. 2015. "Community/ Association of Serbian Municipalities: The Sum of All Fears". NGO Aktiv. http://ngoaktiv.org/uploads/files/Community%20of%20Serbian%20Municipalities%20-%20The%20Sum%20of%20All%20Fears%20-%20Eng.pdf

Orana, A. and R. Ilazi. 2022. "Kosovo-Serbia dialogue: Consequences of the status-quo". Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) and New Social Initiative (NSI). https://qkss.org/en/publi-kimet/dialogu-kosove-serbi-pasojat-e-status-quo-se

Orana, A. and R. Ilazi R. 2021. "Fostering Societal Peace through Inter-Ethnic dialogue in Koso-vo". New Social Initiative (NSI). http://newsocialinitiative.org/publications/kosovo-collective-re-port-fostering-societal-peace-through-inter-ethnic-dialogue-in-kosovo/

Press Conference by Prime Minister Albin Kurti. 02/02/2022

Pula, B. 2018. "Instability of the party system, the duration of government and the institution-al crisis in Kosovo. Democracy for Development (D4D). https://d4d-ks.org/wp-content/up-loads/2018/05/D4D_Elections_11_SHQ_WEB.pdf

Radosavljevic, J. and B. Nicic. 2021. "Political Parties of Kosovo Serbs in the Political System of Kosovo: From Pluralism to Monoism". Kosovo Foundation for Open Society (KFOS). http://new-socialinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/11-Partite-Politike-ENG-02.pdf

Troncota, M. 2018 . 'The association that dissociates' – Narratives of Local political resistance in Kosovo and the delayed implementation of the Brussels agreement . Southeast European and BlackSea Studies 18 , no. 2

"Serbia is investing in 10 Kosovo Serb Municipalities". Kossev, 2018. https://kossev.info/serbia-is-investing-in-10-kosovo-serb-municipalities/

"Osmani declares herself against 'models that make the country nonfunctional'". Radio Evropa e Lire, 2022. https://www.evropaelire.org/a/vjosa-osmani-asociacioni/31679389.html

Vllahiu, E. 2022. "Kurti on the Association: Kosovo doesn't fear". Kallxo. https://kallxo.com/lajm/kurti-per-asociacionin-kosova-nuk-frikesohet/

Weber, B. and A. Bajrami. 2018. "Collective Ethnic Protection as a means of (dis-) integration: The Association Community of Serb-Majority Municipalities". : https://kfos.org/storage/app/uploads/public/5f2/00e/bd3/5f200ebd39816640406402.pdf

Weber, B. 2016. "Awkward Juggling: Constitutional Insecurity, political instability and the rule of law at risk in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue". Big Deal Report by Prishtina Insight. https://prishtinainsight.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/BIRN-Report-2016-ENG.pdfds

Zeqiri, A., P. Troch, and T. Kabashi. 2016. "The Association/Community of Serb-Majority Municipalities: Breaking the Impasse". European Centre for Minority Issues Kosovo (ECMIK). https://www.ecmikosovo.org/uploads/6English1.pdf

JETA ABAZI GASHI

Kosovo's Young Europeans: Understanding Constructions of Self and European Other through Photo-Elicitation

— JETA ABAZI GASHI

Jeta Abazi Gashi works at the Journalism Department at the University of Prishtina since 2012. From November 2021, Jeta is also a Co-Editor in Chief of the Council for European Studies: Europe Radicalization and Violence Research Network Newsletter. She is waiting to defend her PhD thesis at the Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Leipzig, Germany. She has served as a doctoral researcher at the Department of Geography and Territories of École Normale Supérieure (ENS) in Paris. As a media specialist she has collaborated with international organizations in Kosovo (NDI, GIZ and European Commission). Jeta has worked as an investigative journalist for many years. In 2014 she was awarded with the First Prize by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, an outstanding award for journalists in the Balkans. Jeta holds a master's degree in Political science and in Journalism. She lives in Prishtina and speaks Albanian (native), English, German, French and Macedonian.

Introduction

Ample research has been dedicated to the question of how people in 'Europe' construct otherness. The focus is usually on exclusionary, right-wing discourses and narratives in the prosperous Global North (or 'West') vis-à-vis the Global South (or 'East') (Wodak 2015). It includes, for example, how images in the media narrow their readers' understanding of historical events (Corrigall-Brown 2012); or how security threats are constructed under religious labels (Neumann 2016). The Balkans, in particular, within geographical Europe have served to construct a dark 'other', internally (Todorova 2009), with stereotypical images of Albanians from the wider region, specifically, epitomising the underpinning fears (Schwandner-Sievers 2008). However, very few scholars (e.g. (Bracewell 2009) have looked at how people in the region construct 'Europe', the term commonly found to epitomise the prosperous 'West'. With exceptions (Hammond 2016, 116), Albanian images of 'Europe' — both as a metaphorical and a real place evoking ambiguous attitudes and emotions, including dreams and fears —remains still under-researched.

This chapter aims to contribute to the literature decentring research on the construction of 'otherness'. It explores the perspective of those whose gaze is usually excluded from most analyses of persisting political fears and insecurities in 'the West', even though they are, more often than not, the object exactly of such fears. The case of young Albanians in Kosovo is particularly interesting, as the country still faces both internal and external state-building challenges, which cannot be understood without taking the EU's (i.e. 'Europe's) power, influence, and guidance into account (Armakolas and et al 2019). The perspective of young Kosovars, born after the 1999 war, has been mostly ignored in the scholarly literature. Do these young Kosovars still feel that they exemplify an 'other' in European identity formation, and do they aim to become part of, or identify with, Europe? If there still is, how do young Kosovars negotiate any concrete experiences of rejection or misrepresentation by this Europe, which they desire to be part of? Specifically, how do they view and negotiate their country's

religious, majority Muslim, heritage vis-à-vis Western Europe's majority Christian heritage, given the Islamophobic geopolitical and symbolic fault lines of recent decades and the ways in which such difference has been downplayed, internally (specifically by the older generations), and been exaggerated, externally?

Kosovo nominally has a 95 percent Muslim majority population, 2.2 percent Catholics and 1.5 percent Christian Orthodox, according to the last census, which was boycotted by a part of the population (Kosovo Agency of Statistics 2011).[1] These groups are subdivided into Sunni Muslims, represented by the Islamic Community of Kosovo (ICK) and the Sufi mystical orders including the Union of Kosovo Tarikats[2] (UKT) and the Bektashi[3]; the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC); and the Catholic Church (CC). There are also the Jewish Faith Community (JFC), and the Evangelical Church of Kosovo (ECK). Given much larger portions of non-Muslim Albanians beyond Kosovo and across the wider region, including in Albania, ethno-Albanian national ideology has long strived to demonstrate that Albanians form a nation independent of religion (Duijzings 2000); hence, any of their nationalisms has been of a secular type (Clayer 2009, 640). At the same time, Albanian national historiographies across the region have always emphasised links to Christianity (in reference to medieval figures, such as Skanderbeg; or the Catholic nun and saint of Albanian ethnic background, Mother Teresa), thereby downplaying more ambiguous identifications and histories Albanian identities. (Misha 2002, 33).

As the vast majority of Kosovars is ethnically Albanian and of Muslim heritage, also Kosovo is characterised by a normatively strict secular, political system (Abazi Gashi forthcoming). Kosovo's established, contemporary public intellectuals, in an effort to emphasise a European identity, tend to denounce Islam as a remnant of the Ottoman Empire and emphasise 'secular fundamentalism' to an extent that it can even mean disrespecting the rights of religious communi-

---

1 Statistics on religious representation remain a sensitive topic. Roma and Serb communities boycotted the national census in 2011.
2 A special Sufi mystical order.
3 The draft law on amending the Law on "Freedom of Religion" passed the second reading in the Assembly in 2020. Bektashi are not recognized officially by the state, but they reject being subsumed under the umbrella of ICK. Bektashi are a Shia Alevi mystical order in Kosovo, Albania, North Macedonia, Belgium, and the United States. They place 'Atëdheu' (Fatherland) before religion.

ties (Musliu 2021). The Serbs' nationalist imaginary, routinely equating Kosovo Albanians with 'the Turks', a synonym for 'Muslims', repeatedly in history served to deny the Albanians' any rights to their land in Kosovo (Malcolm 1999, 322), including during the 1999 war which forms part of the lived experience of the ruling classes in Kosovo still today. Finally, in recent decades, international concerns over 'religious extremism' and increasing 'Islamophobia' worldwide, further exacerbated and polarised the debate in Kosovo (Merdjanova 2013, 70).

This study explores how Kosovo's younger generation, born after the 1999 war, constructs Kosovo's identity vis-à-vis Europe through the prism of religious identification. Does this generation hold a different attitude towards Kosovo's identity in contrast to the political establishment and their parental generation? The chapter uses an innovative methodology, photo elicitation (PE), to capture such attitudes, symbolic constructions, and related emotions in an appropriately sensitive manner. The overarching aim is to generate a deeper understanding of how young Kosovars understand Self through the prism of their imagination of Europe and of Europe's construction of Kosovo, thereby contributing to 'decentring' the study of European imagologies. The study was, thus, guided by the following objectives:

1) Exploring how young Kosovars imagine Europe and how they think Europe regards them, specifically through the prism of religion.
2) Tracing any potential change between the older (as described above) and younger Kosovar generations' imagery of Self and European 'other'.
3) Probing an innovative and sensitive methodology regarding its usefulness to generate meaningful findings in a study dedicated to exploring often highly emotional reactions related to the construction of Self and Other.

For theoretical guidance, the analysis relies on (Goffman 1956) social interactionist approach to presentations of Self and Other. Its epistemological approach is social constructivism, according to which identity is seen as the result of a discursive and affective, collective construction process, rather than a primordial given (e.g. (Wodak 2009). It further owns its focus to the affective and cultural turns in nationalism studies including Michael (Billig 2010), who shifted attention to the study of everyday, 'banal nationalism'. Finally, the study

employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to trace the ways in which the young Kosovars produced and reproduced, transformed and dismantled, national identities of Self and Other, discursively (Wodak 2009, 4). Data (discursive utterances) were generated through visual prompts, probing photo-elicitation as the method of choice to meet the study's objectives.

Method & Research Design

The method of photo-elicitation (PE) lends itself well to in-depth discussions of personal and sensitive topics without doing harm, and is likely to appeal, specifically, to the visual literacy of a generation used to communicate and present itself on social media, such as Instagram. Visual methods also resonate with the specific topic, given Europe's symbolic representation in Kosovo through strong visual means; for example, the Kosovar flag uses EU symbolism, even though Kosovo remains the only country in the region where visa-free travel in the Schengen area is not possible. Mindful of the sensitivity of the topic of this research project, PE was posing relatively little risk of causing any unintended harm, as with this method, research respondents, while commenting on photos and videos, always retain control of what they wish to divulge about their personal feelings and attitudes.

PE, as a research method, has existed for several decades. American anthropologist and photographer, John Collier (1957), is usually credited with its inception. The method is simple: inserting a photography into a research interview as a tool to expand on questions and simultaneously gather answers by the informants (Clark-Ibáñez 2004; Harper 2002). PE allows for the expression of emotions and memory. The method encourages people to express themselves much easier when compared with structured interviews, as PE "has a physical basis: the parts of the brain that process visual information are evolutionarily older than the parts that process verbal information" (Harper 2002, 23–24). Moreover, compared to exclusively verbal

interview methods, it triggers a different part of human consciousness (Harper 2002, 23–24) and allows for non-verbal communication and expression. PE has been used across broad disciplines, including for mental health research (Glaw et al. 2017); men's health and/or illness experiences (Oliffe and Bottorff 2007); perceptions of differences between educational environments (Gold 2004); and adaptation processes of migrant communities (Shaw 2013). It has also already been applied in the study of religion (Williams and Whitehouse 2015). There have been ethnographic studies using PE that have shed light on Buddhist monks' perceptions (Samuels 2004). Pictures of churches, mosques and various social situations featuring religion were used with young Christians, Muslims and non-religious people to elicit knowledge about different religious life-worlds and bridging different social and cultural worlds in Grønland area in inner-city Oslo, Norway (Vassenden and Andersson 2010). PE has also been used to explore the Scottish national identity among fashion and style influencers on Instagram (Madeleine Marcella-Hood 2021), where pre-existing data (pictures) were used to see how Scottish influencers understood and constructed their national identity online (Marcella-Hood 2021, 885).

This study's focus on national constructions of self and other among Kosovo youth, although inspired by some of those assembled above, also differs. Rather than being a study of religion, it explores religion as a relevant trope of identity constructions for the case study of young Kosovars.

Beginning from the study's third objective (probing an innovative methodology), PE was used to generate verbal discussion about perceptions of Other; Self; and of Other regarding Self, with young Kosovars of age 18 and above. The method was conceptualised to evolve along three steps: firstly, student participants – recruited via the university's social networks online - were asked to bring photos along to the individual one-on-one meetings that, for them, responded to the overarching question, "What does Europe mean to you?". The purpose of this invitation was to generate data from the young people's commentaries during the interview with as little researcher's bias as possible. No other questions were asked. Secondly and subsequently, during the interview purposefully selected photos were offered which aimed at generating respons-

es in a more structured format relating to the project's first objective, such as evoking discussions around symbolic hierarchies (typical for everyday nationalism in the wider region; Spasić 2017; Luci and Schwandner-Sievers 2020) and their impact, on the one hand; and religious identities and identifications, on the other. The pre-selected photographs offered for commentary encompassed images which, firstly, illustrated Europe's power and importance; and, secondly, portrayed visible symbols associated with religious pluralism in Europe. This sequence did not preclude further responses to the initial question, yet it also added an additional question: "How does Europe see us?".

In a third and final step, Kosovo's 2010 nation-branding campaign video, originally launched as part of "Kosovo-The Young Europeans" national campaign" (Saatchi & Saatchi 2010), was shown to all respondents. At the time, this video aimed to promote the newly independent, secular state, two years after declaring its independence from Serbia. However, the video has long since disappeared from public view or attention. In fact, it emerged that it was not known to any of the research respondents, who all had been young children at the time of its original launch. The video's visual content portrays young people only, probably aiming to highlight Kosovo's young demographic average age (with over 65% of the population under 30 years old, then and now). The purpose for showing the campaign footage as part of PE was to elicit comments in response to the second objective; specifically, on how this new young generation regards this national presentation of Self from more than a decade earlier. The question asked here was, whether they felt that the national campaign represented them or not. Respondents were not told that this campaign was rejected by nearly a generation of adolescents before them. At the time, this was for two reasons: it represented only 'modern youth' without including local customs, and Kosovo was the most isolated place in Europe contrary to the image conveyed. In protest against the campaign, some political activists stamped the billboards in Prishtina with the inscription 'isolated', aiming to raise awareness of the ghettoization of Kosovo (Krasniqi 2016, 158).

In all, eight in-depth, one-on-one PE interviews with young Kosovars age 18 or just above were conducted. Although there are limits to any representativity

of such a small sample, it was hoped that ensuring relatively representative demographic variety would help identify potential indicators suggesting correlations and differences that could be followed up in future research projects. The participants selected included: four young people from rural, and four from urban areas, covering all seven existing districts of Kosovo (Prishtina, Mitrovica, Peja, Prizren, Gjilan and Gjakova); two female and six male students; and a mix of social and religious background, including one Bektashi, five Sunni Muslims, one declared agnostic and one Catholic. Thirteen potential interviewees originally self-recruited in responding to a call for student volunteers published on the University of Prishtina's social web site, yet some withdrew for reasons they did not need to provide. The call offered participant information in line with the university's ethics guidelines, which included guaranteed anonymity, informed consent signed off in a consent form, the right to withdraw at any time, and confirmation that a decision for or against research participation would not cause any specific benefit nor disadvantage. Furthermore, Kosovo's Law on Protection of Personal Data, No.03/L – 172 was followed by safely storing the interviews and deleting all original records within one month after the interviews were transcribed. Data were anonymised at source through using only demographic codes, such as "UFM1" (Urban, female, Muslim 1; see relevant table providing all codes used). Participants self-recruited from different subject areas of studies, including economics and business, engineering and architecture, journalism, history, sociology and political science. The interviews were conducted in an office at the Journalism Department of University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina", where the author works.

Using PE was welcomed by all respondents as an innovative method. However, some unexpected limitations led to adaptations including that, firstly, the subjects preferred bringing their pictures on their mobile phone rather than in print; and one even preferred to draw a sketch instead of bringing a picture. Secondly, interviews lasted much shorter than expected, based on the methodological literature. After around 30 minutes respondents ceased engaging, probably because they had to fit the interview session into their busy study schedules. Thirdly, the author's 'European' background from

previous work and studies might potentially have caused some bias. It is possible that some respondents performed towards what they assumed to be researcher's expectations of young Kosovars' European identifications. Such limitation, possibly arising from power dynamics within the university setting, could not be fully eradicated. However, some mitigation was attempted through creating a friendly and egalitarian atmosphere (offering cookies and coffee), as well as only including participants who were not previously personally known to, or a student of, the researcher. Finally, the small number of interviews conducted restricts the possibility of any generalisations. As with all small-scale qualitative research (Denscombe 2010), the findings might thus be only indicative of trends, but they revealed some unexpected attitudes and deeper meanings that could serve as a basis for formulating adjusted, meaningful question for larger-scale, future projects, which could confirm and elaborate the findings on a more representative scale.

What Does Europe Mean to Young Kosovars?

When asked "What does Europe mean to you?", none of the respondents brought along any image, or raised any questions, regarding religion. Through their chosen images they described Europe in relation to topics such as human rights, culture, job opportunities, migration, visa liberalisation, and free elections. These choices correspond with Europe's secular values. As Roy (2019, 5) highlighted, European identity constructions occasionally, but never exclusively, reference a Christian identity; rather, they rely on a liberal orientation arising from the Enlightenment period and subsequent secularization processes, emphasising freedom of conscience and criticism, sexual freedom, human rights and, more recently, gay rights.

On March 16, 2022, Kosovo's National Parliament voted against amending the Civil Code for allowing same sex relationships (28 pro and 29 against,

4 abstentions). This was an important topic for the media in Kosovo, and it clearly also affected the opinions of the research respondents, who were all interviewed in late March and April 2022. An 18-year, female Kosovar student identifying as Muslim, considered that the importance of Europe is related to "European values". In her perspective, these relate to human rights with a focus on LGBT+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex community). She added that "the sexual orientation should be respected because people should be free and decide for their feelings, if it is a European value, it is also a value to Kosovo".[4] On her mobile phone, she showed a picture of a gay parade, from an unknown place, to visualise such liberal values (figure 1). Discursively, her focus was on global values rather than highlighting the nation-state, national identifiers, or national or local values in Kosovo. Kosovo was constructed as European by sharing European liberal values.

Figure 1: RMF1 holds her smartphone showing a gay parade; "What does Europe mean to you". Picture taken by the author.

---

4   RMF1, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 23, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".

Commonality with Europe was also important to a male Kosovar student of rural Muslim background, studying engineering and architecture. His image of Europe related to infrastructure and culture. He chose to bring a picture depicting the new museum at Kosovo's arguably most famous war memorial: that of the Jashari family in Prekaz, a village in Skënderaj/Srbica, central Kosovo (figure 2).
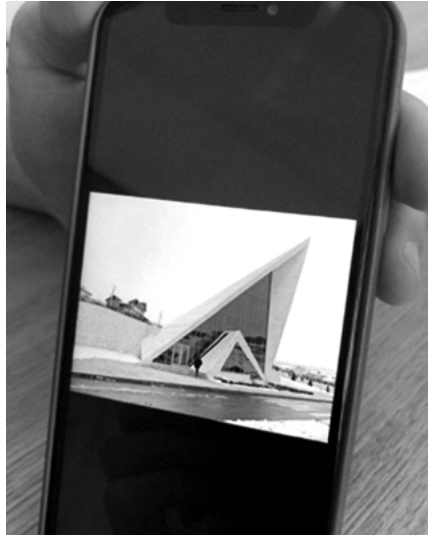
Figure 2: RMM2 showing a picture of the Jashari museum, Prekaz, on his mobile phone. "What does Europe mean to you". Picture taken by the author.

Adem Jashari was among the founders of the Kosovo Liberation Army. In March 1998 he was killed by Serbian police alongside more than fifty family members in a local massacre. Celebrated as 'sublime sacrifice' — for the family fought back, rather than just surrendering — their story has since provided a proud master narrative for Kosovo's post-war, national identity; meanwhile, the underpinning militant ideology was perceived as controversial by many European commentators (Di Lellio Anna and Schwandner-Sievers 2006, 518). To this student, the pyramidal architecture and glass windows of the local museum's architecture situated on the site, however, compares well to European museum buildings: "To me this is like the Museum of Louvre…it has a

lot of history".[5] 'Past' and 'future' are intermingled in his identity construction vis-à-vis Europe, in which the Kosovars are establishing themselves within the cultural canon of Europe through equivalent, modern architecture that is dedicated to important national and, simultaneously local, history and memory, including painful collective memories of resistance and loss.

Other students associated opportunities with Europe, either emanating from, or pulling them towards, Europe. For example, a rural, male, Muslim student of economics constructed Europe as a place of opportunities, because "Europe is investing more and more in Kosovo, there are scholarships, job opportunities for our youth".[6] He did not feel excluded from Europe, but rather expressed hope and optimism. Figure 3 shows a big green sign "Opportunity, Just Ahead", which he presented in response to the question "What does Europe mean to you?". A rural, male Muslim student of history however, shifted the focus onto Kosovo's youth for its agency and potential, which made these opportunities possible.[7]
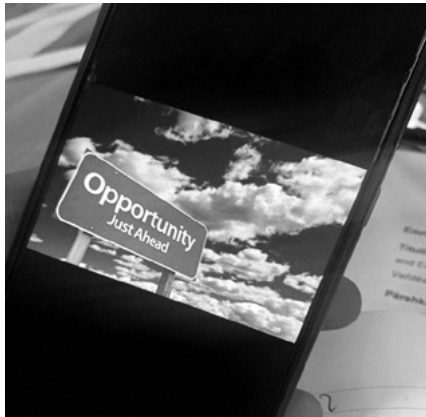
Figure 3: RMM3 showing a picture with the text "Opportunity, just ahead" on his mobile phone. "What does Europe mean to you". Picture taken by the author.

5   RMM2, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 25, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".
6   RMM3, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 28, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".
7   UAM5, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 29, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".

Such discourse relates to the question of young people's migration desires. In 2018, the European Union estimated that 11.2 per cent out of 310,000 citizens given residence permits in European states were from Kosovo (Office of the European Union 2020). The German Embassy in Kosovo alone received over 56 thousand visa applications in 2021 (Shabani 06.01.2021). An urban female, identifying as agnostic and studying history however, explicitly distanced herself from any migration plans. She presented a similar image as RMM3's, reading "Job Opportunity. Employment" on her laptop. She commented that, while she was not planning to leave Kosovo for work abroad, the reality for other young people was reflected in the "highest [number of] visa job application[s], this is not Europe for me, but this is how the youth sees Europe. They think it is better there than here".[8] Arguably, by distancing herself simultaneously from others' migration desires and many young Kosovars' idealisation of Europe, she established a sense of dignity and autonomy for herself.

Others achieved this through a measure of anger directed at the exclusionary politics of Europe as well as turning around the question of desirability, for example, by highlighting young Kosovars' potentials. Here, the imagination of Europe by Self interacts with the imagined gaze of Europe on Self. The following examples respond to both questions, simultaneously, conveying the participants' sense of Self vis-à-vis how they imagine Europe's attitudes towards them. For example, a young urban male student of political sciences, identifying as Bektashi, mentioned 'opportunities' for Kosovo's young people as blocked by the EU: its exclusionary and unfair visa regime stands in contrast to visa liberalisation experienced by other Southeast European countries and their young people. Following this description of Europe, the gaze turns on Self as a message for Europe: "a young nation like us, I think that we have many good things to offer to Europe".[9]

---

8   UAF7, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 31, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".
9   UBM6, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 30, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".

While such utterance may be understood as a plea to Europe for recognising the benefits of opening up its borders to young Kosovars, for a female student of rural and Catholic background, studying journalism, the Europe's positive regard of Kosovo's younger generation can be assumed: "finally, Europe has started to see us differently, they are interested about our youth, many organisations are willing to find young volunteers"[10] – a point she supported through a picture of young people attending a workshop (figure 4).

Figure 4: RCF8 shared a photo on her mobile phone of a group of Kosovar youngsters (unknown place and date). "How does Europe see us". Photo taken by RCF8.

Sometimes, however, the blame is not directed at Europe for failing to recognise the value of Kosovo's youth, but on those at home, who represent Kosovo to Europe abroad and not always do this well. As the political science student suggested: "there have been politicians who have not presented

10   RCF8, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, April 12, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".

Kosovo in the best way, I am aware...".[11] It is for this reason that he decided to bring a picture of the former president of Kosovo, Ibrahim Rugova (1943-2006). Rugova strongly identified with Europe, cultivating an image both as a writer and intellectual who had studied in Paris. Scholarly debates about his pacifism during the cruel 1990s, his emphasis on all Kosovar's original Christian religion as a hallmark of "European identity" (Merdjanova 2013, 45), and his downplaying of any Muslim identity, led to both praise and critique at home as well as in international scholarship (Krasniqi 2011, 204). This student thus used the symbolic power of the previous president and his European identification to emphasise all Kosovar politicians' role and responsibility in national image management of which, according to him, the politicians after Rugova fell short. Here, the interactionist discourse about images of Self and Other supports a political preference.

For the same student, the parliamentary election of February 2021 in Kosovo marked a turning point when the previous opposition political party, Vetëvendosje ('Self-Determination') won by a landslide. These elections were assessed as fair and well-organised (European Union Election Observation Mission 2021, 6). For UBM4, as he elaborated based on a hand-drawing (see figure 5), this event allowed for collective identification (evident in the use of first-person plural, "we") as being worthy of European recognition and as a testimony to Kosovo's character as more European than the Europeans, given the following imagological indicators:

> Europe means free elections and fair voting and Kosovo is one of the only countries in the Balkans that is conducting good and fair elections, when it comes to our elections... we have shown how we should vote, and during the day of election results in Kosovo it is a celebration. We are the best example on how one should vote.[12]

---

11   UBM6, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 30, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".
12   UBM4, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 29, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".
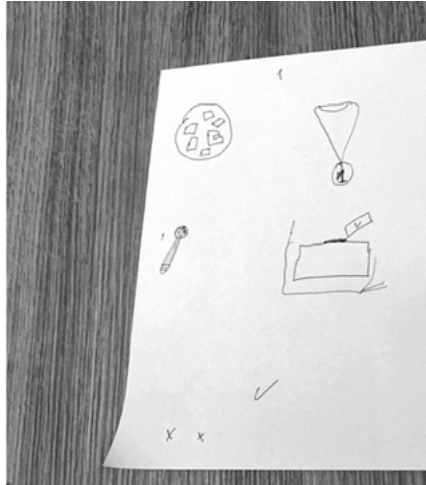
Figure 5: UMM4 presents his drawings: a ball, a gavel, an election box, a first prize medal, to illustrate political responsibilities. "What does Europe mean to you". Photo by taken by the author.

As mentioned above, and contrary to original assumptions, religion did not feature in these students' imagination of Europe or of how Europe sees Kosovo. Europe was associated with aspirational values, whether directly (e.g. relating to educational or employment opportunities) or indirectly (such as when Kosovo was described as more European than the Europeans; or anger directed at Europe's exclusionary policies towards Kosovo). The trope of Europe embodied liberal values such as human rights for LGBTQ+ people or modern museum architecture, even for young Kosovars whom stereotyping outsiders might not immediately associate with these, exactly because of their religion (Islam) or political conviction (nationalism). These young local respondents had in common a desire to align with the liberal, international values associated with Europe. Their local value orientations cannot be understood without recognising their globalised embeddedness and reference (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013, 765). Meanwhile, the interactionist analysis of the imagological discourses revealed highly emotional connotations. There was some anger and blame directed against Europe for its unfair visa regime in Kosovo. Respondents asserted their dignity through insisting that, as Kosovars or young people, collectively, they had much to offer to Europe, thereby intermingling emotions such as hope, pride, and shame.

How Does Europe See Young Kosovars?

Responses to this question revealed several evocative, dichotomous constructions of 'other' and 'Self'. For UMM4, a student of political sciences the juxtaposition of safe/unsafe determines Europe's discriminatory attitude towards Kosovo. He suggested that Europe considers Kosovo not a safe country and, hence, views it negatively. In his construction, the European view of Kosovo arises from recent historical events such as demonstrations, the war, and the unsolved relations between Kosovo and Serbia. Also for UAM5, studying history, "Europeans, they still see us as a country that is not over with the war completely".[13] He brought an old photograph which showed people protesting in the streets in the 1990s. The hetero-image of Kosovo and Kosovars, in these cases, is identified as based on historical events, which circumvents questions of contemporary responsibilities, yet also conveys a sense of unfairness.

The question of religion was brought up by only one female student (UAF7), identifying as agnostic with a Muslim background and suggesting feminist convictions. She used the dichotomy of 'backward'/progressive to juxtapose Kosovo and Europe. In her view, Europe was a liberal, progressive society, which rightly took issue with gendered, cultural backwardness in Kosovo, the latter signified through Islam. Notably, she distanced herself from her original Muslim background through the prism of 'how Europe sees us' in ways, which to her, reflect social realities. She believed that Europe sees Kosovars as a closed Islamic society, synonymous with a country where girls' and women's rights are regularly violated. To her,

---

13　UAM5, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 29, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".

Kosovar society is seen with many taboos, a society that is based on Islamisation, that is not open to changes in the society, it is closed... we have seen even the recent Civic Code [same sex unions] was not voted for; girls and women are oppressed... men continue with a patriarchal spirit... yes, there is some improvement but not up to the European standards, not what it really should be.[14]

Figure 6: UAF7 presents an illustration (unknown artist) of "How does Europe sees us" on her computer screen. Photo taken by the author.

This understanding she explained based on an unknown artists' picture (figure 6), which portrays the heads of two men with their mouths zipped, looking away from the face of an attractive women on a laptop screen between them. However, to this student, Europe is not the saviour. As the discussion went on, she pointed to the US's influence in Kosovo, critically arguing that:

Europe wants to consider herself as powerful...Who cares what Europe thinks, we no longer care what Europe is thinking, it has not

14 UAF7, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 31, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".

helped us during the war, we care more what United States think... I know this looks like a conversation in a cafeteria, but we always do what the US demands us to do, and Europe is threatening us, one day you are going to be a member another day changing her mind, that position has lost the effect, the EU uses double standards, like with Ukraine, for a long time they [Ukrainians] had asked for help from the EU, and the EU has not taken them seriously.[15]

UMM4, as student of political sciences responded to 'how Europe sees us' by constructing a parent/child dichotomy. Accordingly, Europe infantilises Kosovo, just as a controlling parent or big brother might do to a child. While sketching by hand (figure 7), he explained:

You see here, this is a child, and someone bigger than him is holding his hand. Europeans, they think that that we are born thanks to the Americans and the hand that is holding us illustrates that we could not build our state by ourselves, but we are depending on someone else.[16]
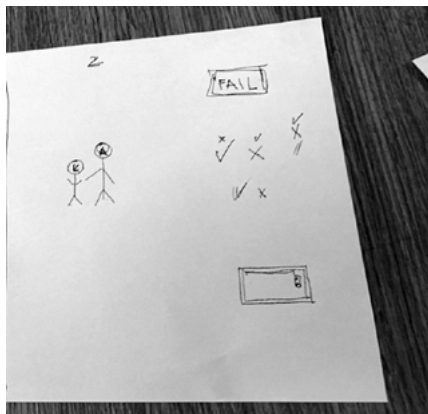
Figure 7: UMM4 sketches "How does Europe sees us". Photo taken by the author.

15 Ibid.
16 UBM4, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 29, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".

Pointing to a square he had drawn (figure 7), this student further elaborated, "you see here, this is a small window, actually it is partly opened, because we only breathe a little bit of air from Europe, we are not able to open the whole window, we are not…".[17] According to him, Europe just ticks boxes, observing whether Kosovo is fulfilling the European standards and requirements, just as "Big Brother is watching you".

The parent/child dichotomy corresponded with big/small, observer/observed, or active (control)/passive (evaluated). Signifying disempowerment, the situation thus described was frowned upon and evoked anger over a structural injustice for this respondent. Dichotomous imageries, however, can convey also more optimistic valuations. In the following discursive constructions. Here, it was Europe which was valued, to its own peril, as old or frail, in contrast to a young and dynamic Kosovo, because of its youth.

Firstly, for UBM6, student of political sciences, Europe appreciates Kosovo's youth for its national successes in sport. This participant brought a picture from the internet of a Kosovar judoka, Distria Krasniqi, who won a gold medal at the Summer Olympics in Tokyo 2020 (figure 8). This student assumed that "Europe knows that we are good at sport, we have good football players, we have shown good behaviour, we have shown that we can be very successful, we have good youth".[18] Such expression of pride through identification with a successful international young athlete from Kosovo is indicative of benign everyday nationalism (documented as widely spread among young Kosovars before, see Luci and Schwandner-Sievers 2020).

---

17   Ibid.
18   UBM6, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 30, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".
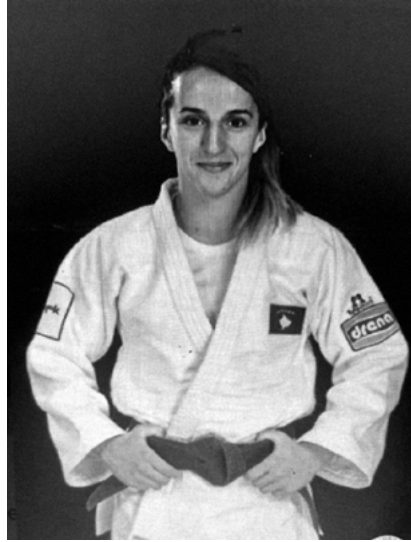
Figure 8. UBM6 shows an online picture of Kosovar judoka Distria Krasniqi.
"How does Europe sees us". https://www.ijf.org/judoka/7829

Secondly, in a more ambiguous statement, RMF1 suggests that "Europe knows now that we are a very young nation, very optimistic, given that we live in a country that is not well-developed, there are no good opportunities, but Europeans think that we don't work that much, and that's why they consider that we spend a lot of time in cafés".[19] Based on a picture demonstrating Kosovar café house culture (figure 9), the attractiveness of youthfulness and café-house culture was juxtaposed to an assumed, erraneous heteroimage of Kosovar laziness which obscures young Kosovars' real predicament: lack of opportunities.

---

19 RMF1, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 23, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".
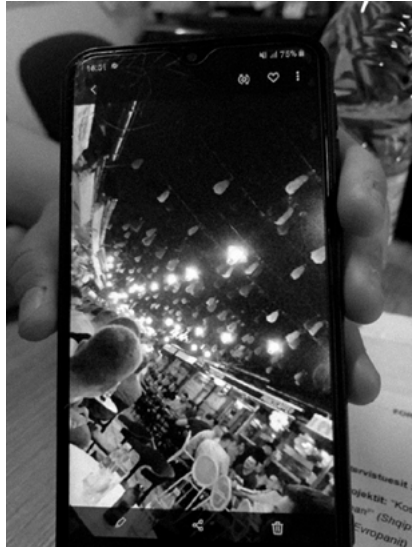
Figure 9. A district of cafés with young people in "Çarshia e Vjetër", Gjakova.
"How does Europe sees us". Photo by RMF1.

Overall, it emerged that the young people interviewed considered their image in Europe had improved from that associated with Kosovars who had previously migrated to Europe in the 1990s. They emphasised commonalities, while recognising the perpetuation of a negative national heteroimage, seen as impacting on young people and their constrained opportunities today. For this, Europe was seen as only partly to blame. Also, the older generation and past events were assigned responsibility for a negative image of Kosovo and Kosovars in Europe. The question of religion was mentioned only once in connection with women's rights. In distancing herself from her own Muslim heritage, this respondent's perspective echoed the Islamophobic 'politics of fear' propagated by extreme right- and left-wing political parties in Europe (Wodak 2015). On the one hand, she also formulated an important feminist critique to societal conservatism in line with liberal European values. Finally, this section revealed how the discursive interaction between 'us' and 'them' is reflected in symbolic dichotomies such as safe/unsafe; progressive/backward; old/young; and weak/strong. These discursive couplets indicate

the speakers' intentions to either up-play, or downplay, Kosovo's image in Europe's eyes and underpin strong emotions such as anger, blame, or hope.

Europe and Religion

During the second stage of the interview, five photos with religious elements (a Catholic Church, an Orthodox Church, an Evangelical Lutheran Church, a Jewish kippa, an Islamic headscarf) were shown to the respondents. Every single respondent explained that Europe is not Christian but, to them, citizens in Europe are of majority Christian religious identification. Notably, the picture of Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome was recognised easily by all respondent: "It looks like this is the Vatican, and I am seeing religious elements, the cross above…. this is Europe".[20] Yet, Europe to them was not about religions, but about respecting religious pluralism and protecting cultural heritage. The students were evidently aware of Roman Catholicism; to a lesser degree of Protestantism; and least aware of Christian Orthodoxy, even though this is the majority faith with which the Serb population identifies. They did not necessarily recognise all of the particular national sites of worship shown, but conveyed strong European value identifications as follows.

As one student emphasised, "… Europe has never been orthodoxly religious, Europe has always been secular".[21] To her, Europe is equal for all faiths and European Union neutral to all religions. Beyond secularism, the value of pluralism was shared as evident in statements such as the following: shown an Evangelical Church in Germany, although the protestant architecture was not recognised, a student made the following associations: "I think this is Germany, yes, the country were Protestantism was born along with

---

20 RMM2, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 25, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".
21 UAF7, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 31, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".

Martin Luther, for me this is Europe, because Europe has many religions and these religions are respected equally, it has more Christians but it is not Christian".[22] Similarly, responding to the picture of the Metropolitan Orthodox Cathedral in Athens, which barely any student recognised as Greek, a student suggested: "Europe in my eyes does not respect only one religion, of course this is Europe"[23]; similar to another, according to whom "Europe does not privilege any particular religion"[24]; and a final student suggest that, in Europe, "religions and culture are respected, for all citizens regardless of their religious orientation".[25] Given that Christian Orthodoxy is usually identified in Kosovo with being Serb, these statements, in particular, suggest a strong identification with the European value of religious tolerance. This value becomes further expanded to respect for cultural heritage, as evident also in the following observations.

One student commented on the picture of the Metropolitan Orthodox Cathedral in Athens (which he was not able to identify) suggesting that, indicative for being European, "they have taken care of their religious heritage, regardless of what religion it is".[26] Similarly, here for a picture of the German Evangelical Church, the architecture student noticed:

> I have never been in Germany, but this architecture style looks like German style, and Germany is one of the most important European countries... yes it is a religious building, but for me this is Europe because an old building has been saved and managed, and it makes me think it is in Europe.[27]

22   UBM6, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 30, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".
23   UAM5, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 29, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".
24   UBM4, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 29, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".
25   UBM6, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 30, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".
26   RCF8, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, April 12, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".
27   Ibid.

Notably, the identification with religious values such as pluralism, tolerance and cultural heritage protection were more ambiguous when confronted with an image pertaining to Islam in Europe, showing a veiled woman. Reactions here, stood in strong contrast to those relating to the picture of a gay parade. All students claimed that they are in favour of respecting LGBT+ rights and gay parades, identified with being European and sometimes juxtaposed to more conservative attitudes still found in Kosovo. For example, the student of political sciences emphasised for LGBT+ rights that "these people have feelings, it is very natural, I don't understand how someone can consider that they face mental disorders, that is love, not a disorder...".[28] Regarding the veil, on the one hand, five respondents similarly suggested that it indicated Europe's respect for human rights. In these cases, respect of human rights was seen as more important than projecting secularism through one's choice of clothes. For example, RCF8 (using the term 'head cover'), a Catholic by background, avoided any judgement in the name of tolerance:

> The cover characterizes one part of the population, that of Muslim faith, and as a Catholic I have been told that it is important for their religion to wear that cover. For me that is not a problem, a girl should be allowed to wear whatever she wants, this is Europe, because it is about the diversity in Europe.[29]

When asked about the gay parade, the same student remained consistent in her attitude: "LGBT rights should be strengthened and we should try and help this community even more, we should not have prejudices towards and we should not see it as a separate community". On the other hand, several other students who considered that deciding freely 'who to love' is a human right and gay rights indicative of Europeanness, opposed the right of 'deciding what to wear' if this indicated an Islamic background. Three of the students openly suggested that they do not see the veil as 'European' (a Bektashi, a

---

28   RMF1, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 23, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".
29   RCF8, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, April 12, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".

Muslim, and an agnostic student). One of these students, who constructed the veil as a sign of otherness, denounced Islamization as externally introduced in Kosovo. She used Huntington's phrase of a 'clash of civilisation' to explain any rejections of the veil experienced in Europe, anticipating that "… the Islamic wave is dominating and is producing its effects". Another student of Muslim background considered that the veil should not be allowed in schools: "For me this is not Europe, because I am seeing a covered person, despite that I am Muslim myself, for me this is unacceptable, someone to be covered and go and learn in schools"

The students appeared least aware of Jewish history, presence, and representation in Europe. Half of the respondents recognized the Jewish kippah, and for the other half it was an unknown image. "…I know it looks like a religious person, but the sign is not clear to me ... I can say it is someone like an imam for Muslims... can you tell me, please ...". After having told him, he recalled that the current Ukrainian Prime Minister, Vladimir Zelensky, identifies as Jewish. However, overall, little allowance was made for the presence of this faith in Europe and its heritage: "Europe is not Jewish, it has had strong Jewish influences...but Jews had not intention to use religion for political reasons in Europe ... my mother has told me that in our roots, from her side we had Jewish roots".[30] Overall, even among the students who recognised the kippah, there appeared to be little knowledge about European history and, specifically national German, responsibilities pertaining to the Holocaust, as evident in sweeping statements such as: "Europe had before problems with the Jews".[31] Where there was any recognition of this dark part of the European past, this was uttered in line with a wide-spread, national saviour myth which has been shown to facilitate avoidance of more complicated questions regarding Albanian Second World War history (Skendaj 2009): "Albanians saved the Jews during the World War II".[32]

---

30 UAF7, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 31, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".
31 UBM6, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 30, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".
32 UMM3, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 28, 2022, Department of Journalism, Univeristy of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".

In summary, for most of the respondents, religion was not a main subject when thinking about Europe or Self. Inspired by the sociology of religion (Roy 2019), the few questions posed alongside related pictures, probed what some of the main religions of Europe meant for the interviewees, who mostly came from a Muslim background. There responses revealed that, to most of them, there existed not one single European identity which could be framed as singularly 'Christian'. They regard Europe as secular, yet including a majority of Christian denominations, including mostly Catholics, Protestants and Evangelicals, and less Orthodox. Very few recognised Europe's Jewish heritage. The discourses revealed an emphasis on secular values such as human rights, cultural diversity, religious pluralism, tolerance, and cultural heritage, not least because "Europe has protected religious buildings". This was expressed strongly through the positive regard held for LGBT+ parades and gay rights. Notably, this emphasis stood in stark contrast to the ambivalence suggested by the respondents in regard to the Islamic veil as a potential signifier of otherness, with attitudes differing from whether this could be included as 'European', or not. Overall, within this discursive field, downplaying Islam to emphasise Europeanness and identification with 'European values', e.g. through identifying with Christian figures, did not emerge as a discursive necessity. The attitudes and perspectives documented oppose any stereotypical assumptions present in European right-wing, populist parties about Muslim Europeans at the continent's margins (Roy 2019, 4).

The Kosovo Young Europeans' Campaign

In the final stage of each interview, the above-mentioned "Kosovo Young Europeans' national campaign", launched in 2010, was shown. An internationally award-winning nation-branding campaign video portrays the spirit of youth through its underlying soundtrack: "I am feeling the life that I wanted to come into me, I am feeling the love that I want you to see" (Saatchi & Saatchi 2010). The footage shows young men and women collecting, colouring, and transporting

large yellow puzzle-pieces, then constructing the shape of Kosovo out of these and, finally, placing the completed shape in the world map. The campaign alludes to the classic narration of the concept of a nation-state, including territory, recognition, and desire for self-determination (Smith 2010, 5), yet promotes a national and a European identity simultaneously. It aimed to promote the newly independent, secular state, two years after the declaration of independence. However, regardless of its international success at the time, locally, this campaign engendered little enthusiasm and soon became forgotten.

Also in 2022, reactions by the respondents, who all saw the video of the first time, remained mixed: "In this video everyone seems so happy, so involved, so hopeful"[33], yet "it does not portray our challenges"[34]. According to UBM4, representing an optimistic view, "I see in this video young people trying to do so something beautiful, and they achieve that, and this is an element that characterise us, we love our country and we finish our tasks, we all work together for the best of our state".[35] In contrast, UBM6 assigned blame to Europe and expressed shame for the older generation of Kosovar emigrants, yet felt pride in the younger generation, triggered by the viewing:

> This is the first time that I am watching this video, I see a lot of zeal of Kosovars for Europe, Kosovars have done so much for Europe, and Europe has not given anything in return, it has not liberalised visas, of course we cannot say that Kosovar emigrants, say in Germany, for example, they have worked hard, they are loving and nice people, they have worked as builders and hard jobs…they are the ones who had no education, no prosperity, but now there is the other generation, their children who are more educated, they have good professions, better jobs, and they are representing us better, and I am so happy about them.[36]

---

33 RCF8, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, April 12, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".
34 UAF7, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 31, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".
35 UBM4, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 29, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".
36 UBM6, interview by Jeta Abazi Gashi, March 30, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".

Most respondents felt that the video campaign failed to portray the isolation of youth in Kosovo. Some of them discussed this in terms of Kosovo's 'real youth', although always with some rhetorical distance as if to indicate that potential migration desires would not apply to them, themselves. Notably, as with the campaign video and its secular undertones, most of the research respondents were also not preoccupied with religious symbolism or identifications in discussing the video. Most of them appeared to have internalised the traditional, secular everyday Albanian nationalism to such an extent that even its potential function to counteract the 'politics of fear' of politically extreme and exclusionary discourses in Europe, were neither noticed nor strategically used, unless deliberately prompted. Arguably, this generation of contemporary young people in Kosovo identifies as European in emphasising contemporary secular and liberal values shared with Europe. Unless prompted, these are not refracted through religious tropes; e.g. there was no indication of making reference to Christian saints or heritage so typical for the older generations. The self-evidence with which this generation identifies as secular European makes the experience of geo-political exclusion all the more painful.

Conclusion

Following Goffman (1956), the presentation of Self is always a performance vis-à-vis an assumed heteroimage in social and symbolic interactions. It might thus be that commonalities or postulate ideal features, which unite performer and audience, might be overplayed. However, the PE method chosen generated qualitative findings which suggest a strong identification of the young Kosovar respondents with secular and liberal European values, including human rights, specifically women's and LGBT+ rights. Critique voiced was never directed against these values, but against the physical and political exclusion from Europe, given the commonalities affirmed. Notably, in contrast to preceding generations and external, right-wing and Islamophobic stereotypes, religion did barely play any role in constructing a sense of Self vis-à-vis Europe, nor

in discussing Europe's view of Self. There was no mentioning of mythological figures evidencing Kosovo Albanian Occidental belonging, such as Mother Teresa or Skanderbeg, which has long pre-occupied the establishment's public discourse in Kosovo. Rather than dichotomies of Occidentalism and Orientalism, juxtapositions such as safe/unsafe, progressive/backward, old/young, and weak/strong prevailed in the young people's discourse. While Europe was constructed as the land of opportunities, both Europe and the older generation were blamed for problems in accessing these, where these arose. Only once prompted to speak about religion, the respondents downplayed Islam in ways that suggest both an internalisation of the older generation's ideology and a response to Islamophobic views known from wider Europe (and social media debates which this generation can share in, across physical borders).

PE as a method furthermore allowed generating data which convey strong emotions corresponding with the respondents' positionality within the symbolic geo-political hierarchies that structure everyday nationalism in the wider region. In decentring the view from Europe to those scrambling for acknowledgement and integration at its margins, the relevance of affirming dignity and pride was apparent. A proud or angry Self counteracted a hurt or ashamed Self. This was evident in suggestions such as that Europe is 'getting old' and needs the young Kosovars; or in diverting and differentiating generalised national blame to specific population groups and events (the older generations; demonstrations; the war; past politicians); or in dismissing the relevance of Europe as compared to the US altogether. Future research could explore further the reasons for this generation's attitudes, which may be sought in political, cultural (e.g. generation social networks), social and wider global factors.

Acknowledgements

List of interviews

RMF1. Interview to author, March 23, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".

RMM2. Interview to author, March 25, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".

UMM3. Interview to author, March 28, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".

UBM4. Interview to author, March 29, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".

UAM5. Interview to author, March 29, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".

UBM6. Interview to author, March 30, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".

UAF7. Interview to author, March 31, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".

RCF8. Interview to author, April 12, 2022, Department of Journalism, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".

Interviewee codes

Code	Description	Interview conducted on
RMF1	Rural, Muslim, Female	23.03.2022
RMM2	Rural, Muslim, Male	25.03.2022
RMM3	Rural, Muslim, Male	28.03.2022
UMM4	Urban, Muslim, Male	29.03.2022
UAM5	Urban, Agnostic, Male	29.03.2022
UBM6	Urban, Bektashi, Male	30.03.2022
UAF7	Urban, Agnostic, Female	31.03.2022
RCF8	Rural, Catholic, Female	12.04.2022

References

Abazi Gashi, J. *Secularity from the Lenses of the Online Media.: Albania and Kosovo (2009-2019)*. PhD Thesis, University of Leipzig, forthcoming.

Armakolas, I., A. Demjaha, A. Elbasani, S. Schwandner-Sievers, eds. 2021. *Local and International Determinants of Kosovo Statehood* 2. Prishtina, Kosovo Foundation for Open Society.

Billig, M. 1995. *Banal Nationalism*. London, SAGE Publications.

Bracewell, W. 2009. *Orientations: An Anthology of East European Travel Writing, Ca. 1550-2000.* Budapest, New York, Central European University Press.

Clark-Ibáñez, M. 2004. Framing the Social World with Photo-Elicitation Interviews. *American Behavioral Scientist* 47, no. 12, 1507–1527.

Clayer, N. 2009. *Në Fillimet E Nacionalizmit Shqiptar: Lindja E Një Kombi Me Shumicë Myslimane Në Evropë*. Tiranë, Botime Përpjekja.

Collier J. 1957. Photography in anthropology: a report on two experiments. *American Anthropologist* 59, no. 5, 843-859.

Corrigall-Brown, C. 2012. The Power of Pictures. *American Behavioral Scientist* 56, no. 2, 131–134.

Denscombe, M. 2010. *The Good Research Guide: For Small-Scale Social Research Projects*. 4th ed. Buckingham, Open University Press.

Di Lellio A. and S. Schwandner-Sievers. 2006. The Legendary Commander: The Construction of an Albanian Master-Narrative in Post-War Kosovo. *Nations and Nationalism* 12, no. 3, 513–529.

Duijzings, G. 2000. *Religion and the Politics of Identity in Kosovo*. New York, Columbia University Press.

European Union Election Observation Mission. "Kosovo 2021: Final Report.". https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/final_report_2021_eom_kosovo_municipal_elections_-_english.pdf (accessed February 4, 2022).

Glaw, X., K. Inder, A. Kable and M. Hazelton. 2017. Visual Methodologies in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 16, no. 1.

Goffman, E. 1956. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.* 2 vols. Edinburgh, University of Edinburgh.

Gold, S. J. 2004. Using Photography in Studies of Immigrant Communities. *American Behavioral Scientist* 47, no. 12, 1551–1572.

Hammond, A. ed. 2016. *The Balkans and the West: Constructing the European Other, 1945-2003*. Abingdon, Routledge.

Harper, D. 2002. Talking About Pictures: A Case for Photo Elicitation. *Visual Studies* 17, no. 1, 13–26.

Kosovo Agency of Statistics. "Regjistrimi I Popullësisë, Ekonomive Familjare": Dhe Banesave Në Kosovë.". https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/2074/te-dhenat-kryesore.pdf.

Krasniqi, G. 2011. The 'Forbidden Fruit': Islam and Politics of Identity in Kosovo and Macedonia. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 11, no. 2, 191–207.

Krasniqi, V. 2016. Topography of the Construction of the Nation. In *Strategies of Symbolic Nation-Building in South Eastern Europe*. Ed. Pål Kolstø. London, Routledge.

Luci, N. and S. Schwandner-Sievers. 2020. Epistemic Justice and Everyday Nationalism: An Auto-ethnography of Transnational Student Encounters in a Post-war Memory and Reconciliation Project in Kosovo. *Nations and Nationalism* 26, no. 2, 477–493.

Mac Ginty, R, and O. P. Richmond. 2013. The Local Turn in Peace Building: A Critical Agenda for Peace. *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 5, 763–783.

Malcolm, N. 1999. *Kosovo: A Short History*. New York, HarperPerennial.

Marcella-Hood, M. 2021. Instagram Versus Reality: The Design and Use of Self-Curated Photo Elicitation in a Study Exploring the Construction of Scottish Identity Amongst Personal Style Influencers on Instagram. *Qualitative Research* 21, no. 6, 865–889.

Merdjanova, I. 2013. *Rediscovering the Umma: Muslims in the Balkans Between Nationalism and Transnationalism*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Misha, P. 2002. The History of Albanian Myth Production: Invention of Nationalism: Myth and Amnesia. In *Albanian identities: Myth and history*. Eds. S. Schwandner-Sievers and B. J. Fischer. Bloomington, Indiana University Press.

Musliu, V. 2021. *Europeanization and Statebuilding as Everyday Practices: Performing Europe in the Western Balkans*. London, Routledge.

Neumann, P. 2016. *Der Terror Ist Unter Uns: Dschihadismus Und Radikalisierung in Europa*. Berlin, Ullstein.

Office of the European Union. "Statistics on Migration, Residence Permits, Citizenship and Asylum for the Enlargement Countries.". https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/4031688/10361659/KS-03-20-002-EN-N.pdf/26f0dc16-4a08-2707-f8d5-8b1b84794169 (accessed February 4, 2022).

Oliffe, J. L., and J. L. Bottorff. 2007. Further Than the Eye Can See? Photo Elicitation and Research with Men. *Qualitative health research* 17, no. 6, 850–858.

Roy, Olivier. 2019. *L'europe Est-Elle Chrétienne?* Paris, Seuil.

Saatchi & Saatchi. 2010. *The Kosovo Nation Branding Campaign Ad*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQRGHAdQjR0 (accessed October 12, 2021).

Samuels, J. 2004. Breaking the Ethnographer's Frames. *American Behavioral Scientist* 47, no. 12, 1528–1550.

Schwandner-Sievers, S. 2008. Albanians, Albanianism and the strategic subversion of stereotypes. *Anthropological Notebooks* 14, no. 2, 47-64.

Schwandner-Sievers, S., and B. J. Fischer, eds. 2002. *Albanian Identities: Myth and History*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press.

Shabani, N. 2021. Mbi 56 Mijë Kosovarë Aplikuan Për Terminë, Për Viza Pune Në Gjermani. *Koha. net*, January 6, 2021. https://www.koha.net/arberi/304658/mbi-56-mije-kosovare-aplikuan-per-termine-per-viza-pune-ne-gjemani/ (accessed February 2, 2022).

Shaw, D. 2013. A New Look at an Old Research Method: Photo-Elicitation. *TESOL Journal* 4, no. 4, 785–799.

Skendaj, E. 2009. Book Review of N. H. Gershman *Besa: Muslims Who Saved Jews in World War II. Albanian Journal of Politics* 2, no. 5, 197-200.

Smith, A. D. 2010. *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, Polity.

Spasić, I. 2017. The universality of banal nationalism, or can the flag hang unobtrusively outside a Serbian post office? In M. Skey, & M. Antonsich, eds. *Everyday nationhood: Theorising culture, identity and belonging after banal nationalism*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Todorova, M. N. 2009. *Imagining the Balkans*. Updated ed. New York, Oxford University Press.

Vassenden, A. and M. Andersson. 2010. When an Image Becomes Sacred: Photo-Elicitation with Images of Holy Books. *Visual Studies* 25, no. 2, 149–161.

Williams, R. R., and K. Whitehouse. 2015. Photo Elicitation and the Visual Sociology of Religion. *Review of Religious Research* 57, no. 2, 303–318.

Wodak, R. 2009. *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*. 2nd ed. /translated by A. Hirsch, R. Mitten and J.W. Unger. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press.

Wodak, R. 2015. *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*. Los Angeles, SAGE

RODOLJUB JOVANOVIĆ

Reaching Peace by Teaching the War: How History Teachers in Kosovo Teach About the Kosovo War?

— RODOLJUB JOVANOVIĆ

Rodoljub Jovanović holds a PhD cum laude in Human rights: Ethical, Social and Political Challenges (Conflict and Cultures of Peace) from the University of Deusto where he held a Marie Skłodowska-Curie COFUND PhD Fellowship. His research employs an interdisciplinary lens to explore intergroup processes in post-conflict societies, with an emphasis on the role of history education in peacebuilding and reconciliation. He authored several academic publications and policy reports about history education in Western Balkans.

Abstract

In the last couple of decades, peacebuilding literature shifted the focus to reconciliation. Going beyond conflict resolution, which can lead to cold peace, reconciliation is understood as involving sociopsychological processes. Many authors consider reconciling different versions of the past, often existing in past opponent groups, as one of the keys to successfully reaching peace. Because of this, history education, as a place where young generations are presented with the official version of the past, is deemed invaluable for peacebuilding processes in societies with a recent history of violence. However, this does not come without certain challenges. Research on history education in post-conflict societies most often deals with educational media such as textbooks, while exploring how teachers approach these topics is rare. This chapter focuses on the experiences of history teachers working within education in Albanian language in Kosovo in relation to teaching about Kosovo War. Findings show that throughout initial teacher training (ITT) and state organized in-service trainings, history teachers working within education in Albanian language in Kosovo do not get many opportunities to obtain specific skills needed for dealing with difficult topics such as the Kosovo War. Trainings that do provide these skills are organized by non-state actors, sporadic, and include a small number of teachers. In addition, the concepts and teaching methods provided within these seems sometimes to be misinterpreted and erroneously applied in the classroom. More often than not teachers use their personal experiences to complement the lessons about Kosovo War and this practice seems to be leading to a great variety in the type of story students will be presented depending on teachers' age and personal beliefs. Taken together, the findings show that history education, in its current form, can hardly fulfill the goals set in various educational documents.

Introduction

Building a culture of peace in post-conflict societies is a long and uncertain road. Many contextual factors can influence the specific post-conflict reality such as the nature, scope, length, recency and outcome of the conflict, the transitional justice strategies chosen in a society to deal with the past, the overall political system, the degree of foreign involvement in the conflict and conflict settlement, and the strength of civil society (Bentrovato 2017, 62). Nevertheless, education seems to be one of the most important tools that can serve to overcome but also perpetuate the challenges posed by the recent violent past. The importance of educational processes stems from two arguments. One is that educational media are considered an epistemic authority, meaning that their contents are based in scientific discovery and thus highly reliable. The other is that education reaches almost all young people in a society (Bar-Tal 2013)

History education is crucial when it comes to transmitting the stories about the past to future generations in a society. Researchers take different approaches in an effort to understand the role of history education in post-conflict societies. Significant part of research looks into curricula, educational media such as textbooks, and reforms of these. Nevertheless, the research on teachers is often overlooked even though teachers are said to be "far more important to the success or failure of a reform initiative than is generally understood" (Worden 2014, 2) and research focusing on history teachers in post-conflict societies can shed light on how they teach these topics and what actually happens in the classroom (Goldberg 2017; Kello and Wagner 2017; Kitson and McCully 2005). Research on history education in the post-Yugoslav countries focused mostly on history textbooks (Bentrovato et. al. 2016; Koren and Baranović 2009; Ognjenović and Jozelić 2020; Pavasović Trošt 2018; Stojanović 2009; Švigir 2018; Tomljenović 2012) while the research on history teachers is rare (Jovanović and Marić 2020) and more in-depth, qualitative perspective is still missing. Existing research shows history teachers in Kosovo consider "the middle ages"

as the most difficult topic to teach (Jovanović and Marić 2020) signaling they don't really have many difficulties teaching about the recent violent past. This data, however, does not provide deeper understanding of how they approach sensitive topics such as Kosovo War 1998/99.

This chapter offers a qualitative exploration of the ways history teachers working under the program in Albanian language in Kosovo approach the topic of Kosovo War (1998/99). The exploratory qualitative investigation presented in this chapter is guided by the understanding that history teachers in, often fragile, post-conflict contexts have to navigate complex societal influences and frequently censor what they are able to share with their students about the recent violent conflict. In addition, many teachers in post-conflict societies are simultaneously witnesses or even perpetrators of the violence in addition to being teachers. Balancing between their own experiences, memories, and emotions regarding the violence and a scientific approach to history and history teaching sometimes proves to be a difficult task. I will first introduce the educational context of Kosovo, the theoretical connections between history education and peacebuilding and the role of history education in post-conflict societies. After that, I will present previous research on Albanian history textbooks in Kosovo and the findings from the current study.

Kosovo Educational Context

Kosovo is a small landlocked country situated in Southeast Europe with the 2022 population estimate of 1,952,701 (World Factbook n.d.). Out of this number the majority are Albanians, while ethnic Serbs are the second largest ethnic group making around 5-6% of population (Municipal Profiles 2019). Educational system currently de facto consists of two separate educational systems. One under the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of the Republic of Kosovo (hereafter MEST), provides education in Albanian,

Bosnian and Turkish languages. Another, under Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of Serbia, provides education in Serbian language (Community Rights Assessment Report 2021). As of 2018 there are 131 pre-university schools operating under Serbian curriculum in 24 municipalities (Communities Access to Pre-University Education In Kosovo 2018). Since this chapter focuses on history education under MEST conducted in Albanian language (sometimes referred to as Albanian curriculum), all the information in the following sections is referring to this part of the educational system if not otherwise specified.

Pre-university education in Albanian language in Kosovo consists of four stages: pre-school education (age 1-5 years), primary education (age 6-10 years; grades 1-5), lower secondary education (age 11-14; grades 6-9), and upper secondary education (age 15-18; grades 10-12) (Pupovci 2016). This research focuses on the last two, lower and upper secondary education level since within these, history is taught as a separate subject. Since history education is chronological, Kosovo War and the recent history are taught in the last grade of lower secondary education level (grade 9) and last grade of the upper secondary education level (grade 12).

According to the latest issue of the Educational Statistics in Kosovo, in 2020/21 there were 892 primary and lower secondary public educational in-stitutions with 17,353 teachers and 223,908 pupils, and 122 upper secondary public educational institutions with 5,232 teachers and 70,742 pupils in Koso-vo (Education Statistics in Kosovo 2020/21 2021).[1] In addition, there are 5,769 pupils enrolled in primary and lower secondary and 3,645 pupils enrolled in upper secondary private educational institutions (Education Statistics in Kosovo 2020/21 2021). While there is no official source on the number of his-tory teachers according to some assessments there are around 500-600 his-tory teachers on both levels of education.

---

1 This publication does not provide data on Serbian community except for the municipality of Kamenicë/ Kamenica (Education Statistics in Kosovo 2020/21 2021, 3)

Developments in the educational system in Kosovo before the War played an important role in what was to come. After Kosovo autonomy was abolished in 1989 "Serbia adopted a series of laws that annulled Kosovo's educational autonomy" (Kostovicova 2005, 77). This led to the organization of the parallel educational system that ran from January 1992 and within which the "changes in the Albanian curricula for primary and secondary schools allowed an unrestrained expression of Albanian nationhood" (Kostovicova 2005, 130). The parallel system was attended by an estimated 300,000 to 450,000 students (Salihu et. al. 2019). After the War, a kind of a reversal happened where "Serbs were left to devise alternative spatial strategies to continue to provide education in Serbian to the remaining Serbs in Kosovo" (Kostovicova 2005, 211).

Education in Albanian language in Kosovo after 1999 is marked by two major reform drives, one immediately after the war in 2001 and another in 2011. The 2001 reform produced the General Curriculum Framework with eight different curricular areas and was guided by the idea of replacing the existing excessively encyclopedic knowledge. This framework though was never approved (Pupovci 2016). The second educational reform introduced competence-based Kosovo Curriculum Framework in 2011 with seven learning areas: Languages and communication, Arts, Mathematics, Natural sciences, Society and environment, Health and well-being, and Life and work (Curriculum Framework 2011; Pupovci 2016). History, together with some other subjects is part of the learning area society and environment. The way Kosovo Curriculum Framework introduces key competencies as defined by EU recommendations has been described as "loud borrowing . . . education policy-making process in which national authorities deliberately pursue and welcome external policies for both educational and political ends" (Tahirsylaj 2021, 125). The same author concludes, among other things, that "Kosovo's civic competences . . . avoid local ethnic-related controversial issues, and push for a European identity that builds on internationally-promoted democratic citizenship and civic competences" (Tahirsylaj 2021, 126).

History curricula for 9th and 12th grade that roughly covers history of the twentieth century do not go into too much detail on the topic of Kosovo War. History curricula for grade nine covers the War in Kosovo as one of the outcomes ("Explains the causes of the beginning of the Kosovo Liberation War and records its main stages and battles") within the theme "The Albanian Movement for Equality and Freedom - the Birth of a New European State – Kosovo" (Kurrikulat Lëndore - Klasa e nëntë 2020). History curricula for grade 12 also covers it as one of the outcomes (defined in the same way as in the grade nine curricula) within the theme "Kosovo within the Federal Yugoslavia, independence efforts - the birth of a new European state" (Kurrikulat Lëndore - Klasa e dymbëdhjetë 2019). In both cases the theme contains other outcomes related to the position of Albanians in Yugoslavia, peaceful resistance and international factors that contributed to resolving the Kosovo issue.

History Education and Peacebuilding

During the last decades it became evident, and Kosovo is an excellent example of this, that formal peace agreements are unstable, easily collapse, and can lead to cold peace (Bar-Tal 2013). This started moving the attention of peacebuilding scholars away from conflict resolution to include the challenges societies face beyond signing peace treaties that end direct violence. The shift influenced the change in terminology used in the peacebuilding literature. While conflict resolution is an indispensable step in creating conditions for moving forward, more and more authors talk about conflict transformation. The fact that the world saw much more conflicts "between ethnic or other identity groups within a single political unit" in the post-Cold War era (Kelman 2008, 15) produced significant interest in the concept of reconciliation. It is generally agreed that reconciliation is "formation or restoration of a genuine peaceful relationship between societies

that have been involved in an intractable conflict" (Bar-Tal and Bennink 2004, 14). In addition, it is characterized as a voluntary, deliberate, reciprocal, non-linear, long, and gradual process (Bar-Tal 2013).

Quite a few authors see truth and truth-telling as the center of their understanding of reconciliation or one of the integral parts (Asmal et. al. 1996; Kelman 2008; Lederach 1997; Long and Brecke 2003). Teaching students about all relevant events in the past is obviously the task history education has and should have. Furthermore, if history is to work towards reconciliation, it cannot conceal certain uncomfortable truths. According to Kelman (2008), one of the conditions for reconciliation refers to "confronting history" which means coming to terms with the truth, re-examination of historical narratives and re-evaluation of national myths. Developing various critical thinking skills through history education helps them evaluate myths, including national ones. Further definitions of reconciliation deal more specifically with the fact that there are different, often competing interpretations of the same events after the conflict. Asmal defines reconciliation as "facing of unwelcome truths in order to harmonize incommensurable world views so that inevitable and continuing conflicts and differences stand at least within a single universe of comprehensibility" (1996, 46), and Kelman calls for "admitting the other's truth into one's own narrative" (2008, 29). Some understandings of reconciliation openly call for history and its ethical dimension. Reconciliation is said to require "inter-subjective agreements on historical truths and addressing the issue of historical responsibilities for the mass violations of human rights that have occurred in whatever forms" (Rouhana, 2008). However, many post-conflict societies suffer from being frozen in the conflict narratives and overcoming this includes assuming responsibility for past misdeeds and changing the way past rival groups are seen (Bar-Tal 2013)

Methods of reconciliation include, among others, writing a common or joint history that could serve as a "basis for rewriting history textbooks, which can affect the beliefs and attitudes of new generations" (Bar-Tal and Bennink 2004, 31). Thus, although differently understood, reconciliation almost always includes specific elements that could be aided in a significant way

by history education. However, implementing these ideas proves to be a complex task since there are different ways for history education to realize its role in post-conflict societies.

History Education in Post-conflict Societies

History education is an essential element of the reconciliation process. Cole claims that "understandings of history are crucial to a society's ability to reckon with the past for the sake of a more peaceful future." (2007, 13). However, translating the theoretical concepts related to reconciliation to the practice of history teaching and determining the place history education should have in these processes is not an easy task. Cole points out several problems of history education in the context of reconciliation (2007). One is the tension between two competing goals of history education: supporting patriotism and promoting critical thinking. Supporting patriotism has been a primary goal of history education since its early days. This practice started slowly changing only in the second part of the twentieth century to focus more on developing critical thinking (Bermúdez and Carretero 2012; Carretero 2011). This tension is profoundly amplified in post-conflict societies since the critical examination of the recent violent past often stands in direct contradiction to building a positive image of one's group. Related to it is a problem of "clash between the needs of post-conflict or transitional societies and the accurate depiction of a negative past" (Cole 2007, 19). Due to the immense material and human cost of the conflict, societies are in a very fragile state immediately after conflict resolution. Furthermore, depending on various contextual characteristics of the conflict, the initial peace is frequently utterly fragile. For these reasons, there might be a need to balance other psychosocial needs of society with the need for an accurate depiction of the past. The final problem is that history education is only one element in this process, and it can be supported or hindered by many other sites of history learning such as family, museums, the media, etc. (Cole

2007). History education does indeed represent only one of the sources for young people in society to learn about the past, but this in itself does not need to represent a significant obstacle. The problem in post-conflict societies arises when the different versions of the past available outside history classrooms stand in stark opposition to what history as an academic discipline is providing to students through history education.

Following what Barton and Levstik (2004) propose, it is not enough to explore curricular objectives and course requirements, but we need to look into what textbooks say contain and how teachers go about teaching. We know about textbook representations of the past in various societies mainly from the critical tradition of international textbook research, which includes various contributions of independent researchers that focus on certain specific aspects of the textbooks they analyse (Foster 2011). At the heart of critical research is the understanding that textbooks are selectively presenting accounts of the past and textbook authors decide what to include or exclude from the textbooks. As a result, "textbooks have long been a major site for the construction and contestation of national, regional, and international identities and are, understandably, the constant subject of critical study by international scholars" (Foster 2011, 13).

History Textbooks in Kosovo

History textbooks in Kosovo have also been the object of such work. The most comprehensive content analysis of Kosovo history textbook lessons about the Kosovo War was conducted within Gashi's comparative work on history textbooks in several Western Balkan countries. Across several studies Gashi compared history textbooks in Kosovo and Serbia (Gashi 2020), history textbooks in Albania, Kosovo, and Serbia (Gashi 2012), and the representations of Kosovo history in history textbooks in Kosovo, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro

and Macedonia (Gashi 2016). In addition to comparing the historical narratives to each other, the author contrasts them with acclaimed authors writing about Kosovo War as well as reports of various local and international NGO's (Gashi 2012). This kind of analysis revealed several important characteristics, or groups of differences as the author calls them, of the historical narrative in Kosovo history textbooks lessons about the Kosovo War 1998/99. These are: a) Possession of territory, b) The crimes committed by the other side, c) Silent collaboration, d) Distortion of aims, and e) Merging of different strands of thought (Gashi 2020, 80). Since most teachers use these textbooks to teach about the War in Kosovo, I will present this analysis in more detail. Out of the five characteristics *Possession of territory* is derived from the analysis of historical narratives about the period before the war so it will not be presented here.

The first characteristic - *The crimes committed by the other side*, is noted in textbook analysis across the post-Yugoslav space (Jovanović 2020; Šimić 2020; Švigir 2018; Tomljenović 2012). It shows how textbook narratives are exclusively focusing on and exaggerating the crimes committed by the other group while missing out on the opportunity to talk about crimes committed by the own ethnic group and representing "us" as the victim. In the case of Kosovo history textbook lessons about the Kosovo War "there is mention of not a single Serb killed by the KLA and NATO forces during and after the armed conflict" (Gashi 2012, 39). In addition to this, the number of ingroup victims is exaggerated and the author concludes that "the number of those killed [Kosovo Albanians] is thus doubled in the Kosovan textbooks" (Gashi 2012, 40). In addition to this, Gashi points to the fact that Kosovo history textbooks label the crimes committed by Serbian forces as genocide without engaging in the explanation of what this means and ignoring the Kosovo Supreme Court decision that says otherwise (2012, 41).

Another important characteristic is what Gashi calls *Silent collaboration* (2012, 51). This category refers to the fact that in Kosovo, textbook narratives are obscuring any instances of collaboration and agreements between Serbian and Kosovo Albanian political and military representatives such as

for example the agreement on the return of Albanian pupils and students to school and university premises from 1996. The following characteristic is the *Distortion of aims* and it refers to Kosovo history textbooks "exaggerate the aims of Albanian political and military organizations" (Gashi 2012, 52). From the examples the author provides to depict this category it seems that in the current textbook narratives striving for independence is retroactively but falsely ascribed to various organizations that existed in Kosovo. This includes the fact that the textbook is "not mentioning the signing up by Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) representatives to substantive autonomy for Kosova [within the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the FRY]" (Gashi 2020, 76) which diverges from the depiction of KLA in the textbooks, whereas "for the Kosovan textbooks the political platform of the KLA's war was Kosova's freedom and independence" (Gashi 2012, 43).

Merging of different strands of thought is the final characteristic of the Kosovo history textbook narratives according to this analysis (Gashi 2020). This feature represents the tendency of textbook narratives to overlook the disagreements within Kosovo Albanian political and military structures including the division between the passive and active resistance, division between peaceful and military arms of Kosovo politics, and "three conceptualizations of military policy regarding war in Kosova: FARK, LKÇK and KLA" (Gashi 2020, 83). Based on this short overview of the textbook analysis it is easy to agree with the author's conclusion that "the countries are not sowing in the next generation the seeds of reconciliation" (Gashi 2012, 53).

However, most contemporary research considers the textbooks to be only one part of the "complex medial space" (Lässig 2013). Textbooks and other educational resources could be employed in many different ways by teachers. What teachers actually do in the classroom needs to be considered to understand the ways history education influences young peoples' understanding of history. This is exactly the question the current study is aiming to answer.

History Teachers in Post-Conflict Soceities

Authors mainly agree that the way history is taught is as important as the content of history. According to Kello and Wegner, "the style of teaching not only conveys a message about epistemology . . . but also constitutes the history narrative in terms of its content" (2017, 205), and according to Goldberg, how teachers help students engage with the information is as important as the information itself (2017). The role of history teachers in teaching about recent violence in post-conflict societies is of great importance. History teachers, especially when it comes to controversial issues, "are positioned as mediators between different fields or perspectives [. . .] or between different group-bound social memories" (Kello and Wagner 2017, 203). Teachers *action space* is affected by the social and political context, education structures, and past-related scholarship, whereas "teachers' positions towards the different kinds of contexts include their own positions on the social, mnemonic and political landscape, as well as their conceptions of those fields' influences on their students and classrooms" (2017, 204). Many factors influence the way teachers approach controversial topics. Some of them are common to teaching any other topic, such as their knowledge of the topic, pedagogical skills, curricular expectations, etc. However, others stem from specific challenges such as their own position and experiences during the conflict, support from the community, the political climate in society vis-à-vis the recent conflict, etc.

Focusing specifically on history teachers in conflict and post-conflict societies, some authors focus more on the emotions and the effect they have in the classroom when teaching sensitive topics. One recent contribution to this strand of literature deals with teaching about the genocide in Rwanda. The authors investigated teachers' "personal experiences and practices in navigating the emotionally charged nature of delivering the teaching about the genocide" (Bentrovato and Buhigiro 2021, 125) and found that in the everyday discourses and practices of Rwandan teachers' emotions are very salient

and they are often determining factor shaping the experiences of teaching and learning (Bentrovato and Buhigiro, 2021). Most importantly, teachers' pedagogical decisions and choices were shown to be affected by the emotions through the work of emotion management. The findings show several routes teachers take within the "strategy of deliberate selectiveness and limited disclosure" (Bentrovato and Buhigiro 2021, 130).

Other ways to understand how teachers approach controversial topics in post-conflict societies are predominantly cognitive and value oriented. Kello and Wagner suggest that styles of history teaching can be conceptualized as communication styles of the *Social Representations Theory*: *diffusion*, *propagation,* and *propaganda* (Moscovici 2008). *Traditional history teaching* where teachers "represent the past in a way that is determined by some kind of ideology" is understood as propaganda. In contrast, *critical history teaching* that provides "complementary historical interpretations, weighing their evidence and accepting them as possible alternatives" is seen as diffusion (Kello and Wagner 2017, 206). However, the three communication/teaching styles are seen slightly differently than those in Moscovici's theory. The authors see *diffusion* (critical history teaching) and *propaganda* (traditional history teaching) as two ends of the continuum with propagating style covers the space in between and is represented by various teaching approaches. This distinction "focuses on the teachers' intentions, motivations and the limits set by their action space" (Kello and Wagner 2017, 207).

The effects of curricular changes are emphasized by Goldberg (2017), who proposes three teaching styles based on what he refers to as the *curricular pendulum* in Israel. According to this typology, *the official approach* is focused on "a single clear narrative, with a conventional textbook-oriented teaching, and a stress on in-group (Israeli) righteousness"; the *empathetic dual-narrative approach* focuses on "perspective-taking and nonjudgmental acknowledgment of both sides' narratives"; and the *educational reform for higher-order thinking approach* focuses on "critical disciplinary thinking and engagement in historical controversy evaluating and synthesizing conflicting historical accounts of both sides" (2017, 280). The author

concludes that the official approach could be harmful to intergroup relations while the other two approaches seem promising in this regard.

Based on these theoretical considerations the current exploratory study is based on the following question: in which ways history teachers teaching within Albanian system in Kosovo approach teaching about Kosovo War?

Methodology

Overall, twelve history teachers participated in the in-depth interviews conducted for the purposes of this research. The sampling strategy was purposeful, and the main criteria was that participants are working as history teachers within the Albanian educational system in Kosovo. All teachers were contacted through the Kosovo History Teacher Association (Shoqata e Mësimdhënësve të Historisë së Kosovës).[2] Once this criterion was fulfilled, I tried to also include teachers who live and work outside the Kosovo capital, Prishtina, teachers of various age, and teachers teaching at different educational levels (lower secondary and upper secondary). The participation was voluntary, anonymous, and participants consented to the interview. This sampling strategy resulted in a following sample structure. All identify as Albanian, participants' age ranges from 28-59 years, around one half teaches history in Prishtina, four teachers identify as female, the rest as male. Two thirds of participants currently teach history in elementary school however, a few have experience teaching in both during their career or are currently teaching in both, in order to fulfill the norm.

All interviews lasted from one to one and a half hour and were conducted by the author with the help of the translator during fieldwork visit to Kosovo in March 2022. The interview protocol was based on several themes. Initially,

---

2   More info at https://euroclio.eu/member/history-teachers-association-of-kosovo/

participants were asked about some demographic data (age, city they live in, type of school they teach in, etc.). The first theme was related to participants' wartime experiences. The second theme was the initial teacher training, or the university education participants received. Within this topic, special focus was put on the quantity and quality of the training in didactics and teaching methods as opposed to the content. The second theme was in-service teacher training. The discussion included the quantity, quality, and the thematic focus of the in-service teacher trainings as well as the differences in these depending on the training provider (government or non-government entities). Within this theme, the focus was put on the trainings dealing with teaching difficult and sensitive topics such as the Kosovo War. The following, central theme was the way participants approach teaching the Kosovo War in their everyday practice. This theme included various questions and subthemes such as the perception of the curriculum and the textbook lessons about the Kosovo War, what previous knowledge students bring into the classroom, how much of their own wartime experience teachers share with their students, etc.

Some themes emerged from the interviews and were not planned by the author but were embraced as welcomed since teachers seem to ascribe a lot of importance to them. All interviews were transcribed word-for-word and thematic analysis was conducted to identify the dominant recurring themes. The analysis conducted represents the combination of inductive and deductive thematic analysis. It was simultaneously driven by previously discussed theoretical contributions based on research on history teachers in other contexts and the data itself – specific ways participants approach their teaching in Kosovo. This analytical strategy resulted in several recurring themes that will be presented and discussed in the light of these theoretical considerations.

Findings

Training

Initial Teacher Training (hereafter ITT) was one of the first themes discussed with all the teachers and within this theme the focus was on the amount of didactics, teaching methods or possibly psychology and pedagogy courses did their university education involve. The findings confirm what was shown in previous studies (Jovanović and Marić 2020) which is that university education at the BA level for most of the history teachers consisted of just one or maybe two courses dealing with these topics. This course usually includes giving one or sometimes several practice lessons. Some of the participants also have obtained or are in the process of obtaining MA degree within which they spent more time dealing with teaching methods. But MA studies are not obligatory for history teachers. While most teachers agree these courses were useful and prepared them sufficiently for their teaching career, some disagree and state these courses didn't help as much. Whether they assess their ITT as useful for their teaching or had to "learn on the job", they all stated it did not include any special focus on dealing with difficult or sensitive topics such as violent conflict.

On the other hand, the *in-service trainings* did include content related to how to teach sensitive history. Here, the difference between state organized training and non-state organized training is pronounced. It seems that state organized in-service trainings are also not dealing with the topic of war or any topics specifically aimed at history teachers. They appear to be dealing with teaching in a more general way and helping teachers prepare for the implementation of the Curriculum Framework for Pre-university Education. This is not the case with numerous trainings organized by non-governmental organizations. These do offer content particularly tailored for history teachers, and some focus specifically on how to teach difficult or controversial topics such as Kosovo War in order to improve the relationship between different ethnic groups within Kosovo.

One such training, mentioned by many participants during the interviews, is the training organized by New Perspektiva.[3] The training and the webpage developed within the same project named Multi-Perspektiva[4] are based on the need for multiperspectivity in history teaching. The project webpage states two main reasons for this kind of training in Kosovo. One is that "Kosovo is a multi-ethnic society and yet the teaching of history in its schools is based on a single national-centered approach" (Multi-Perspektiva n.d.). This, according to the authors, does not foster the mutual understanding in a multi-ethnic society. The second reason is that "the multi-perspective methodology of teaching history enables students to question and analyse history from a wider perspective" (*Multi-Perspektiva*, n.d.). This methodology is to help them distinguish between facts and interpretations.

Multiperspectivity in history teaching usually refers to the possibility of developing students' understanding that history is not a copy of reality but rather someone's interpretation and that learning history necessitates understanding different interpretations and constructions of the story based on the same event or period. Multi-perspektiva webpage offers three versions (Albanian, Serbian, and international/other) of 25 historical events (or periods) relevant for the history of Kosovo ranging from "Origins of Albanians" to "The International Court of Justice decision on Kosovo, 2010" (*Multi-Perspektiva*, n.d.). All participants who took part in this training assessed this experience as very positive, and especially interesting since it allowed them to meet Kosovo Serb colleagues and cooperate with them in this workshop.

However, several teachers seem to misinterpret the basic concept of this approach. One of them, after describing one of the workshop exercises, concludes "but I'm not the one who does not accept the truth . . . I'm not the one who says the truth is not like this" (Musli)[5]. Another teacher explained how he uses this material in his class, but students assigned with presenting the

3 More on New Perspektiva at **https://www.new-perspektiva.com**
4 Available at **https://multi-perspektiva.com/en/home2-0/**
5 Pseudonyms are used throughout the chapter

Serbian perspective try to distance themselves from it as much as they can. In addition, the same teacher, answering the question about the results of such an exercise on the topic of the Battle of Kosovo says:

> "In this topic, they have seen two different perspectives, the Serbian perspective and our perspective or Albanian perspective and they start to understand that they (Serbian perspective) are trying to manipulate what happened in order to legitimate what they were, what they are trying to do. A lot of people who took part in the battle, they deform their names and showcase them as Serbs." (Faton)

It appears some participants use several versions of one event or period to "prove" that there is one true version, and it is the version of their ethnic group. In the following quote the teacher explains the way he is using the multiperspective material:

> "To be honest, I teach, I teach it to the students, the Serbian perspective about the war, about the KLA . . . but all the time I tried to convince them that our own perspective is more correct" (Ardian)

It seems that while participants do embrace multiperspective approach to history teaching, implement the exercises, and use the materials they were provided with in the training, they miss the opportunity to bring home the crucial point which is

> "understanding that we too have a perspective which has been filtered through our own cultural context, reflects our own standpoint and interpretation of what has happened and why, our own view of what is and is not relevant, and may also reflect other prejudices and biases" (Stradling, 2003, 13).

Teacher as a Primary Source

One important theme was the way teachers perceive the *textbook* lessons about the war in Kosovo currently in use. As compared to most post-Yugoslav contexts where there are several publishers and teachers have the freedom to choose the textbook they want to use, there is only one state approved textbook in Albanian language educational system in Kosovo. The majority of participants reported on using the textbook lessons as the base for the classes about the war and sometimes complementing it with additional material where they see necessary. Most participants agreed the lessons about the war in Kosovo are few, short and relatively superficial, some pointed out the lack of additional sources and the need for more detailed representation of some events. However, none commented on any of the characteristics of the textbooks found in the previously presented textbook analysis (Gashi, 2012, 2016, 2020).

One of the sources almost all participants reported on using to complement the textbook lessons on the war in Kosovo were their personal wartime experiences. In the words of one of the participants: "Now, I am the primary source" (Musli). All reported remembering certain personal experiences from the war and these obviously varied depending on the age of participants (the youngest 28 and the oldest 59 years old). When doing so, almost without exception, participants stated they edit their personal experience stories in order not to cause emotional harm to their students. They tend to take out the scenes of extreme violence they witnessed and adjust the story depending on the age of their students:

> "[it is] because of the age of the students, I don't tell them the same [way] I would tell a friend" (Mirlind)

> ". . . but when I tell it to the students, I try to remember something that was good from that time, for example, I tell them how I celebrated this one birthday, when I was a refugee. Stuff that I can find . . . the good in that time period" (Faton)

"Sometimes I talk about my own experiences as well and I try to make it seem less harsh" (Xhevahire)

"Yes, for example, because I also have like . . . members of my family were killed and for example, there are also missing and things like that, but these kinds of things I don't talk with the children and during my lesson in the class" (Agim)

"My own personal experience and my family's experience even though it was not very good, we didn't lose anyone from our families. I try to transmit my whole experience to the students." (Kreshnik)

Furthermore, teachers also censor and edit what they discuss in class regarding the Kosovo War depending on the knowledge they have about the community in which they teach or the information they gather from the students before starting this lesson:

"I know who students are by the last name and then I can tell if they are from a family that suffered a lot" (Hetem)

". . . they say that we know it this way, this different way; we know it in this way; this is how my grandparents told me . . . when we start, I ask a measuring question; when I start a lesson, I ask a question that measures. In order to see how much info they have. So, I know where to go" (Xhevahire)

"For example, when we mentioned the massacres. There may be someone whose family member or someone who is near relative was in a massacre or came from the massacre and survived it. I ask them beforehand" (Minire)

What teachers share and the way they share it also depends on what students come with to the class. Based on participants' experiences, the interest of

new generations in these topics is in constant decrease. Participants with more experience, when asked if students are interest in the topics of Kosovo War, confirmed that a sort of a *generational change* is happening:

> "Rrahman: It has changed and it's continuously changing.
> Interviewer: Can you tell me which way? How?
> Rrahman: It's a new generation that doesn't show a lot of interest about the past"

> "In 2002 when they would come to class, they were part of the war and now the younger generations or generations that were born in 2005, 2006. For them the war is . . . an example starting from my own experience . . . for them it is what watching the Otpisani was for me[6]" (Musli)

> ". . . the generation after the war, they did know more, but right now, these generations that are coming, they know just a little bit and maybe I can say not so much" (Agim)

However, students are still interested to understand certain aspects of the recent history. Most participants reported students are curious about the way their teachers personally saw the war asking questions such as: "have you had direct contact with Serbian forces?" (Mirlind), "how did you experience the war, how did you experience leaving your home" (Rrahman), "How did you learn? Were you afraid? How did you organise?" (Agim). These quotes testify to the interest of students in the everyday aspects of the war.

There is an additional teaching practice that involves all teachers, not only history teachers, sharing their interpretation of these historical events. Many participants, when asked about possible extracurricular activities related to teaching the Kosovo war, talked about the special classes, organized sev-

---

6 Otpisani is a famous Serbian TV show about the group of freedom fighters in Belgrade during the WW2 that originally aired in 1974

eral times a year, on the days commemorating important events. There are three such days: Independence Day (February 17th), Flag Day (November 28th), and March 5th-7th commemoration of the Jashari massacre.[7] On each of these days, first class is dedicated to talking about these events and this involves all (not only history) teachers. However, there is no training or written text they are supposed to use but rather each teacher prepares something or talks about what they know. Many participants concluded that "everyone knows" about these events and there is no need to give them any special instructions.

Here we see the different sources teachers use in their classes and the ways they understand their quality. Textbook, with all its flaws, is still the main material used in the history lessons of most interviewed teachers. While teachers are critical of the certain aspects of the textbook in use (length of lessons, depth, number of sections dedicated to the Kosovo war), they fail to recognize and comment on some of the narrative practices and even inaccuracies (such as the number of victims) identified in textbook analysis (Gashi, 2012, 2016, 2020).

Another important source they use to complement the textbook are teachers' own experiences. Participants report on editing and censoring these depending on what they understand to be appropriate for the certain age group and the knowledge they have about the experiences of students' families. This points to the additional effort history teachers need to invest in understanding their students in order to navigate emotionally sensitive content. Still, they have complete freedom to choose what additional content will find its place in the history lesson about the Kosovo war. In a similar manner, other subject teachers have the opportunity couple of times a year to share their knowledge and experiences related to this period. These kinds of practices, given they fall outside of the prescribed curriculum, leave a significant amount of space for potentially problematic interpretations of the recent violent past.

---

7   More on the importance of Jashari massacre in (Lellio & Schwandner-Sievers, 2006)

History Education and Peacebuilding

Finally, all participants were asked to share their attitude on the role history education has in building peace, especially (re)building and normalizing relationships between different ethnic groups in Kosovo. Most agree history education is important however, according to them history education should not be political and history education can't go beyond politics. This relationship between what many participants refer to as "politics" and history education is clear in Ardian's words: "The history education can contribute to peace . . . but the main change should come from politics". Once the relationships between different ethnic groups were mentioned, most participants commented that this topic enters the realm of politics they would like to keep away from. In these cases, I probed further on the relationship between politics and history education and from these discussions an interesting finding emerged. Ardian continues to explain what exactly needs to happen in the realm of politics for history education to move forward:

> "At first, change, I think, should come from the politics . . . because every day in our TV, there are news that Serbia does not have a good approach towards Kosovo [. . .] I would like to have a long term stability [. . .] The solution would be if the Serbs that live Kosovo, would recognise Kosovo . . . and Serbia as a country recognized Kosovo as well . . . And if this happens, I think that we would have a long term piece and not just in the aspect of society, but as well history." (Ardian)

Finally, an interesting finding emerged from the discussions connecting participants using their personal experience as a resource for teaching and the potential of history education to foster peacebuilding. Most of the older teachers said that, when they discuss Kosovo war, they try to include some "positive" experiences they had with the members of the Serbian community before the war – memories of peaceful coexistence in the local community, street, village, workplace. This is how one participant explains why he thinks it is important to talk about these experiences:

> "Rrahman: I think that we shouldn't talk only about the war topic, but also about topics which showcase the good relationship that we had. I remember, from my own experience as a kid in the 70es. It's important.
> Interviewer: So, you tell students about your experiences of living together. With Serbs, Montenegrins?
> Rrahman: Yes!"

Another participant shares what she tells her students in order to showcase the hardship of war for all sides involved and how ordinary people suffer on all sides:

> "In this case I mention personal experience . . . that there's been a lot of Albanians and Serbs that did not did not want the war. For example, I live in a building and there I had a lot of Serbian neighbours . . . and during the war we asked them to protect us, as Albanians . . . and after the war, the ones that were left there have asked us the same thing, us to protect them . . . and I tell students that it was not easy for them to stay here . . ." (Hysnie)

These examples shed additional light on what personal experiences teachers could potentially include in their lessons however, these types of stories are only available to older generations of teachers. None of the younger participants reported on sharing any such stories with their students.

Discussion

Findings presented provide a more detailed look at how history teachers working under Albanian curriculum teach about the Kosovo war and together with the textbook analysis start to reveal the bigger picture of the Albanian language history education in Kosovo. In this section I will draw connections between

the findings and the literature on the history education's role in reconciliation in post-conflict societies.

What participants reported on doing in the classroom bears resemblance to what Goldberg calls *the official approach* to history education - "a single clear narrative, with a conventional textbook-oriented teaching, and a stress on in-group righteousness" (2017, 280). This is mostly evident from the fact that most participants reported on using the textbook as the base for their lessons. While they did talk about various shortcomings of the textbook such as superficiality or amount of space dedicated to lessons about the war in Kosovo, none of them seem to have a problem with any of the characteristics of these lessons found in the textbook analysis (Gashi, 2012, 2016, 2020). Maybe most surprisingly is the fact that, although many participants pleaded for fact-based teaching and the role of truth, none of the interviewees mentioned that "the number of those [Kosovo Albanians] killed is thus doubled in the Kosovan textbooks" (Gashi, 2012, 40) or that Kosovo history textbooks label the crimes committed by Serbian forces as genocide ignoring the Kosovo Supreme Court decision that says otherwise (2012, 41).

It is possible to simultaneously identify some elements of what Goldberg calls *educational reform for higher-order thinking approach*: "critical disciplinary thinking and engagement in historical controversy evaluating and synthesizing conflicting historical accounts of both sides" (2017, 280). But these seem to be restricted by several factors. On one hand, there is a limited number of trainings on dealing with controversial topics. These types of training for history teachers are non-existent within the initial teacher training while within in-service training they are also not to be found among the state-organized trainings. The opportunities for teachers to learn how to deal with sensitive histories such as Kosovo war are sporadic, project-driven NGO organized trainings with a limited reach. On the other hand, as we saw this in the example of applying multiperspective approach to history teaching, it seems quite a few teachers misinterpret the key ideas these trainings are based on. These findings underscore the need for more trainings focused on development of critical disciplinary thinking and engagement in historical controversy.

Strikingly, all participants reported on using their personal wartime experiences in teaching about the Kosovo War. Most participants engage in this practice to complement the information they see missing from the textbook and to respond to the curiosity of their students. And while we know from the literature that "teachers' positions towards the different kinds of contexts include their own positions on the social, mnemonic and political landscape, as well as their conceptions of those fields' influences on their students and classrooms" (Kello & Wagner, 2017, 204) it seems that the studied participants use their personal experiences to a great extent. This situation could lead to a great variety in the type of story students will be presented as part of their compulsory history lessons about Kosovo war.

Based on the findings we can see that teachers often navigate a complicated network of personal experiences, family and community histories, and possible emotional "landmines" while discussing the Kosovo war with their students. Almost without exception, participants reported on editing and censoring their lessons in order not to stir up students' emotions based on their knowledge of the specific community experiences, their knowledge of family experiences of their students, their understanding of what could by psychologically harmful for students of certain age, and their own understanding of what the role of history education should be. As shown in the case of Rwanda, Kosovo Albanian teachers' pedagogical decisions and choices also seem to be affected by the emotions through the work of emotion management (Bentrovato and Buhigiro 2021, 130).

As showed in the findings, some teachers use the examples of peaceful co-existence and wartime solidarity to demonstrate to their students that "not everyone is the same" and that "the war hurts people on all sides". However, this kind of approach is only available to older teachers who actually lived these kinds of experiences. Once again, it seems that providing more training opportunities for teachers with a specific focus on how to navigate and balance between their own experiences and the curricular requirements would allow for history education that has better chance at working towards reconciliation.

Taken together, these findings allow for some conclusions about Albanian language history education in Kosovo. We could use the three challenges history education faces in post-conflict societies proposed by Cole (2007) to better describe Albanian language history education in Kosovo. The first challenge, the tension between supporting patriotism and promoting critical thinking, seems pronounced due to the specific nature of the post-conflict context of Kosovo where the post-conflict transition led to the creation of the new state. Thus, it is understandable that promoting critical thinking and balancing these two needs within history education is maybe more difficult than in some other contexts. The second challenge, the clash between the needs of post-conflict or transitional societies and the accurate depiction of a negative past, is clearly prominent. What Albanian history teachers in Kosovo include in the lessons about the Kosovo war is to a large extent determined by their eagerness to protect their students from intense emotional reactions or secondary traumatization. Additionally, we see some teachers balancing between these two groups of needs through the way they understand the role of history education in peacebuilding and its relationship with what they refer to as politics. What they see the need of their country is, at least for some teachers, determines the way they engage with teaching recent violent history.

Finally, the third challenge history education faces in post-conflict societies happens when the different versions of the past available outside history classrooms stand in stark opposition to what history as an academic discipline is providing to students through history education (Cole, 2007). Findings in Kosovo paint a different picture. It seems that within Albanian educational system in Kosovo there is little opposition between versions of past that exist outside the classroom and ones presented within history education. This can be seen from the fact that many teachers share their personal experiences to complement history lessons thus in a way blurring the line between academic history and lived experiences.

Going back to different definitions of reconciliation introduced at the beginning of this chapter we see that the potential of history education to help this process in the case of Albanian language educational system in Kosovo is not fully realized. According to Asmal, reconciliation involves "facing of

unwelcome truths in order to harmonize incommensurable world views so that inevitable and continuing conflicts and differences stand at least within a single universe of comprehensibility" (1996, 46). For Kelman, on the other hand, reconciliation is "admitting the other's truth into one's own narrative" (2008, 29). While it is clear these represent difficult and demanding tasks, they are nevertheless crucial having in mind the Council of Europe recommendations from the Resolution on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in Kosovo:

> "Prioritise comprehensive and concrete efforts to promote interethnic dialogue and tolerance at central and local level in order to bridge divides between communities and promote reconciliation while taking into account that the Kosovo Albanian majority has a special responsibility in this regard" (According to Community Rights Assessment Report 2021, 43)

Given the current findings, history teachers working under Albanian language education system in Kosovo could benefit from a coordinated training efforts focused on teaching controversial and sensitive topics, primarily the Kosovo war. These efforts should be made within the initial teacher training and in-service teacher training, both provided by the state and non-state actors. Given the recency of the conflict and the fact that it influenced most of the population, these trainings should focus on helping history teachers navigate complicated relationship between their personal experiences and their history lessons about this period.

References

Asmal, K., Asmal, L., & Roberts, R. S. 1996. *Reconciliation through truth: A reckoning of apartheid's criminal governance*. David Philip Publishers, in association with Mayibue Books, University of the Western Cape.

Bar-Tal, D. 2013. *Intractable conflicts: Socio-psychological foundations and dynamics*. Cambridge University Press.

Bar-Tal, D., & Bennink, G. H. 2004. The Nature of Reconciliation as an Outcome and as a Process. In Y. Bar-Siman-Tov, Ed., *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, 11–38. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195166439.003.0002

Bentrovato, D. 2017. History Textbook writing in Post-conflict Societies: From Battlefield to Site and Means of Conflict Transformation. In C. Psaltis, M. Carretero, & S. Čehajić-Clancy, Eds., *History Education and Conflict Transformation*, 37–76. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54681-0

Bentrovato, D., & Buhigiro, J.-L. 2021. Mediating Emotive Knowledge in the Presence of Historical Trauma: Emotions in History Teachers' Everyday Discourses and Practices around Genocide Education in Rwanda. In D. Bentrovato & J. Wassermann, Eds.), *Teaching African history in schools: Experiences and perspectives from Africa and beyond*, 124–150. Brill | Sense.

Bentrovato, D., Korostelina, K. V., & Schulze, M., Eds. 2016. *History can bite: History education in divided and postwar societies*. V & R unipress.

Bermúdez, A., & Carretero, M. 2012. Constructing Histories. In J. Valsiner, Ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Culture and Psychology*, 1st ed., 625–646. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195396430.001.0001

Carretero, M. 2011. *Constructing patriotism: Teaching history and memories in global worlds*. Information Age Pub.

Cole, E. A., Ed. 2007. *Teaching the violent past: History education and reconciliation*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers : In cooperation with the Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs.

Communities Access to Pre-University Education In Kosovo. 2018. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe - Mission in Kosovo.

Community Rights Assessment Report, 5th Edition, 58. 2021. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe - Mission in Kosovo. https://www.osce.org/mission-in-kosovo/493675

Curriculum Framework for Pre-University Education in the Republic of Kosovo. 2011. Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.

Education Statistics in Kosovo 2020/21, 98. 2021. Kosovo Agency of Statistics. https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/6073/education-statistics-20202021.pdf

Foster, S. 2011. Dominant Traditions in International Textbook Research and Revision. *Education Inquiry*, *2*(1), 5–20. https://doi.org/10.3402/edui.v2i1.21959

Gashi, S. 2012. *Kosova 1912-2000 in the History Textbooks of Kosova, Albania and Serbia*. KAHCR-Kosovar Association for Human and Children's Rights.

Gashi, S. 2016. *The History of Kosovo in the history textbooks of Kosovo, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia*.

Gashi, S. 2020. Kosova Under Yugoslavia (1945–1999) in the History Textbooks of Kosova and Serbia. In G. Ognjenović & J. Jozelić, Eds., *Nationhood and Politicization of History in School Textbooks: Identity, the Curriculum and Educational Media*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-38121-9

Goldberg, T. 2017. The Official, The Empathetic and The Critical: Three Approaches to History Teaching and Reconciliation in Israel. In C. Psaltis, M. Carretero, & S. Čehajić-Clancy, Eds., *History Education and Conflict Transformation*, 277–300. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54681-0

Jovanović, R. 2020. Intercultural Education in Post-conflict Societies: Historical Narratives of the Break-up of Yugoslavia in Serbian High School History Textbooks. In C. Pica-Smith, C. N. Veloria, & R. M. Contini (Eds.), *Intercultural education: Critical perspectives, pedagogical challenges and promising practices*, 183–215. Nova Science Publishers, Inc.

Jovanović, R., & Marić, D. 2020. Controversy in the Classroom: How History Teachers in the Western Balkans Approach Difficult Topics? *Journal of Curriculum Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2020.1780326

Kello, K., & Wagner, W. 2017. History Teaching as 'Propaganda'? Teachers' Communication Styles in Post-Transition Societies. In C. Psaltis, M. Carretero, & S. Čehajić-Clancy, Eds., *History Education and Conflict Transformation: Social Psychological Theories, History Teaching and Reconciliation*, 201–230. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54681-0_8

Kelman, H. C. 2008. Reconciliation From a Social-Psychological Perspective. In A. Nadler, T. Malloy, & J. D. Fisher, Eds., *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Reconciliation*, 15–32. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195300314.003.0002

Kitson, A., & McCully, A. 2005. 'You hear about it for real in school.' Avoiding, containing and risk-taking in the classroom. *Teaching History*, *120*, 32–37.

Koren, S., & Baranović, B. 2009. *What Kind of History Education Do We Have after Eighteen Years of Democracy in Croatia? Transition, Intervention, and History Education Politics (1990-2008)*, A. Dimou, Ed., 91–140. V and E unipress.

Kostovicova, D. 2005. *Kosovo: The politics of identity and space*. Routledge. http://www.myilibrary.com?id=30265

Kurrikulat Lëndore/Programet Mësimore—Klasa e dymbëdhjetë. 2019. Ministria e Arsimit dhe Shkencës.

Kurrikulat Lëndore/Programet Mësimore—Klasa e nëntë. 2020. Ministria e Arsimit dhe Shkencës.

Lässig, S. 2013. Introduction part 1: Post-conflict reconciliation and joint history textbook projects. In K. V. Korostelina & S. Lässig, Eds., *History education and post-conflict reconciliation: Reconsidering joint textbook projects*. Routledge.

Lederach, J. P. 1997. *Building peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. United States Institute of Peace Press.

Lellio, A. D., & Schwandner-Sievers, S. 2006. The Legendary Commander: The construction of an Albanian master-narrative in post-war Kosovo*. *Nations and Nationalism*, *12*(3), 513–529. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2006.00252.x

Long, W. J., & Brecke, P. 2003. *War and reconciliation: Reason and emotion in conflict resolution*. MIT Press.

Moscovici, S. 2008. *Psychoanalysis: Its image and its public*. Polity.

Multi-Perspektiva, Home page. (n.d.). [Multi-Perspektiva]. Multi-Perspektiva. https://multi-perspektiva.com/en/home2-0/

Municipal Profiles 2018, 112. 2019. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. https://www.osce.org/files/Municipal%20Profiles_2018.pdf

Ognjenović, G., & Jozelić, J. Eds. 2020. *Nationhood and Politicization of History in School Textbooks: Identity, the Curriculum and Educational Media*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-38121-9

Pavasović Trošt, T. 2018. Ruptures and continuities in nationhood narratives: Reconstructing the nation through history textbooks in Serbia and Croatia: Ruptures and continuities in nationhood narratives. *Nations and Nationalism*, *24*(3), 716–740. https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12433

Pupovci, D. 2016. Kosovo: An overview. In T. Sprague, Ed., *Education in non-EU countries in Western and Southern Europe: Edited by Terra Sprague*, 177–204. Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Rouhana, N. 2008. Reconciling History and Equal Citizenship in Israel: Democracy and the Politics of Historical Denial. In W. Kymlicka & B. Bashir, Eds., *The politics of reconciliation in multicultural societies*. Oxford University Press.

Salihu, A., Terziqi, D., & Schaffer, E. 2019. Kosovo Education in the 21st Century: A Challenging Future. In N. Popov Ed, C. Wolhuter Ed, L. De Beer Ed, G. Hilton Ed, J. Ogunleye Ed, E. Achinewhu-Nworgu Ed, & E. Niemczyk Ed, Eds., *Glocal Education in Practice: Teaching, Research, and Citizenship. BCES Conference Books, Volume 17*. Bulgarian Comparative Education Society. Blvd Shipchenski prohod 69 A, 1574 Sofia, Bulgaria. e-mail: info@bces-conference.org; Web site: http://www.bces-conference.org.

Šimić, G. 2020. To Believe or Not to Believe: Current History Textbooks in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In G. Ognjenović & J. Jozelić, Eds., *Nationhood and Politicization of History in School Textbooks: Identity, the Curriculum and Educational Media*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-38121-9

Stojanović, D. 2009. Slow Burning: History Textbooks in Serbia, 1993–2008. *Transition" and the Politics of History Education in Southeast Europe*, 141–158.

Stradling, R. 2003. *Multiperspectivity in history teaching: A guide for teachers*. Council of Europe.

Švigir, D. 2018. Slika „drugoga": Predodžbe o Srbima u hrvatskim udžbenicima povijesti za osnovnu školu od 1990. Do 2012. Godine. *Historijski zbornik*, *71*(1), 105–134.

Tahirsylaj, A. 2021. What kind of citizens? Constructing 'Young Europeans' through loud borrowing in curriculum policy-making in Kosovo. *Comparative Education*, *57*(1), 115–129. https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2020.1845066

Tomljenović, A. 2012. Slika Hrvata u srpskim i Srba u hrvatskim udžbenicima povijesti za osnovu školu. *Povijest u Nastavi*, *X*(19 (1)), 1–32.

Worden, E. A. 2014. *National identity and educational reform: Contested classrooms*. Routledge.

World Factbook—Kosovo. (n.d.). CIA. Retrieved 9 May 2022, from https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/kosovo/#people-and-society

ADELINA HASANI

Activists' Commitment for Peace and Solidarity in Kosovo and Serbia

— ADELINA HASANI

Adelina Hasani is co-founder and chief editor of Prizma Medium. She received her PhD degree in International Relations from the University of Ankara. She graduated from the Faculty of Political Science of the University of Ankara University and received her Master degree in Human Rights and Democracy in South East Europe at Bologna University (ERMA). She worked in local organizations dealing with social-economic development and women empowerment in all political and social processes.

Abstract

This study intends to analyse the reasons for the lack of organic cooperation among the new generation of activists in Kosovo and Serbia and how they distinguished themselves from the older generation. Cooperation among activists in Kosovo and Serbia especially during and after the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia has played significant role to bring peace and solidarity to the region. During the 1990s activists in Serbia and Kosovo have developed an organic cooperation for activism against the war and the oppressive Milosevic regime. The solidarity and organic cooperation among activists in Kosovo and Serbia amounted to a political refusal to follow oppressive state orders and served as an alternative scene and aspiring frame for activism. However, after the 2000s cooperation among activists in Kosovo and Serbia was not as vibrant as it was during the 1990s. Instead, collaboration among activists continued in the framework of NGOs cooperation, mostly through loose networks, support and solidarity. The lack of a stable political dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, and unresolved political issues between the two countries, are considered as major problems that hinder the development of an organic cooperation among activists. On the other hand, the nationalist master narrative dominating public discourse in Kosovo and Serbia contributes to the rise of barriers between the two societies.

Introduction

Feminist activists in the former Yugoslavia have played a significant role in the social and political transformation of the societies. Especially after the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, their roles were noticeable in their attempt to bring peace and solidarity to the whole region. Worth mentioning are the protests of activists in both Kosovo and Serbia as well as the cooperation among feminist activists in the region against the Slobodan Milosevic regime, which emerged during the break-up of the former Yugoslavia. The women's peace coalition was composed of the Kosovo Women's Network, the Women in Black Network – and groups from Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Italy, Spain, Israel and others. This coalition was the result of solidarity, support, and cooperation among women in the region. The network of women in the former Yugoslavia existed especially during the war. The Women in Black Network emerged as an activists' network in 1991. There were many feminists and activists from Kosovo and Serbia that chose peace and cooperation in the midst of war. The activists had managed to find an organic communication to combat the regime and to provide a common space where they could talk together. Feminist activists in Serbia fought for the rights of the women, refugees, and national minorities. More precisely, women who put gender identity before their national one - have been labeled as traitors of the Serbian nation mostly by radical nationalist groups in Serbia. In this regard, combating denial and apathy in Serbia as well as breaking the silence when the war occurred in the former Yugoslavia, seemed to be a central challenge for many anti-war groups (Fridman 2011, 509).

Feminist activists have been independently organized even before the wars started in the former Yugoslavia. In the 1980s, becoming actively involved in supporting women's rights and inventing their roles in anti-war activism. As a result of their cooperation, in 1987, the First National Feminist Conference of Yugoslavia was held in Slovenia, where their position against state nation-alisms was highlighted as: united in sisterhood by not recognizing artificial

male boundaries and staying united against nationalisms (Batinic 2001, 6). The dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia through violent conflicts meant that the transition from war to peace had a central, sometimes even an exclusive position in the understanding of post-Yugoslav social relations, while other aspects of transition such as cooperation among activists and resistance of activists against the wars, were less prominent and discussed.

However, after the wars following the break-up of the former Yugoslavia cooperation among activists and feminists in Kosovo and Serbia occurred without formalized relations, often through loose networks of support and sisterhood. Still, some cooperations developed among youth initiatives and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Kosovo and Serbia. Nevertheless, cooperations among CSOs in Kosovo and Serbia after the 2000s, did not succeed in establishing organic cooperation among activists. As Adriana Zaharijevic, senior research fellow at the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory in Belgrade has well pointed out, "it is essential to figure out how we can contribute in the formation of communities that are defined beyond the ethnic identities, communities or territories, which was the main issue after the break-up of the former Yugoslavia" (Zaharijevic 2016, 482).

Activists' and feminists' contribution to peace in the former Yugoslavia has been neglected by the societies in the Balkans. This research intends to emphasize the political potential of feminists and activists in Kosovo and Serbia to develop an alternative narrative that goes beyond ethnic division and the dominant nationalist narrative. By interviewing current activists and feminists from both Kosovo and Serbia, this paper aims to analyse why there is a lack of organic cooperation among activists in Kosovo and Serbia and how/why their activism is different from that of the 1990s. By analysing the current collaboration among activists in Kosovo and Serbia, this paper aims to also shed light on the anti-war activism during the 1990s among feminists in Kosovo and Serbia against the Milosevic regime.

The paper highlights the differences of new activists from the 1990s generation, by focusing on the experience and memory of the new generation. Orli

Fridman offered the most extensive account of anti-war (anti-denial) activism in Serbia and regional solidarity against the Milosevic regime. Moreover, there are many studies conducted so far by various researchers about coalitions among activists and anti-war activism during the break-up of the former Yugoslavia. The aim of the research is to contribute to this body of knowledge by analysing the reasons for the lack of organic cooperation among the new generation of activists in Kosovo and Serbia, as well as their recollection of the regional activists' solidarity during the 1990s. As the collective memory plays an essential role in the process of identity formation, it is vital to investigate what the new generations memorize from the regional cooperation and how they distinguish themselves from their parents' generation.

The paper focuses on three main research questions:
1. Why is there a lack of cooperation among activists in Kosovo and Serbia?
2. How do new activists differentiate their activism from that of the 1990s?
3. Which are the spheres of cooperation among activists that could go beyond the dominant nationalist narrative?

The research is based on a qualitative methodological approach. The data has been gathered from semi–structured interviews and desk research, whereby the former informs the empirical core of this research. Semi-structured interviews have been conducted with feminists and activists from Kosovo and Serbia. A total of eight such interviews have been conducted. In order to understand the reasons for the lack of cooperation among current activists in Kosovo and Serbia, and how the latter remember the activism of the 1990s in the region, the new generation of activists in Kosovo and Serbia have been interviewed. Desk research has been used as a secondary source for consulting academic articles on cooperation among activists during the war. Further analysis was done through research, documents, and reports that address the cooperation among activists and feminists in Kosovo and Serbia during the 1990s and after the 2000s.

The paper is structured in three parts. The first part provides the reader with a historical background of activists' cooperation in Kosovo and Serbia against the

Milosevic regime following the break-up of the former Yugoslavia. The second part of the paper focuses on explaining why there is a lack of cooperation among young activists in Kosovo and Serbia and how they differentiate their activism from that of the 1990s. The final part of the paper analyses the possibilities of developing a new master narrative among activists in Kosovo and Serbia, which go beyond the nationalist narrative by exploring new fields of cooperation.

An Overview of Activists' Cooperation Following the Break-up of the Former Yugoslavia

During the 1990s, feminists and activists in Kosovo and Serbia contributed to regional cooperation and the peace-building process by documenting human rights violations during the wars in the former Yugoslavia, by organizing peaceful demonstrations, and by combating the nationalist narrative and the Milosevic regime. However, three decades after the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, the memory of the cross-national activists' cooperation in the region against the Milosevic regime, is still missing in the public discourse and collective memory of Kosovo and Serbia.

In 1989, Serbia revoked Kosovo's autonomy within Yugoslavia by changing the constitution, which was followed up with repressive measures and police brutality against the Albanian population. The abolition of Kosovo's autonomy within the former Yugoslavia in 1989 was the turning point in the political and social life in Kosovo, as it led to the Albanians' civil resistance movement from the late 1980s to the early 1990s (Pula 2005, 5).[1] In response to the mass demonstration, the Serbian authorities introduced a state of emergency and new measures which discriminated against Albanians and

---

1 Kosovo gained the most advanced status of an autonomous province of Serbia in 1974.

led to their marginalization in social and political life in the country (Malcolm 1989). As will be argued below, the civil activism in Kosovo and activists' cooperation in Kosovo and Serbia during the 1990s are interrelated with the civil resistance movement in Kosovo against the Milosevic regime. The main aim of civil activism and peaceful movement in Kosovo was to establish a safe environment for people living in Kosovo and to abolish the oppressive Milosevic regime.

The nonviolent civil resistance in Kosovo started to rise with the miners' protests between 1988–1989 and with the escalation of violence against the Albanian population in Kosovo. The lack of any references to the Kosovo issue in the Dayton Accords that were signed in 1995 and ended the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina gave the rise to activists' determination to break up the passive resistance (Mujika Chao 2020, 844), led by Ibrahim Rugova, the leader of the political party Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK). In 1996, a Kosovo Albanian student was killed by a Serb civilian sniper, which brought reactions among Kosovo Albanians (Clark, 2000, 123). Thousands of women took to the streets to protest the killing and against the Milosevic regime (KGSC 2004, 104-105), contrary to the advice of the LDK. In 1997, Albanian students organized a massive demonstration in Kosovo, demanding the return of the Albanian students and professors at the University. As Clark recalled, this demonstration switched from the 'passive nonviolence' activism led by Ibrahim Rugova, to the 'active nonviolence' activism in Kosovo (Clark 2000). On International Women's Day in 1998, around 15,000 women in Kosovo protested against human rights violations in front of the American Center in Prishtina. Moreover, on 16 March 1998, women in Kosovo organized a demonstration entitled 'Bread for Drenica''[2] against the military siege of Drenica. The demonstration became the symbol of women's resistance and activism against the oppressive Milosevic regime.

Feminist activists played an important role in the collective uprising against war in the former Yugoslavia, despite the fact that they were unpopular as

2 AP Archieve, "Kosovo: Albanian Women Protesters Truned Back By Serbian Police," 1998, http://www.aparchive.com/metadata/youtube/97274b579371816d69458367cfe8f061

political activists especially in Serbia, mostly by being labeled as 'pro–Western', traitors, and 'enemy of the state' (Batinic 2001, 5). During the 1990s wars, a group of activists in Serbia opposed nationalism by striving to have their voice not only heard, but also matter (Fridman 2011, 507-522). This prominent group of activists in Serbia against the regime and wars in the former Yugoslavia was Women in Black. They held silent protests every Wednesday afternoon, expressing their opposition to the war, the Serbian regime and its militarism, and violence against women (Batinic 2001, 6). Between 1997 and 1999, activists protested against the war in Kosovo and the apartheid that the ethnic Albanian population was subjected to, expressing solidarity with the nonviolent and women's movements in Kosovo. In this regard, Women in Black played a remarkable role in piercing the political silence and the denial of Serbian state aggression in the region. As Orli Fridman explained, in the early 1990s, a large number of anti-war demonstrations were organized by the Center for Anti-War Action in Serbia, however, only Women in Black continued to demonstrate against the Milosevic regime later on (Fridman 2011, 518). The anti-regime protests and street protests organized by Women in Black in Belgrade, were an essential attempt of "creating a new culture of political activism in the country" (Fridman 2011, 518). In other words, feminists in Serbia were the first to reject the Milosevic regime and to organize public protests in the name of solidarity with feminists in Kosovo.

However, it is worth mentioning that during the 1990s, especially in Serbia, various developments of anti-war activism and anti-war demonstrations against the Milosevic regime also occurred. *Otpor* (Resistance) anti-Milosevic activism managed to attract a large number of people by not referring to controversial issues such as Kosovo, the denial of war crimes or responsibility for the war. This anti-regime group of young men and women, whose agenda was to get rid of Milosevic, also received attention from international media and scholars (Fridman 2011, 510). However, the *Otpor's* activism was opposed by the Women in Black in Belgrade based on the argument that *Otpor* activists were marching against the Milosevic regime but not necessarily against the wars in the former Yugoslavia (Fridman 2011, 513-514).

During the 1990s, Albanian and Serbian women developed more organic relations under the umbrella of international Women in Black meetings held in Serbia. In the beginning, this cooperation among feminist activists from Serbia and Kosovo was mostly symbolic. Over time, the number of women traveling to Belgrade from Kosovo increased (Mujika Chao 2022, 852). During these meetings, Albanian and Serbian women demanded peace and security for the whole region (KWN 2021, 33). Women from Kosovo also started to join the Women in Black protests organized in Belgrade against the Milosevic regime and against the difficult political situation in Kosovo (Mujika Chao 2022, 852). Even when Albanians were forced to flee their homes during the war, Albanian and Serbian women kept close relationships, holding true to their joint work across borders towards peace (KWN 2021, 33).

Natasa Kandic, an activist from Serbia, played an important role in the documentation of crimes and human rights violations that occurred in Kosovo. Sonja Biserko, who has served as director of the Serbian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, also did extensive cross-border work in documenting war crimes during the wars in the former Yugoslavia (KWN 2021, 33). These activists kept their cooperation with Kosovar activists even after the war in Kosovo. According to Adriana Zaharijevic, these two societies were linked with each-other either through solidarity or due the fact that they were considered as the "others" in their own society (Zaharijevic 2016, 482). Albanian women who attempted to build bridges with Serbian women were considered traitors by the Albanian resistance, and the same applied to Serbian women cooperating with Albanian women (Mujika Chao 2022, 852).

While talking about solidarity and cooperation among anti-war activists in the 1990s, it is important to elaborate on the meaning of solidarity for these activists. Their political subjectivity throughout the period was an essential form of survival. Regional cooperation of feminist activists in the area of the former Yugoslavia opposes the narrative of ethnic hatred and division by stressing the cross-ethnic borders solidarity against the Milosevic regime. According to Lepa Mladjenovic, an anti-war activist:

> "Women's solidarity starts with my decision to hear the Other. To hear her experience, to make a space in my body for her, so that she

can let her story come through the way she tells it. This means that I have agreed that the experience of each woman is equally valuable. That I am important to myself and that she is important to me. That I started to accept myself unconditionally. That I started to accept all my emotions unconditionally, nevertheless no one ever told me to do this when I was young, that acceptance is what I need to do to heal" (One Billion Rising, 18 September 2016).

The coalition among feminists and activists from Kosovo and Serbia in the 1990s was important since they chose to develop a peaceful network among people who were divided by the borders and ethnicity (Hasani 2022). Their narrative of activism and experience of war provided an alternative perspective not only on the historical events of the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia, but also for a better future. Yet, women's anti-war regional solidarity during the 1990s has faded from the collective memory of both countries. When it comes to the contribution of feminist activists in Kosovo and Serbia in the fight against the Milosevic regime, collective amnesia is seen as an intentional attempt to hide the role and contribution of the activists in the peace-building process, as means to expel them from public and political life. (Hasani 2022). Women's anti-war activism and their regional solidarity during the 1990s have been banished from public discussion and everyday life.

Cooperative Efforts Among the New Generation of Activists in Kosovo and Serbia

The conflict between Kosovo Albanians and the Milosevic regime ended up with the military intervention of NATO forces in 1999. The United Nations Security Council adopted the Resolution 1244, which placed Kosovo under the administration of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).

On 17 February 2008, Kosovo unilaterally declared its independence with the support of major Western states. Kosovo's independence declaration led to more fragile relations with Serbia, as Serbia was determined to refuse the recognition of Kosovo and continuously opposed Kosovo's subjectivity in the international system and its membership in international organizations.

Kosovo's experience within the history of the dissolution of Yugoslavia and its aftermath was different from that of the other countries of the former Yugoslavia. Kosovo Albanians were not Slavs, they spoke a different language, and were subject to an oppressive regime, especially since the Milosevic came to power in Serbia. Unlike other countries of the former Yugoslavia, the memories of Yugoslavia have disappeared from public spaces in Kosovo. In her article named "Albanian Memories of Socialism after the War in Kosovo", Stephanie Schwander Sievers has analysed well the absence of any visible memory of Yugoslav socialism after the war. In today's Kosovo, the Yugonostalgia does not exist, and "memories of Tito are missing from public space, because it did, literally, hurt" (Schwandner-Sievers, 2010 109). There is no collective memory (especially among the young generation) about the Yugoslav period in Kosovo. Likewise, Kosovo's social, cultural, and political situation is unknown to Serbia. As Fridman pointed out, "even though Belgrade is covered with graffiti stating that 'Kosovo is the heart of Serbia' most people have never been to Kosovo and in fact have very little interest in going there" (Fridman 2013, 153). The analysis below is conducted in two societies that are detached from one another in terms of their 1990s recollections.

The collective memory in Serbia is deeply divided and fragmented in relation to the period of 1990s, along with their ways of remembering the solidarity among the activists in Kosovo and Serbia. Hence, references to the 1990s among activists in Serbia are more related to the war in the former Yugoslavia than solidarity among feminist activists in Kosovo and Serbia. Thus, as Fridman has pointed out, they have very little reference to the legacy of the past (Fridman, Hercigonja, 2016, 16) and of the regional feminists' solidarity. Lirika Demiri also mentions that the first time she got introduced to the regional cooperation among feminist activists in the region in 2016 in Prishtina, was when 1990s

women activists from Kosovo, Serbia, and Croatia came together in a day-long panel to reflect on their war experience and solidarity. She stressed that "the regional communication of feminists in the space of the former Yugoslavia opposes the narrative of ethnic hatred, and instead emphasizes the efforts for cross-ethnic borders solidarity against the Milosevic regime" (Demiri 2018, 33).

After the wars, cooperation among activists in Kosovo and Serbia was not as vibrant as it was during the 1990s. Instead, collaboration among activists continued in the framework of NGOs cooperation. As the activist from Kosovo, Agon Maliqi explained:

> "After the war the cooperation among activists in Kosovo and Serbia was mostly imposed by the international community. Contacts with activists in various forms had existed, but there wasn't any organic cooperation among them, except among organizations who worked for transitional justice and had developed contacts from the period of the war."[3]

Immediately after the war, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) was established as a youth NGO, which became a regional organization with programs in Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Croatia. It was formed by young people from these countries in order to enhance youth participation in the democratization of society and establish connections in the post-Yugoslav region (Fridman 2013, 144). Through YIHR-organized activities, young people from Kosovo and Serbia have cooperated on different issues, such as LGBTQ rights, gender equality, culture etc. Sofija Todorovic, an activist from Serbia explains that YIHR has managed to develop and hold a festival like '*Mirëdita Dobar dan'* by bringing together young activists from Kosovo and Serbia. The festival has also provided a platform for discussing controversial topics, such as dealing with the past, and has provided a space for exploring and discussing some points in history which have been interpreted in different ways in Kosovo and Serbia.[4]

---

3 Interview with Agon Maliqi, activist from Kosovo, 22 March 2022.
4 Interview with Sonja Todorovic, activist from Serbia, 20 April 2022.

Moreover, feminist activists in Kosovo and Serbia tried alternative methods to continue their cooperation after the 1990s and to recognize each other's pain. The tradition of young women gathering across borders to build peace was carried on by Artpolis and the Alternative Girl's Centre from Serbia, bringing together young women from Kosovo and Serbia at the annual Young Feminist Spring School (KWN 2021, 48). This program was important as it opened up a space of discussion among young feminists from Kosovo and Serbia about topics such as dealing with the past. Activist Adelina Tershani, recalled:

> "I once attended the Young Feminist Spring School with activists from Kosovo and Serbia and I remember watching a documentary together about raped women from Kosovo and Serbia. It was a moment when all of us started to cry and it did not matter if the person who is telling the story is from Serbia or Kosovo. The pain was the same. At that moment I realized that you are either a feminist or a nationalist; you cannot be both."[5]

The grieving of women from Kosovo and Serbia in front of each-other is a form of resilience against what can be said and what can be shown within nationalist narrative. Judith Butler asked a very fundamental question referring to the grieving as a revolutionary act: "Is the prohibition on grieving the continuation of the violence itself?" (Butler 2004, 148). And later she pointed out that "[…] the insensitivity to human suffering and death - becomes the mechanism through which dehumanization is accomplished. This derealization takes place neither inside nor outside the image, but through the very framing by which the image is contained" (Butler 2004, 148). Thus, the grieving or crying sustained to be a form of women's solidarity against the nationalist narrative and the violent regime.

Also, the Women's Peace Coalition, composed of Women in Black in Serbia and Kosovo's Women Network, met for the first time in 2006. During this meeting, Women in Black activists expressed their first public apologies for

5 Interview with Adelina Tershani, activist from Kosovo, 24 March 2022.

the crimes against the Albanian population, which was broadcasted on the Kosovo television, RTV 21 (Zaharijevic 2016, 492). They wrote a landmark statement saying: "The future status of Kosovo should be independence" (KWN 2021, 51). This meeting and another one held in 2007, were considered important steps in raising the cooperation among activists and in developing an alternative narrative about what happened during the war. However, after this meeting, the Coalition interrupted its activities.

In general, after the 1990s the cooperation among activists in Kosovo and Serbia has continued mostly through the NGOs. As Zaharijevic has pointed out, the process of NGO-ization of relations among activists in Kosovo and Serbia, transformed activism into an organizational structure (Zaharijevic 2017, 206). Kosovo's activist, Oktay Pomak during the interview said that the whole cooperation is happening through NGOs, which are detached from people's daily reality.[6] Plus, there is not any cooperation among grassroots initiatives in Kosovo and Serbia. Oktay Pomak described that, today the civil society sector is perceived just through NGOs - to be part of civil society, you have to be involved in an NGO. "*All NGOs are considered as CSOs, but not all CSOs are considered as NGOs.*"[7]

However, new-generation activists in Kosovo and Serbia have distinguished their activism from the generation of the 1990s. Unlike the older generation (Albanians) who could understand and speak Serbian language, shared the same administration environment, and went to the same universities – young generation (Albanians) does not understand and speak Serbian language as well as activists from Kosovo and Serbia are deeply divided due to social and political barriers. Belgzim Kamberi, activist from Kosovo, mentioned:

> "There is a huge difference between old and new generations of activists in Kosovo and Serbia. The war killed coexistence between Serbs and Albanians. The war destroyed the empathy for each oth-

---

6 Interview with Oktay Pomak, activist from Kosovo, 17 April 2022.
7 Ibid.

er. Creating a huge barrier between two societies. Thus, for a young person in Belgrade or Prishtina it is more important to know what happens in Berlin or London than in Belgrade or Prishtina."[8]

Beyond NGOs that work for the same causes and have joint programs in Kosovo and Serbia, there is a disconnection among young people and activists in Kosovo and Serbia. For instance, during the 1990s, activists from Kosovo and Serbia had the same enemy that united them: the fight against the Milosevic regime. However, today the common enemy among activists in Kosovo and Serbia is not yet well-defined, and their limited relations are blocked from the unsolved political issues among Kosovo and Serbia. The context between the 1990s and now is considered an important element that differentiates young activists from the generation of the 1990s. Sonja Todorovic, activist from Serbia, explains:

> "The biggest difference between activists of the 1990s and now - is the context – the situation of the society in which we are conducting. During that time, we had war, we had the Milosevic regime who committed war crimes in Kosovo, and we had displacement of people... So, even though the war caused so much damage to the people – it also created links between Serbs and Albanians to work together on some important issues."[9]

Activists had cooperated across the post-Yugoslav countries even when their repressive states were in war, and this attitude changed especially after the 1990s (Zaharijevic, 2017, 206). Feminist activism in Kosovo and Serbia failed to reconnect - especially among young social actors and activists. There was a decrease in cooperation among activists throughout the region in general, and between Kosovo and Serbia in particular. Filip Balunovic, activist from Serbia puts it that in recent years, regional activism has begun to change partially as activists from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Slovenia and Croatia have increased their cooperation in various fields, although not that much with activists in Kosovo:

---

8 Interview with Belgzim Kamberi, activist from Kosovo, 16 March 2022.
9 Interview with Sonja Todorovic, activist from Serbia, 20 April 2022.

> "Cooperation among activists from Kosovo and Serbia still remains problematic, as political issues between Kosovo and Serbia are not resolved yet, and this puts additional pressure on all those actors [from Serbia] who are trying to cooperate with activists in Kosovo."[10]

On the other hand, Balunovic mentioned how activists who try to cooperate with activists in Kosovo are stigmatized in Serbia:

> "Activists who cooperate with activists in Kosovo are targeted as traitors in Serbia. Moreover, the lack of knowledge about Kosovo is huge in Serbia, and most Serbs, especially young people have never been to Kosovo."[11]

The treatment of activists as traitors by their community continues to be one of the main obstacles for the continuation of cooperation among activists. As Adelina Tershani has pointed out:

> "There is stigmatization of activists in Kosovo who cooperate with activists in Serbia. Apparently, after the Russian intervention in Ukraine, there were people in Kosovo who began to openly blame activists who have cooperated with activists in Serbia."[12]

In general, activists from Kosovo and Serbia have mentioned that fragmentation exists in both societies in the way they perceive the social and political reality between Kosovo and Serbia. The memory of coexistence between Serbs and Albanians is missing, and furthermore, the war in Kosovo has increased the alienation between the two societies and young people. As the activist from Serbia, Katarina Tadic, explained:

> "We don't really have information about people in Kosovo, and we are disconnected from Kosovo's daily reality. For young people in Serbia,

---

10 Interview with Filip Balunovic, activist from Serbia, 18 April 2022.
11 Ibid.
12 Interview with Adelina Tershani, activist from Kosovo, 24 March 2022.

it is not relevant for instance what is happening in Peja. The wall between two societies is so high that if you want to get information about Kosovo, you really have to look for it, otherwise, you will only read about the harassment of Kosovo Serbs in Kosovo."[13]

The lack of normalization of political relations between Kosovo and Serbia is one of the main factors impacting the fragile relations among activists, and it is hindering the process of mutual recognition between both countries and understanding among the two societies. As Agon Maliqi recalled: "*political issues have always made it difficult to develop normal relations among societies and activists.*"[14] On the other hand, the master nationalist narrative in political and public discourse, but also among some mainstream NGOs in Kosovo and Serbia, is considered an obstacle to developing more sustainable cooperation among societies and activists. The activist from Kosovo, Oktay Pomak, mentioned: *"we are bombarded by the nationalist narrative everywhere – songs, books, news...''.*[15] Again, Katarina Tadic explained how racist narratives against the Albanian people are commonly present in Serbia, especially among those who have never been to Kosovo and refuse to change their minds about the people living there.[16]

After the 2000s activists and feminists of the states of the former Yugoslavia began to see themselves as their state partner in the state-building process. In the post-socialist state-building process, ethnic nationalism became the most dominant building force (Papic 2002, 192) of all social relations. For instance, in Serbia, the feminist slogan "the personal is the political", started to get translated as "the personal is national" - through which the role of the women was interpreted within the nationalist framework (Papic 2002, 193). On the other hand, Vjollca Krasniqi mentioned that in Kosovo, ethnicity became an important element in social, political and cultural practices and has been central in the politics of state-building (Krasniqi 2014). After the 1990s,

---

13 Interview with Katarina Tadic, activist from Serbia, 23 March 2022.
14 Interview with Agon Maliqi, activist from Kosovo, 22 March 2022.
15 Interview with Oktay Pomak, activist from Kosovo, 17 April 2022.
16 Interview with Katarina Tadic, activist from Serbia, 23 March 2022.

post-Yugoslav civil society and state increased their mutual understanding, by focusing more to their respective states, a process that weakened the dimension of cross-border civic solidarity and narrowed the regional scope of the movement (Zaharijevic 2017, 205-207). In this environment, feminist activists from Kosovo and Serbia lost the organic cooperation that had developed during the war. The lack of opposition and criticism of activists in Kosovo and Serbia towards their nation-states appeared as an obstacle to increasing cooperation among feminist activists in Kosovo and Serbia, especially after Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008.

The lack of public support for Kosovo's independence among activists in Serbia, is seen as an obstacle to developing sustainable and organic cooperation among activists in the two countries. The radicalization of political life in Serbia has made it difficult to openly support the independence of Kosovo. As one activist from Serbia recalled*:*

> "It became less politically political harmful to say that genocide happened in Srebrenica than that you are in favor of Kosovo's independence. Thus, if you want to be relevant in political life in Serbia you cannot support Kosovo's independence openly, otherwise you will be attacked and you wouldn't have space in political or public life in Serbia."[17]

---

17 Interview with an activist from Serbia, 23 March 2022.

The Courage to Talk About the Future of Relations Between Kosovo and Serbia: Developing a New Master Narrative

Political disputes between Kosovo and Serbia are considered as the main reason why there is a lack of cooperation among activists. The common spaces to talk about the future of relations among activists are shrinking. Accordingly, the whole political and social spectrum in the two countries is focused more on issues of the past and the present, rather than on the future potential. However, environment, culture, and feminism have been valued as a potential sphere for enhancing the cooperation among activists in Kosovo and Serbia by producing an alternative narrative. This chapter briefly discusses possible areas for increasing cooperation among activists in Kosovo and Serbia and for providing an alternative narrative.

In recent years, green activism has managed to bring together local and regional activists, irrespective of national identities, with the purpose of fighting for the common good.[18] There was also the example in 2019 of the village of *Bitia e Poshtme*, near the Kosovar town of Strpce, where Serbs and Albanians came together to protest against the resumed construction of a hydropower plant on the Lepenc river (Reuters, October 11, 2019). Even though this example was characterized as an isolated case, in essence, it represents the very civic act of the gathered communities to protect their common spaces. The protection of the environment is seen as a significant incentive to develop a new form of cooperation among activists. As Belgzim Kamberi explains:

> "Only green activism and environmental causes have managed to overcome nationalist and ethnic division of the two communities and

---

18 See, for examples, the initiative 'Save the Blue Heart of Europe', https://www.balkanrivers.net/en

to promote coexistence. More precisely, nature is appearing as the only area that is providing a new dynamic in citizenship, which can also open new possibilities for cooperation in the future. I mean, at the end of the day you cannot divide a tree."[19]

Ecology offers vital momentum to unite people and activists from Kosovo and Serbia and has the potential to produce an alternative narrative that could go beyond the nationalist one. However, it risks escalating into being used as a space for avoiding the discussion of political issues between Kosovo and Serbia. Filip Balunovic points out:

"Ecology is an issue that can gather people – especially those who have been reluctant to come together in the first place. However, I think it is dangerous to talk just for ecology without addressing political problems, as we may lose another 10 years talking only about the environment and then we will return to the same political problems that we had before."[20]

Culture could be considered the cornerstone of further cooperation among activists in Kosovo and Serbia. For many years, culture has offered various collaborations among activists from all over the region, including here those from Kosovo and Serbia. As Ares Shporta, activist and cultural worker from Prizren, has explained:

"We have most intensively had exchanges and cooperation (with or-ganisations from Serbia) on issues about cultural policy, governance of spaces and cultural networks within Platforma Kooperativa. In the meantime, we have developed bilateral cooperation with independent researchers, artists and organisations who engaged with us with cul-tural, institutional and social histories in Prizren during socialist Yugo-slavia..."[21]

---

19   Interview with Belgzim Kamberi, activist from Kosovo, 16 March 2022.
20   Interview with Filip Balunovic, activist from Serbia, 18 April 2022.
21   Interview with Ares Shporta, activist from Kosovo, 3 April 2022.

Cultural events/festivals such as *Dokufest* organized in Prizren and *Mirëdita Dobar dan* organized in Belgrade and Prishtina, have provided a space for debate among young activists from Kosovo and Serbia as well as the possibility to enhance their cooperation. As Agon Maliqi recalled:

> "[T]he more cooperation on culture among activists [exists], the more an autonomous environment and alternative narrative could be developed between the two societies. The idea of endless hostility between the two communities is prevalent at the moment."[22]

On the other hand, Ares Shporta explained that collaborations with organizations from Serbia tend to not be in line with official histories and related policies of both states, they work against the limitations and pressures of the nationalist and antagonistic environment that defines the discourse and sentiment in the public sphere about cooperation among Kosovo and Serbia.[23]

Feminism also contains a great potential to increase cooperation among activists in Serbia and Kosovo and to ensure an alternative transnational narrative. As we have mentioned above, feminists who have cooperated during the 1990s have put their gender identity prior to their national or ethnic identity, even though they were perceived as traitors by their respective communities. Thus, feminist cooperation during the 1990s between Women in Black and the Kosovo Women's Network, their Peace Coalition Initiative during the 2000s, and other collaborations among feminist NGOs in Kosovo and Serbia, are important in building a new transnational narrative. The feminist cooperation against the Milosevic regime in the past was important as it showed how activists can be in solidarity and combat the nationalist narrative. The experience of developing such an experience in the 1990s could serve as a significant element to build a new transnational narrative.

---

22   Interview with Agon Maliqi, activist from Kosovo, 22 March 2022.
23   Interview with Ares Shporta, activist from Kosovo, 3 April 2022.

Closing Remarks

Within this relatively short period of time – from 1990s until now - the political dimension of the cooperation of activists in Kosovo and Serbia in the post-Yugoslav area went through significant changes, which were mainly influenced by the political situation of the Yugoslav successor states. While the activism of the 1990s was shaped by the war context, the post-war activism was generally shaped by the challenges of transition, which represents the core differences between the generation of the 1990s activists and the new activists. During the 1990s, the oppressive regime of Milosevic strengthened the cooperation among feminists in the region and their political activities in the public spaces to protest against the regime.

Cooperation among activists during the 1990s in the region, including Kosovo and Serbia, embodied one of the most iconic moments in the promotion of regional peace and solidarity against the Milosevic regime. During the 1990s, activists from Kosovo and Serbia established contacts mostly through feminist organizations, which later continued as individual communications among feminist activists. Thus, feminist activists found organic cooperation by building a common space where they could talk about a better future for the region. The "nationalization" of women's issues in the post-Yugoslav states, as Adriana Zaharijevic would recall, has damaged the feminist regional cooperation in general. Moreover, the vibrant cooperation of the 1990s between activists in Kosovo and Serbia was missing. Hence, after the 1990s, almost all collaborations among activists in Kosovo and Serbia took place within the framework of activities organized by NGOs.

Interviews with young activists focusing on civic cooperation among Kosovo and Serbia, the way they remember activism of the 1990s, and more importantly, the way they differentiate their activism from that of the 1990s generation gave important insights about potential areas of future cooperation. There are many reasons for the lack of cooperation. However, the lack of a stable political dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, and unresolved political issues between the two countries, are considered major problems that hinder the development

of a vibrant cooperation among activists. On the other hand, the nationalist master narrative dominating public discourse in Kosovo and Serbia contributes to the rise of barriers between the two societies. Stereotypes in Serbia that are tainted with racism toward Kosovo Albanians are commonly present, especially among those who have never been to Kosovo and refuse to change their mind regarding the people living in it. Public discourse in Serbia generally focused almost exclusively on the Serb population living in Kosovo. Moreover, the nationalist master narrative in public discourse in Serbia and Kosovo has hampered the cooperation among activists, as they have been labeled as traitors by their societies.

During the 1990s, activists had a common enemy that united them, while today a common enemy among activists is not well-defined or does not exist. Moreover, the war in Kosovo has damaged the coexistence between Serbs and Albanians. The young generation gets to know each other through the war and the historical narratives that prevail in the public discourse. On the other hand, the NGO-ization of the civil society after the war has fostered more 'artificial' cooperation among activists in Kosovo and Serbia. There is little communication or cooperation with grassroots initiatives or organizations outside the sphere of the NGO sector.

Various areas of cooperation, such as feminism, green activism and culture can enhance further cooperation among activists in Kosovo and Serbia. Moreover, these areas have the potential to alternate the master nationalist narrative in Kosovo and Serbia by uniting activists and promoting solidarity. Cultural events like Dokufest and *Mirëdita Dobar dan*, lessons learned from feminist cooperation during the 1990s, organized activities such as Young Feminist Spring School as well as environmental causes like the protest against the resumed construction of hydropower plant on the Lepenc river are bringing together Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, are topics that could produce an alternative master narrative beyond the nationalist one. Moreover, these topics could ensure an environment where activists from Kosovo and Serbia can be united in the very fundamental issues that they face in everyday lives.

List of Interviews

Adelina Tershani, feminist and activist, Kosovo Women's Network, Prishtina, 24 March 2022.

Agon Maliqi, activist, co-founder of Sbunker, Tirana, 22 March 2022.

Ares Shporta, activist and cultural worker, Lumbardhi Foundation, Prizren, 3 April 2022.

Belgzim Kamberi, activist and researcher, Musine Kokolari, Prishtina, 16 March 2022.

Filip Balunovic, activist and researcher, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, 18 April 2022.

Katarina Tadic, activist and analyst, European Fund for the Balkans, Belgrade, 23 March 2022.

Oktay Pomak, activist and researcher, Prizren, 17 April 2022.

Sonja Todorovic, activist, Youth Initiative for Human Rights in Serbia, Belgrade, 20 April 2022.

References

Batinic, J. 2001. Feminism, Nationalism, and War: The "Yugoslav Case" in Feminism Texts. *Journal of International Women's Studies* 3, no.1: 1-22.

Butler, J. 2004. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Verso: New York.

Bytyçi, F. 2019. Divided Kosovo mountain village unites to fight hydropower plant. *Reuters*. October 11. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kosovo-environment-protest-idUKKBN1WQ21H.

Clark, H. 2000. *Civil Resistance in Kosovo*. London: Pluto Press.

Demiri, Lirika. 2018. *Stories of Everyday Resistance, Counter-Memory, and Regional Solidarity: Oral Histories of Women Activists in Kosovo*. The Ohio State University, Master Thesis.

Fridman, O. 2011. It was like fighting a war with our own people: anti-war activism in Serbia during the 1990s. *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 39, no. 4: 507-522.

Fridman, O. 2013. Structured Encounters in Post- conflict/ Post - Yugoslav Days: Visiting Belgrade and Prishtina. *Transitional Justice and Civil Society in the Balkans*, eds. O. Simic and Z. Volcic, 143- 162.

Fridman, O. and S. Hercigonja. 2016. Protiv Neormalnog: An analysis of the #protivdiktature Protests in the Context of Memory Politics of the 1990s in Serbia. *Contemporary Southeastern Europe* 4, no. 1: 12-25.

Krasniqi, V. 2007. Imagery, Gender and Power: The Politics of Representation in Post-War Kosovo. *Feminist Review* 86, no.1: 1-13.

Kosovo Women's Network (KWN). 2021. *A Seat at the Table*. Prishtina: KWN.

KGSC (Kosovar Gender Studies Center). 2008. *History is Herstory Too: The History of Women in Civil Society in Kosovo 1980 – 2004*. Prishtina: KGSC.

Hasani, A. (2022). For Peace Today, Let's Recall Wartime Yugoslav Feminist Solidarity, *Balkan Insight*. March 14. https://balkaninsight.com/2022/04/13/for-peace-today-lets-recall-wartime-yugoslav-feminist-solidarity/.

Malcom, N. 1999. Kosovo. *A Short History*. New York: New York University Press.

Mujika Chao, I. 2020. Women's Activism in the Civil Resistance Movement in Kosovo (1989 – 1997): Characteristics, Development, Encounters. *Nationalities Papers*, 48, no. 5: 843-860.

Mladjenovic, L. 2016. Politics of Women's Solidarity. *1 Billion Rising*. September 18. https://www.onebillionrising.org/37605/politics-of-womens-solidarity-by-lepa-mladjenovic/.

Papic, Z. 2002. Europe After 1989: Ethnic Wars, the Fascination of Social Life and Body Politics in Serbia. *Letnik* 23, no. 2:191-204.

Pesic, V. 1993. Serbian nationalism and the Origins of the Yugoslav Crisis. *United States Institute of Peace* 1, no. 42.

Pula B. 2004. The Emergence of the Kosovo 'Parallel State' 1988-1991. *Nationalities Papers* 31, no. 4: 797- 826.

Schwandner-Sievers, S. 2010. Invisible - Inaudible: Albanian Memories of Socialism after the War in Kosovo. *Post- Communist Nostalgia*, eds. M. Tordorova and Z. Gille, Berghahn, Book: New York.

Zaharijevic, A. 2016. Komuniteti i të Shpronësuarave: Koalicioni paqësor i grave. *Figura e Armikut: Ripërfytyrimi i marrëdhënieve Shqiptaro- Serbe*, 481 - 496. Prishtine: Qendra Multimedia.

Zaharijevic, A. 2017. What is Political in Post-Yugoslav Feminist Activism?. *Gender in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe and the USSR,* 201-213.

COVID-19 CRISIS: EDUCATION AND SOCIAL POLICY RESPONSE

NORA NIMANI MUSA

Rethinking Teaching in Post COVID-19 Education In Kosovo: What Do Educators and Parents Think about Online Teaching and Learning?

— NORA NIMANI MUSA

Nora Nimani Musa (PhD candidate at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia) is a Program Coordinator at the American Councils office in Prishtina. She is a representative of the United States-Kosovo Educational Exchange programming. Prior to this, for many years, Nora has worked as an English Language Teacher in different institutions, including the University of Prishtina. Nora holds a bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature, from the University of Prishtina, and master's on Journalism and Communication, from the Kosovo Institute for Journalism and Communication. Her main academic and research interest involve the wide range of the processes in the field of education to understand and gain insights into empirical issues in teaching and learning English as a foreign language. Nora is an author of a few articles published in international journals.

RETHINKING TEACHING IN POST COVID -19 EDUCATION IN KOSOVO:
WHAT DO EDUCATORS AND PARENTS THINK ABOUT ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING?

177

Abstract

In the early spring of 2020, the education system across the world faced something like never before: schools had to close their doors to their students. From learning with physical presence at school, students had to shift to online learning, and this meant more responsibility for the parents or guardians, especially of first graders in particular. This study aimed to explore teachers' and parents' experiences during the online learning of first graders in public schools in Kosovo. Through the use of thematic coding, we analysed the responses regarding our participants' main challenges. The results from the questionnaires and interviews indicate that online learning is not highly qualitative which in turn does not enable the complete implementation of the curriculum. Teachers explained their own challenges of using technology in teaching. Parents described their challenges in having difficulties in balancing their own responsibilities as working parents and their children's online learning. We point out the urgent need for adequate teacher trainings on technology usage and its integration in learning.

Key Words: Education, Covid-19 pandemic, teachers, pupils, parents

Introduction

The importance of using technology in teaching has been emphasized by many researchers for many years now, and schools around the world have started to use it as an engaging tool in their teaching. Those schools which have already integrated technology in their instruction have paved their way for online teaching, which now has become mandatory to the whole world. The outbreak of COVID-19 worldwide pandemic in 2019 has had serious implications on education and, among others, made the use of technology in teaching and learning indispensable. Teachers and pupils had to switch abruptly from physical classes to online teaching and learning. The teaching and learning environment changed remarkably, thus negatively affecting the education process in Kosovo and elsewhere.

The main aim of this research is to shed light on the degree to which online learning has affected learning achievement among schoolchildren in Kosovo and on the struggles experienced by teachers and parents while engaging in their children's learning during the academic 2020-2021. It focuses on the first-grade teachers in Kosovo and the way they dealt with instruction during the pandemic. Children who have just entered the first grade, six- and seven-year-olds, were the most vulnerable group of pupils who, besides the pre-existing emotional challenges, also need close supervision during their learning. There is no data in Kosovo regarding the number of pupils who did not attend online learning and the extent to which these children were able to meet the curriculum expectations. It is crucial to understand the problem in order to plan further steps in providing support to these children at all levels of schooling, especially the first graders. Furthermore, there is a need for more studies to understand the problems and challenges teachers and children, including their parents, have faced during this difficult time.

This study was carried out in Kosovo with first grade teachers and parents whose children are first graders. Questionnaires were utilized to explore

RETHINKING TEACHING IN POST COVID -19 EDUCATION IN KOSOVO:
WHAT DO EDUCATORS AND PARENTS THINK ABOUT ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING?

179

teachers' and parents' attitudes toward online learning and its impact on their pupils and children. Furthermore, semi-structured teacher and parent interviews were used to investigate the topic from a different point of view in order to add depth to the quantitative results. Shedding light on the effects of online teaching on pupils and teachers themselves will enable a better understanding of the importance of integrating technology in the development of pupils' learning skills, for teachers, and for other educational stakeholders.

Understanding the problems and challenges that teachers, children and their parents are facing will generate important lessons for them and help prepare the teachers with the skills of integrating technology in their teaching and learning. The scientific contribution of this study will be twofold: firstly, it will contribute theoretically to the body of literature as it will examine the teaching process in a country which lacks technological equipment and the teachers' resilience and adoption to new techniques without proper training. Secondly, it will contribute to the educational policymakers' decisions to maximise the learning opportunities for the children.

The first chapter of this study addresses the issues of e-learning and the integration of technology in learning. It provides insights from other researchers and theories of learning including the importance of using technology in learning, socialization among the children, and parental involvement as an important factor in pupils' achievement. Furthermore, in the second chapter we have highlighted the background of the education system in Kosovo and continuous curriculum challenges it has had for many years now. The third chapter describes the research methodology and approach, explaining the methods, participants, and data collection. A great portion of our research was dedicated to the following chapters about e-learning, the use of technology in learning, parents' involvement, curriculum and textbooks, and teacher development. Conclusions following from our research are presented in the last chapter.

Literature Review

The digital age we have entered in the last few decades has served as a solid basis for most organizations and institutions worldwide to carry on with their work during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. Consequently, technology has become an integral part of education, having gained huge importance at all levels of education and thus becoming a necessity for teachers and pupils. Before this pandemic, we were used to the notion of 'distance learning' as a form of education carried out though radio, letter, mail, or TV (Simonson, Zvacek & Smaldino 2019; Zhao et. al. 2005), which very rapidly changed into a form of online learning (Siemens, Gasevic & Dawson 2015).

E-learning is defined as a "delivery of education (all activities relevant to instructing, teaching, and learning) through various electronic media" (Koohang & Harman 2005, 77). E-learning does not involve any physical learning materials nor face to face contact, but it occurs only through the Web (Nichols 2003). With this form of learning, there are three main learning theories to be considered: Behaviorism, Cognitivism, and Constructivism (Cooper 1993). Behaviorism is a school of thought that sees the mind as a 'black box', with learning deriving from cause and effect, and during this process, action produces reaction.

Cognitivism as another theory of learning promotes the concept that the mind has an important role in learning, in which the motivation and imagination as cognitive processes of the mind are critical elements of learning. With the development of more advanced software into adaptive and personalised applications seeking the integration of artificial intelligence and learning analytics into instruction, the future of this theory is remarkably interesting (Hung 2001). On the other hand, constructivism learning theory is the active construction of new knowledge based on a learner's pre-existing cognitive structures and it enables them to set their own goals and motivate themselves, while the teacher serves as a facilitator of learning.

RETHINKING TEACHING IN POST COVID -19 EDUCATION IN KOSOVO:
WHAT DO EDUCATORS AND PARENTS THINK ABOUT ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING?

181

In addition, Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the importance of the interaction of children with other children, parents, and teachers in cognitive development, which is called social constructivism. Research has shown that constructivism is an appropriate learning theory for e-learning (Hung 2001; Hung & Nichani 2001; Koohang & Harman 2005), however, each theory has its own strategies which may be used in developing learning materials for online learning based on students' differences.

For many years, there was an ongoing debate about the effect of TV on the process of learning, and educators have had different views on its benefits on the development of literacy. There was a concern that people who spend more time watching TV would spend less time reading books (Corteen 1986). However, with the development of technology and better TV programs which contributed to children's interest to be exposed to them, educators started to change their views and started to become more interested in exploring the potential of TV in educational practices (Moeller 1996). Importantly, Moeller (1996) suggested that exposure to television and its contents may have four types of effects on the people including a) behaviour, b) attitudes, beliefs, and values, c) knowledge, and d) cognitive skills. Furthermore, he suggested that the effect of TV in learning depends on the curriculum, the role of teachers, and other learning materials, activities, assessment, and the broadcasting schedule (Moeller 1996).

Researchers have also tried to shed light on the importance of out-of-school exposure to technology on the improvement of language acquisition (Ellis & Collins 2009; Ojimaa 2011; Musa & Fojkar 2019). On the other hand, while exploring the effect of TV programs on the development of literacy in younger children, Anderson, Lavigne, and Hanson (2013) reported that it may not be very beneficial because it does not provide a learning process which is behaviourally active. In addition to this, children need hand-on experience, responsive teachers' feedback on their learning, and interaction with others (Anderson et. al. 2013). Exposure to TV programmes affects the improvement of language proficiency, literacy outcomes and problem-solving strategy (Safranj 2015; Linebarger McMenamin & Wainwright 2008; Crawley, Anderson,

Wilder, Williams & Santomero 1999). However, socialization, interpersonal relationship and problem solving, and other activities that require interaction with classmates are very important to the lower grades (Garbe, Ogurlu, Logan & Cook 2020). Technology should offer opportunities for activities such as turn-talking, group work, and peer review, among others, in order to be educationally beneficial.

On the other hand, in a traditional school setting, parental involvement is an important factor in pupils' achievement, and this involvement has been shown to have significant contributions in the learning outcomes of the children. With the latest developments in the world due to COVID-19, which caused the switch from face-to-face to online learning, parents have had to take on new responsibilities previously unknown to them and far more instructional responsibility for their children's learning (Liu, Black, Algina, Cavanaugh & Dawson 2010; Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares 2009).

Online learning during the pandemic has once again emphasized the importance of integrating technology because it has an impact on the behaviors, attitudes, beliefs and values, knowledge, and cognitive skills of pupils. Exposure to technology has shown to improve language literacy but also problem-solving skills of children. But to achieve successful outcomes in education, the integration of technology should go hand in hand with the social interaction of children. This study takes a cognitivist's approach in exploring the ways in which the mind has an important role in learning and using technology is crucial in the process of nowadays way of learning.

Educational System in Kosovo: Pre-pandemic Challenges

In this chapter we will highlight the background information on the education system in Kosovo. Being the youngest country in Europe, Kosovo declared its independence in 2008. Prior to that, Kosovo had been a part of Yugoslavia as an autonomous province. Troubles started in Kosovo in the early 1980s, while in 1989 the Milosevic regime revoked Kosovo's autono-

RETHINKING TEACHING IN POST COVID -19 EDUCATION IN KOSOVO:
WHAT DO EDUCATORS AND PARENTS THINK ABOUT ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING?

183

my sparking Kosovo Albanians' mobilisation. Numerous Kosovars were left jobless, but Kosovo resisted for almost two decades. About 6,000 Kosovar teachers and professors lost their jobs because they refused to give up the Albanian curriculum. The language of instruction in schools became Serbian. This interruption in the education system resulted in the evolution of a parallel system of education at all levels. Private houses became schools for hundreds of thousands of Kosovar Albanians until the end of the conflict in 1999. There were about 267,000 students who attended this parallel schooling system, which was mainly financed by the Albanian diaspora. Curriculum and textbooks were from Albania (Picciano & Elbasani 2019). When the conflict ended in 1999, thousands of Kosovars returned to their homes, which, for most of them, were destroyed. Amidst many other problems, education is still one of the most important ones which, even 20 years later, suffers the consequences of the war. However, Kosovar Albanians have shown to be particularly resilient, adapting to the most difficult circumstances and surviving them.

After the war, in 2001 there was a draft Curriculum Framework document which was not approved but was used as a basis for designing subject curricula from 2002 to 2006. A senior officer from the department of curriculum and textbooks of the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation of Kosovo (hereafter MESTI) explains the curriculum developments through years by saying that

> "the initiative to improve and approve the 2001 curriculum has come by the Curriculum Division in 2008. But, after the formation of the new government in 2009, the then-minister decided to draft a completely new document which began to be drafted in 2009 and was completed in 2011 and then revised in 2016 and it is being used ever since."[1]

---

1 Interview with Arber Salihu, senior officer from the department of curriculum and textbooks of the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation of Kosovo

Before the pandemic, teachers had only basic training on the new curriculum and its use in their teaching practices. In addition to this problem, in Kosovo, many public schools are not equipped with (adequate) technology, especially in the rural areas and most teachers are not trained to use it in their teaching, let alone having their personal technological devices to use for online teaching. There were also a lot of children who did not possess these devices either, nor had access to cable TV and were not able to follow the learning contents transmitted to them during the pandemic. Teachers had to adjust their teaching in line with the new curriculum and online practices, which was quite a challenge to them. In addition to this, they also had to switch to online teaching, which for most teachers using technology was the first time in their teaching career.

The new curriculum in Kosovo for pre-university education has seven main curricular fields: Languages and Communication, Arts, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Society and Environment, Physical Education and Sports, and Life and Work (Government of Kosovo, 2018). Before the pandemic, pupils had to attend 21 classes per week, with 45-minute classes, whereas during the pandemic, when the country had to go to a lockdown, classes were reduced to 30 minutes mainly with only two subjects: math and Albanian language, excluding the other curricular fields. With the return of pupils in their schools, the classes resumed similarly with three classes only. The curriculum expectations were impossible to be achieved, and this is thought to have badly affected the learning process for pupils.

There is very limited or no in-depth research on online teaching and learning in general, nor on online learning or teaching during this pandemic, in particular. Therefore, the main aim of this research is to shed light on the degree to which online learning has affected learning among schoolchildren in Kosovo as well as to explain the challenges teachers and parents experienced while engaging in their children's learning during the academic year 2020-2021. The following section will explain the methodology we used in trying to understand the challenges and problems teachers/pupils/parents encountered during the online learning process in Kosovo.

RETHINKING TEACHING IN POST COVID -19 EDUCATION IN KOSOVO:
WHAT DO EDUCATORS AND PARENTS THINK ABOUT ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING?

185

Research Methodology and Approach

This study uses non-experimental methods of pedagogical research based on a mixed quantitative and qualitative research paradigm. Participants in our study were 41 first grade teachers in Kosovo, and 55 parents of the first graders. The sample was randomly selected, and we were trying to collect data from a sampling of teachers and parents who experienced online learning during 2020 due to the pandemic and transition to online learning. From this sample, 26 teachers self-identified as women and 9 as men, whereas 50 parents self-identified as women and five as men. Teachers had different years of experience, 13 of them had 21+ years of teaching experience, 11 of them had up to five years of experience, six of them had up to 10 years of experience, and five of them had up to 15 years of experience in teaching. We sought to account for rural and urban areas participants of different socio-economic backgrounds. 23 parents in our sample have reported to have a graduate level of education, 14 parents have secondary school education, 10 parents have a master's degree, and six of them have only elementary school education. To enable a more in-depth investigation of research questions, a qualitative study was carried on with five teachers and five parents, in the form of semi-structured interviews.

Data Collection

The questionnaire for teachers was distributed to teachers in different schools, and it was translated into their native language. The questionnaire was categorized into seven categories such as: 1) the level of teachers' knowledge about technology, 2) the level of technology use before the Covid-19 pandemic, 3) the main problems during the online teaching, 4) the extent to which teachers could achieve the expectations set in the curriculum, 5) the teaching methods and children's' assessment, 6) the level of teachers' and pupils' motivation during the online classes, 7) teachers' expectations for changes in educational practices in the post-Covid-19 world, and 8) teachers' plans for professional development in the post-Covid-19 world.

The questionnaire for parents was distributed to parents and was categorized into the following categories: 1) demographic information, 2) accessibility and the level of using technology, 3) the pupils' motivation to learn, 4) the level of educational resources available to them, 5) balancing responsibilities, and 6) the level of online learning preference and child's enjoyment to e-learning activities. Questions in the questionnaires were open ended and close ended, and the five-point Likert scale was employed in rating weight such as: Strongly agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. At the end of each section, there was a space for participants' comments.

The semi-structured interviews with teachers addressed the same topics as in the questionnaire but here we sought to gain more detailed accounts of teachers' experiences and opinions. The participants of the study were informed that their identities would be removed from the questionnaire prior to data analysis, and they would be assigned a code, for the reasons of confidentiality. Consent and appropriate permission from the participants for handling and usage of data were acknowledged and referenced.

Limitations of the Study

This research has its own limitations. Firstly, the questionnaire was distributed online, and volunteer parents had to fill it out, which may not be a strong representation of the parents who have most struggled during their children's online learning. Secondly, this research gives conclusions on the short-term impact of COVID-19 in learning, while aware that long-term consequences are yet to be seen. Therefore, it invites a degree of caution in terms of drawing conclusive arguments about the wider and longer-term impact of COVID-19.

Data Analysis and Discussion

This study employed an online survey using an open-ended questionnaire. The analysis of teachers' and parents' interviews were qualitative. The inter-

RETHINKING TEACHING IN POST COVID -19 EDUCATION IN KOSOVO:
WHAT DO EDUCATORS AND PARENTS THINK ABOUT ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING?

187

views were semi-structured for allowing flexibility to the researcher to change the questions and lead the interview to our areas of interest. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, organized, read through, coded, categorized, and interpreted in a logical manner in order to answer the research questions. Thematic coding, which according to Gibbs (2007), is a process which involves the identification of passages and linking them by e common theme, was used to analyse the data. The process included the categorization of codes which ultimately enable thematic analysis of ideas. The researchers read the responses a few times to familiarize with the content and avoid the bias and then coded them systematically and independently. Through this process of data analysis and interpretation, we were trying to identify and understand the relationship between the problems that teachers and parents reported to have during the online learning in achieving the curriculum expectations.

E-learning and Its Effects in Teaching and Learning

In the age of fast technological advancements, E-learning is a more attractive and technologically mediated form of learning by using computers, tablets, phones or iPad in classroom or distance. Since the introduction of computer assisted learning in 1960 there was a shift from the traditional classroom setting to a more ICT-based learning which offers opportunities for a more personalized, flexible, self-organized and collaborative learning which is based on a community of learners, facilitators, experts, and teachers (Bourner & Flowers 1997). E-learning or web-based learning enables the use of the internet and technology for the students who cannot go to schools.

For those countries who had the technological infrastructure and trained personnel to use the technological devices in delivering their lessons, it was easier to switch to online learning when the pandemic hit the world. The European countries such as

Denmark, Estonia, France, Finland, Italy, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, have national platforms to be used in facilitating the communication between students and teachers in schools, have provided free and widespread access to resources for all, free online learning materials, free internet access and some countries have even offered individual education plan (IEP) for students with special needs (Directorate of Evaluation, Forecasting and Performance Monitoring 2020).

School personnel in public schools in Kosovo were not trained to use this new method of delivering their lessons and most teachers struggled with trying to figure out the new curriculum. The deficiency in this education system was uncovered during the emergent school closures during the pandemic. Physical closures caused significant challenges and immense disruptions in the operation of schools, teaching and learning including the family dynamics. This is mostly because successive governments in Kosovo have focused on building new school premises even though the main problem the education system faces is that these schools are far behind in all levels and parameters of internal infrastructure, including ICT equipment and teaching materials.

So far there has been limited investment in capacity building, development of school libraries, labs, computers, and providing different learning materials. Lack of this kind of investment has direct consequences on the performance of students and overall learning process. Even though there are many international organizations that provide ICT equipment and other packages of necessary equipment, most of the time this equipment is not used due to the lack of teachers' skills, or lack of reliable internet in schools (MESTI 2018). The problem is acute especially in schools in remote areas.

The MESTI was aware of the latest developments in education systems in the world including the importance of integrating technology in learning. The previous strategy 2017-2021 (MESTI 2016) has identified quality assurance, teacher development, teaching, and learning, among the main thematic fields of focus and objectives. Likewise, the strategy identifies the main

RETHINKING TEACHING IN POST COVID -19 EDUCATION IN KOSOVO:
WHAT DO EDUCATORS AND PARENTS THINK ABOUT ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING?

189

challenges that the education system in Kosovo is facing, including reliability and quality of national tests, analysis of national test results and their usage for quality improvement, lack of teachers' licensing system based on their performance, lack of mandatory teachers professional development, limited capacities for new curriculum implementation, limited capacities for integration of technology in teaching and for preparation of online resources.

To address such challenges, MESTI undertook numerous activities in order to develop an effective and sustainable system for teachers' professional development including the implementation of the process of evaluating teachers' performance, complete functionalization of a teacher licensing system and ensuring qualitative preparedness of pre-service teachers. According to MESTI officials from the department of pre-university curriculum development, "teachers were offered basic training for the implementation of the new curriculum, but unfortunately it wasn't sufficient, and it also deviated from the initial idea."[2] Additional planned activities include those aimed at overcoming the challenges that teaching and learning processes face. These challenges include difficulties in the implementation of new curriculum, textbooks and other materials, unsatisfactory level of integration of technology, and other didactical materials in schools. According to the plan, all schools would be equipped with ICT tools and other didactical tools necessary for a successful implementation of the new curriculum, and school textbooks and other learning materials would be prepared and ready for all courses.

However, based on a Kosovo Education and Employment Network (KEEN) report (Mehmeti, Boshtrakaj, & Mehmeti 2019) on the implementation of Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021, it turns out that teacher development and implementation of the licensing process faced many delays and challenges, thus hindering successful implementation. This raised additional challenges for teachers during online learning. The report also reveals lack

---

2   Interview with Arber Salihu, MESTI official from the department of pre-university curriculum development, Prishtina, 11 May 2022.

of data on teacher training for the development and use of electronic materials. This is especially worrying given the acute need for teacher training that the recent online learning experience has exposed.

The KEEN report also assessed the implementation of another important objective within this strategy i.e. teaching and learning. It shows that the new curriculum caused many problems in the learning process since there were no guidelines provided on how to approach the existing textbooks in line with the new curriculum. MESTI contributed modestly to providing schools with computers and ICT infrastructure and other necessary aids. Part of the problem stems from the fact that although most schools have Internet, its integration in learning remains quite limited. This became a huge obstacle when MESTI was forced to switch to online learning because of COVID-19 school closure.

Drawing on the importance of e-learning, the establishment of technological infrastructure and teacher development is crucial for the successful learning outcomes. Even though MESTI was aware of the importance of integrating technology and in their previous strategy 2017-2021 has identified it as one of the main thematic fields of focus and objectives, reports have shown that the pandemic found the education in Kosovo crippled. The aforementioned reports have shown that the lack of technological infrastructure and teachers' skills in using technology has had direct consequences on the achievement of first graders in public schools. This has hindered the successful implementation of the curriculum during online learning. There is as of yet no data on the number of children participating in online learning, the challenges teachers, parents, and their children faced during online learning, nor the assessment of pupils' skills and knowledge gained during this period.

The following section discusses the use of technology in the process of teaching and learning in public schools in Kosovo before and during the pandemic.

RETHINKING TEACHING IN POST COVID -19 EDUCATION IN KOSOVO:
WHAT DO EDUCATORS AND PARENTS THINK ABOUT ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING?

191

The Use of Technology (TV, laptop, tablet, phone) in Teaching and Learning in Public Schools in Kosovo Before and During the Pandemic

COVID-19 posed enormous challenges for educational institutions, teachers, pupils, and parents alike. MESTI made attempts to ease these obstacles and make it easier for the children to access learning and has spearheaded the process of switching to online teaching, in cooperation with schools and other educational institutions. This involved preparation of video recordings by teachers that were delivered as lessons broadcasted on national TV and online lessons using platforms such as Zoom and E-shkollori.

MESTI (2020) also drafted an instruction for three potential scenarios during the pandemic: Scenario A, learning in schools; Scenario B, combined learning – in distance and physical presence at school; and, Scenario C, online learning. During Scenario C, except for the online learning with their teachers using the E-learning platform, Google Classroom or other platforms, lessons were delivered via the National Television, RTK. In addition to providing these platforms, MESTI (2020) also drafted instructions for teaching, evaluation, and specific instructions for children with special needs. However, there is no data on student participation in online learning nor their achievements during the pandemic, in general, and 2020, more specifically.

Lack of infrastructure for the use of technology in learning and teaching in public schools in Kosovo has mobilized teachers to be resourceful and creative on their own. Children had started their first grade online or had to switch from in school to online learning. The first graders lacked any prior experience in using technology for learning, and they had to meet their teachers and classmates for the first time through the screen, being that Laptop, iPad, or phone screen. Similarly, on the other side of the screen were teachers, who had little or no prior training on how to integrate technology in their teaching. Both parties faced tremendous challenges thus imposing the need for increased parental involvement in the process.

3%
No Knowledge

8%
Basic

18%
Advanced

Teachers' level
of knowledge in
technology

71%
Average
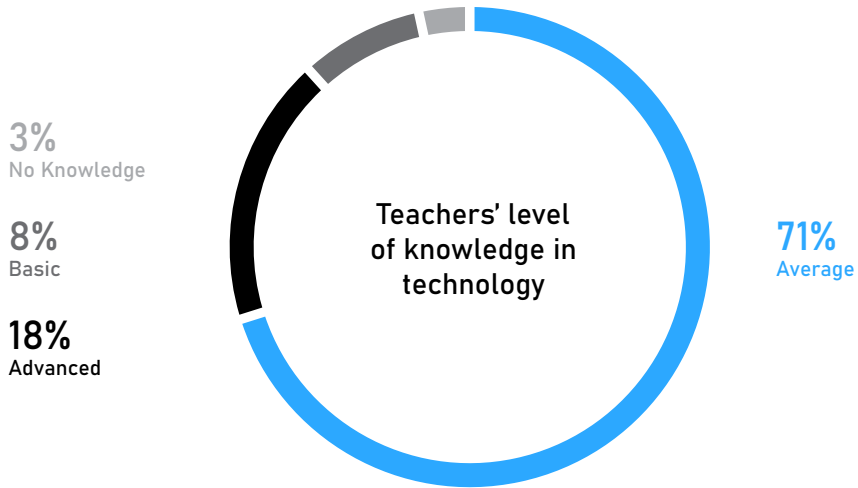
FIGURE 1: Teachers' level of knowledge in technology

2.63%
Never

Teachers' usage
of technology in
teaching before the
pandemic

36.84%
Sometimes

28.95%
Always

31.58%
Most of the
times
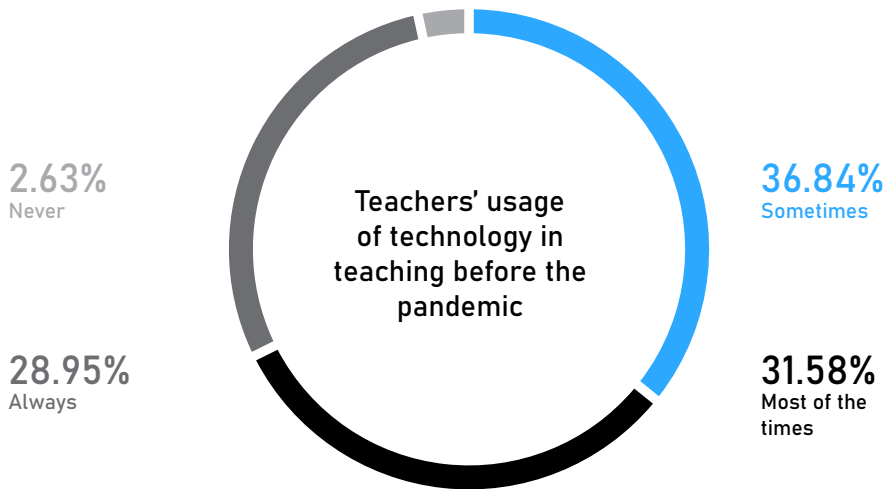
FIGURE 2: Teachers' usage of technology in teaching before the pandemic

RETHINKING TEACHING IN POST COVID -19 EDUCATION IN KOSOVO:
WHAT DO EDUCATORS AND PARENTS THINK ABOUT ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING?

193

Teachers in our study reported to have had some level of knowledge in technology; 71.05% have average knowledge whereas 18% of them have advanced knowledge. The same group of teachers reported to have used technology in their teaching before the pandemic, 36.8% of them have sometimes used it, 31.6% most of the time, 28.9% have always used it whereas 2.6% have never used technology in their teaching. What they mean by integration of technology in their teaching is the use of a projector to show movies or documentaries related to topics they were teaching. "We have used technology in teaching, we have used the projector, such as PowerPoint presentations and screening of movies related to the lesson or the story we were doing in class,"[3] said Teacher 3 during our interview.

3%
Never

8%
Rarely

26%
Sometimes

Teachers' confidence during online learning

37%
Most of the times

26%
Always
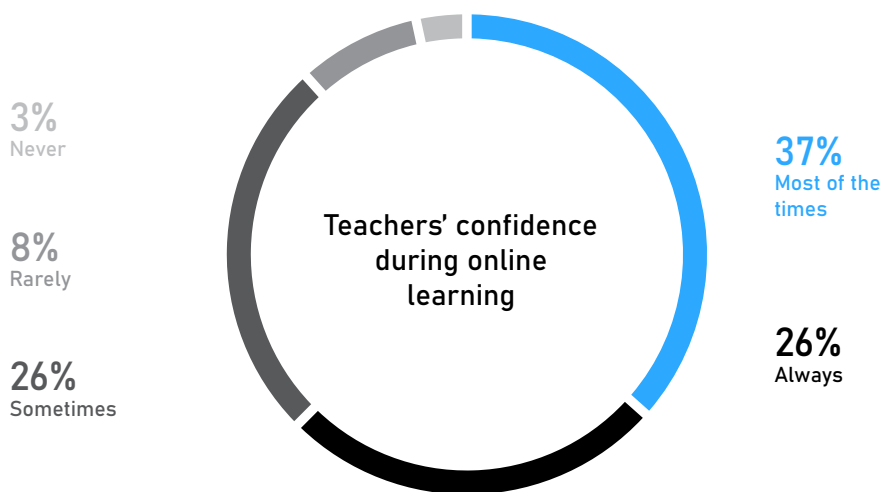
FIGURE 3: Teachers' confidence during online learning

3 Interview with a second-grade teacher at a public school in Kosovo, conducted on April 22, 2022

3%
Nervous

17%
Happy

36%
Stressed

Teachers' feelings during online learning

44%
Anxious
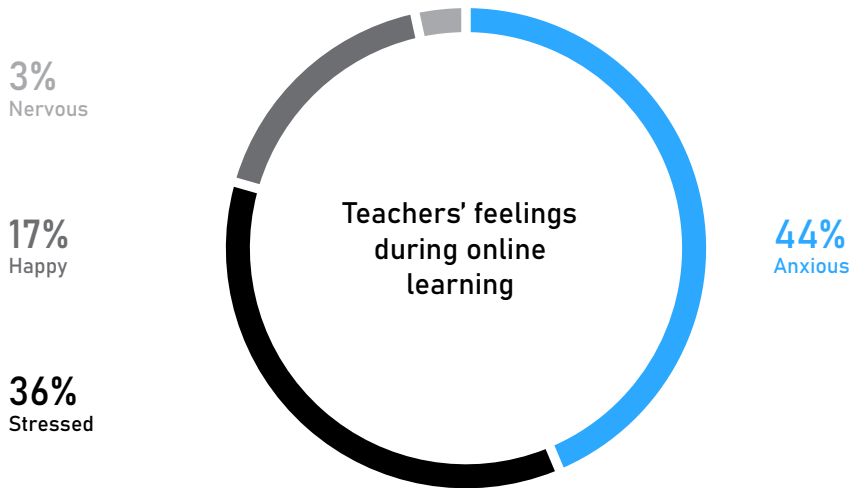
FIGURE 4: Teachers' usage of technology in teaching before the pandemic

During online learning, not all teachers felt confident with their teaching via Zoom or other online platforms. Most of them, 37% were confident most of the time, 26% were always confident, 26% were sometimes confident, 8% rarely, and 3% were never confident during online teaching. This has led to 44% of teachers feeling anxious during online teaching, 36% feel stressed, 17% of them felt happy whereas 3% of the teachers felt nervous during online teaching.

RETHINKING TEACHING IN POST COVID -19 EDUCATION IN KOSOVO:
WHAT DO EDUCATORS AND PARENTS THINK ABOUT ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING?

195

36%
Online Classes

Teacher's Schooling
type preference

44%
Classroom-based
schooling
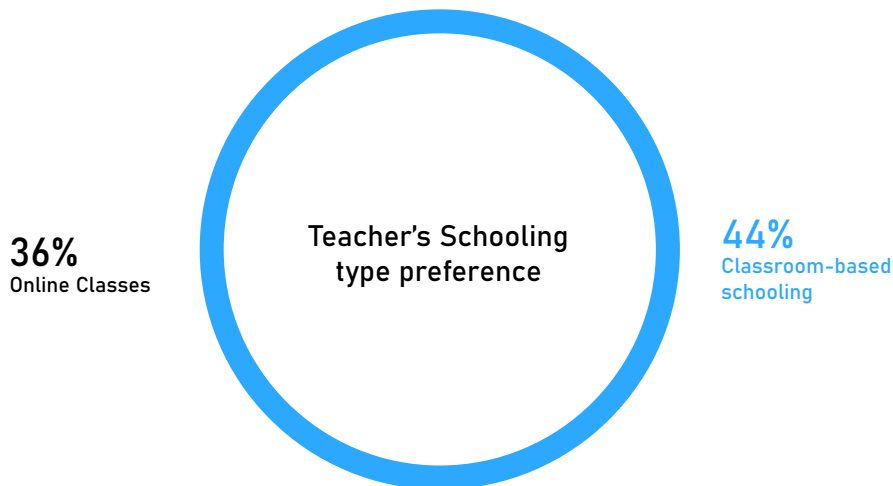
FIGURE 5: Teachers' schooling type preference

However, in our question about their preferred way of teaching, 100% of them reported to prefer classroom-based schooling with the physical presence of pupils. This may also be related to their pupils not being able to access online learning because 36.8% of teachers have reported that their pupils did not have suitable equipment to access online learning. According to teacher 2,

> "To tell you the truth, it is better to have classes through Zoom than not have classes at all. There is a number of pupils from families with low financial income. They have only one phone to be used for learning by two children of the family. Children in upper grades are prioritized by their families."[4]

Data from our study show that teachers have different views on the success of online learning during the pandemic. Almost half of the teachers, 37.8%, think that student learning during online learning was beneficial, 32.4% think it was beneficial only sometimes, and only 13.5% of the teachers think that it was always beneficial for their pupils. However, during our interviews, teachers reported to have been lucky not to teach online for a long period of time.

---

4 Interview with a second-grade teacher at a public school in Kosovo, conducted on April 20, 2022

"Fortunately, last year we did not have many disruptions - only 2 weeks - because we did our best to work according to scenario B. We worked in two groups, in two shifts. It was difficult, we disinfected, we tried to maintain the school and the classrooms, but thankfully the children were rewarded, and the online learning lasted for a very short period of time," reported teacher 3.[5]

2%
Online Learning

Parents' schooling type preference

98%
In class learning
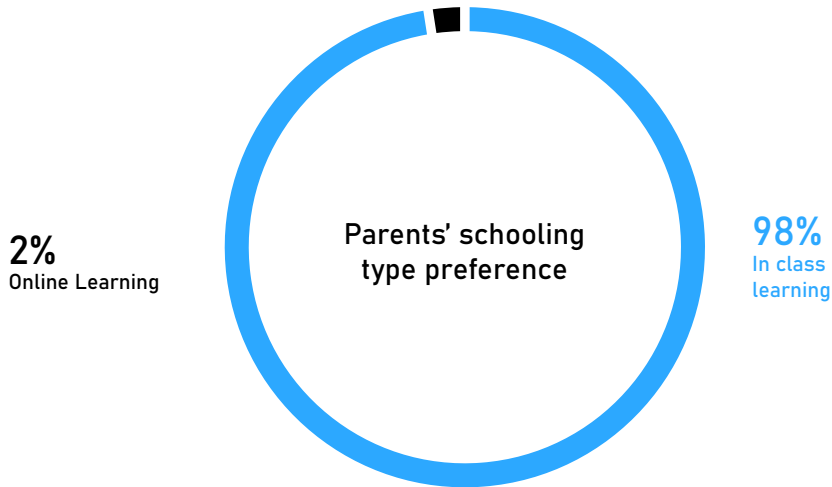
FIGURE 6: Parents' schooling type preference

___

5   Interview with a second-grade teacher at a public school in Kosovo, conducted on April 22, 2022

RETHINKING TEACHING IN POST COVID -19 EDUCATION IN KOSOVO:
WHAT DO EDUCATORS AND PARENTS THINK ABOUT ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING?

197

Similarly, parents in our study report to be more satisfied with the school-based than online learning. 98% of the parents have reported that their child is more motivated during school-based learning. The reasons leading to this dissatisfaction are that children are very stressed and after the lessons have headaches, have difficulties with the internet connection, it is a very stressful way of learning, there is not enough information provided for the children, and parents are not able to help and supervise their children during the online learning.
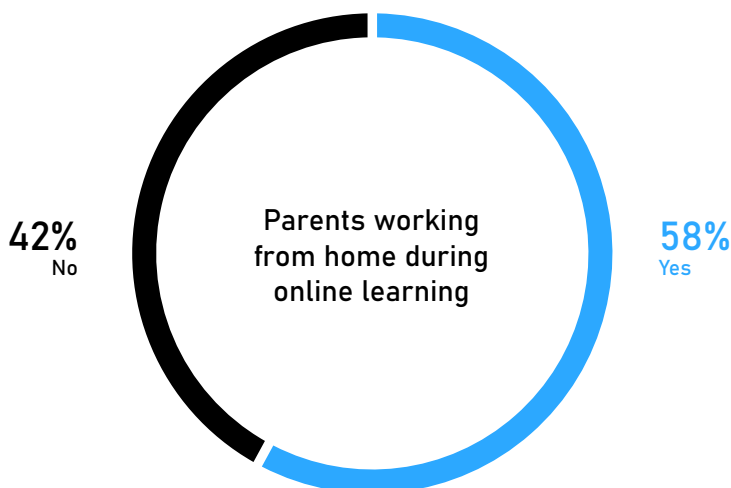
FIGURE 7: Parents working from home during online learning

58% of parents in our study work from home at the same time when their child attends online learning, whereas 42% of them did not.

8%
Rarely

8%
Never

16%
Always

Parents' feelings
during their
children's online
learning

35%
Sometimes

33%
Most of the
times
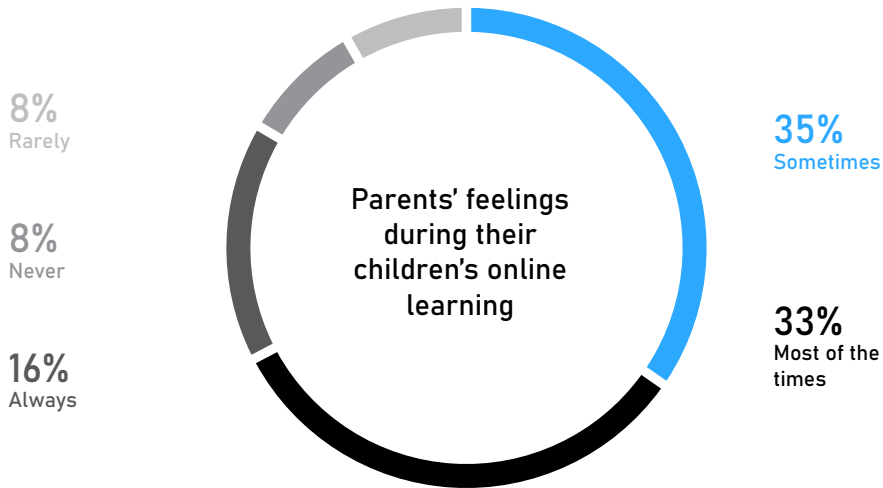
FIGURE 8: Parents' feelings during their children's online learning

Working from home at the same time as their children attended online class-es was not a pleasant experience for the parents in our study. 33% of parents reported that working from home at the same time as their children is having online classes is mainly stressful for them, for 35% it was sometimes stress-ful, and 16% of the parents were always stressed out when they worked from home at the same time as their child had online classes.

RETHINKING TEACHING IN POST COVID -19 EDUCATION IN KOSOVO:
WHAT DO EDUCATORS AND PARENTS THINK ABOUT ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING?

199

6%
Rarely

22%
Sometimes

Parents' opinions on their ability to support their children during online learning

42%
Always

30%
Most of the times
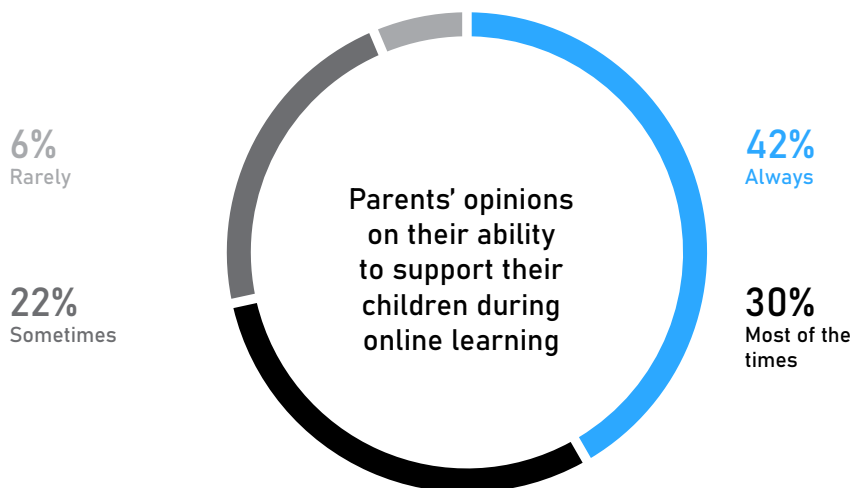
FIGURE 9: Parents' opinions on their ability to support their children during online learning

This unpleasant experience leads the majority of parents in our study to believe that they were not always able to fully support their children during online learning. 42% of parents think they were always able to support their children during online learning, 30% of them think they were not able to do so, 22% think that they sometimes did, and 6% of them think that they could never support their children during online learning. All the aforementioned reasons led to parents not preferring online learning because "it is very difficult to learn online, and my wish is to learn at school and get all the answers from their teacher," says parent 3.[6]

Our data show that the lack of school infrastructure and the teacher development and trainings make teachers feel insecure in exploring new ideas using technology. Similarly, parents do not feel comfortable when they need to supervise and take the lead in educating their children. This may be due to their previous inexperience in supervising their children during online learning. This also shows that the triangle school-teacher-parent system does not function well in Kosovo, and it should be improved.

───────────

6   Interview with a parent of a second grader at a public school in Kosovo, conducted on April 11, 2022

Parents' Involvement

At the age of seven, which is the time when children typically start their first grade, they are still trying to define and build complex concepts in their heads. Pinter (2011) has researched and explained the processes that are developed during early childhood. It is particularly during this age when the distinctions between the pre-operational (animism, egocentrism, and centration) and operational stages (operational thought, complete analogy usage, full emergence of symbolic thought, responsibility and conservation, appreciation of causality, development of hierarchical classification, de-centration, a gradual loss and decline of egocentricity and rational logic) becomes apparent. As the famous psychologist, Jean Piaget (1896-1980), explained, pre-operational stage develops in children from 2-7 years whereas the concrete operational stage develops from 7-11 years. The age of 7, in particular, is known as an 'intellectual revolution', a notion used by Wood in 1998. On the other hand, Vygotsky (1896-1934) opposed the notion of discontinuity in the development of children and focused more on the outside factors that affect this development such as social environment, thus emphasizing the role of experts and quality of their support offered to young learners. Furthermore, Vygotsky explained that learning occurs as a result of an interaction between children and parents/teachers (Pinter, 2011).

In addition to cognitive development of children at the age of 7, there are also emotional changes they face during the transition period from nursery to elementary school. Instead of only playing with toys, children will become a part of larger formal classrooms together with their classmates, the majority of whom are unknown to them. In these formal classroom settings, they will experience disappointment, resignation, resolve, focus, competition, and many more different emotions. However, before their enrolment in the first grade, children are informed by their parents and nursery teachers about the school environment with the purpose of preparing them for this major milestone in their lives. Nevertheless, for the first graders in 2020, this experience was quite different compared to previous generations as a result of the COVID-19-imposed shift to online teaching.

RETHINKING TEACHING IN POST COVID -19 EDUCATION IN KOSOVO:
WHAT DO EDUCATORS AND PARENTS THINK ABOUT ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING?

201

During online classes, teaching was even more difficult, and classes were shorter, about two hours in total. Among others, teachers had difficulties in maintaining discipline, paying close attention to every child's learning needs, and struggled to ensure that pupils finished their classwork or did it right. On the other hand, many parents were not able to use technology or had some basic knowledge, especially those in rural areas. In these areas there were problems with unstable internet connection, power shortages and insufficient devices for all the children in the family. The lack of suitable conditions for providing a stable environment in which their children were able to get the most from their teachers during the first year of education inevitably caused stress and anxiety among parents, too, especially those who were trying to balance working at home and parenting.

As a mother who supervised her child while at the same time working from home put it,

> "online learning limits the opportunity to be actively involved in classes, it is difficult for the teacher to maintain order, all children tend to talk at the same time. Sometimes this lack of order leads to my child not being involved even though he is well prepared and knows the answer. Children are very loud." However, she maintains that despite the difficulties and challenges, "online learning has now become an accepted phenomenon and we try to coordinate our work with our son's school schedule."[7]

While this mother had the privilege to adjust her own work schedule with that of her child, there were many more parents who could not do the same. They had to go to work and as a result their children did not have the needed parental supervision during online learning. For many children, parents going to work meant no online lessons at all.

---

7 Interview with a parent of a second grader at a public school in Kosovo, conducted on April 11, 2022

"If my child is unsupervised, he cannot access online learning. His sitter does not have experience with technology and can't help him. Therefore, if me or his father is not with him, he cannot participate in online classes,"[8] says another parent who is an essential staff member at her organization, and who is required to always be physically present at work. Knowing that her child will suffer consequences because of her absence at home is quite a stressful experience for many parents in addition to the stress caused to their child.

To put it bluntly, lack of participation in online learning implies lack of learning and lagging children. Parents had to find other solutions to help their children cope with this situation and make progress in their learning. This situation has created a general perception among the parents and the community at large that online learning did not have a positive effect in learning. Therefore, it is not surprising that an overwhelming majority prefer the learning to take place physically in schools.

A parent explained the way her family dealt with their child's learning difficulties during online learning as follows:

> "Online learning did not have a positive effect during this period of pandemic. The negative effects it had in reading-writing are noticed now during their physical presence at school. There is a lot of work needed from the parents. During my child's first grade, I have employed a support teacher for my child during the second semester".[9]

What made it even more difficult is the devices children used during online learning. Many of the children used phones as a tool to participate in online classes and thus could not have the best vision.

From the parents' responses we can understand that they faced many struggles during online learning and most of them failed to see any positive effects

---

8   Interview with a parent of a second grader at a public school in Kosovo, conducted on April 9, 2022
9   Ibid

RETHINKING TEACHING IN POST COVID -19 EDUCATION IN KOSOVO:
WHAT DO EDUCATORS AND PARENTS THINK ABOUT ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING?

203

on their children's education. Furthermore, they think that children cannot express themselves as much as they should because of the noise and technological problems. This also implies that the curriculum expectations could not be achieved. In the following section we will give insights from the teachers and MESTI officials regarding the curriculum implementation.

Curriculum and Textbooks

During these chaotic times, teachers in Kosovo were still trying to figure out the new curriculum and new textbooks, while at the same time adjusting to online teaching. When the new curriculum started to be implemented, there was a lack of adequate textbooks and for a year or two children learned things at school without having a specific textbook to refer to when doing their homework or preparing for the tests. The MESTI senior officer from the department of curriculum and textbooks confirms that "there has been one to two years gap between the new curriculum and the publication of new textbooks, whereas in pilot schools even more."[10]

Amid this confusion and problems that teachers and the education system in Kosovo were facing, a new generation of first graders were preparing to start school for the first time. Unfortunately, their first day of school was not as they were told it would be, i.e. pupils running with flowers to meet their teachers and the excitement of sharing desks with their new peers. Instead, they had to attend online teaching without having the opportunity to meet their teachers or peers in person beforehand. Moreover, they had to manage the stress of being able to go online on their devices, unstable/unreliable internet connection, ignore room/home distractions, and other similar factors during online classes.

---

10   Interview with the MESTI official from the department of pre-university curriculum development, Prishtina, 11 May 2022

Typically, first grade pupils learn the alphabet, reading and writing, and basic math problems and therefore need direct teacher and parent/custodian supervision. Online classes usually lasted about 30 minutes instead of the usual 45 during regular school days, and not all subjects were covered. The new curriculum of 2016 covers seven fields: Albanian and English languages; Music and Art Education; Mathematics; Humans and Nature; Society and Environment; Physical Education, Sports, and Health; Life and Work. These courses make up a total of 21 hours of learning. To cover the curriculum, there should be four classes per day and once a week five classes. During online learning, there were about two to four classes per day and each class was about 30 minutes long. It is obvious that the curriculum goals could not have been met, let alone the student engagement in class activities, teachers' feedback, and assessment. A MESTI senior officer from the department of curriculum and textbooks explained that the writers of this curriculum were a large group of people from within and out of MESTI. Furthermore, he explains that "the main problem during the writing of these documents was the transfer of responsibilities for managing the work, sometimes at the relevant division at the Ministry and sometimes at other groups outside of the Ministry."[11]

Even before the pandemic, the implementation of the new curriculum faced many challenges. The reports show that the difficulties encountered during the process of curriculum implementation were difficulties in transforming the teaching and learning models from the teacher to the student, difficulties in the implementation of the evaluation instruments for the student achievements and in some cases even the lack of adequate human and material resources. Low access to contemporary technology not being incorporated appropriately in the curriculum, including teaching, was also reported (Ministria e Arsimit, Shkences dhe Teknologjise 2018).

The average annual hourly duration of schooling in European Union countries (EU-27) varies from 470 hours to 1,050 (Directorate of Evaluation, Forecasting and Performance Monitoring 2020). In Kosovo first graders spend 772 hours at school annually (MESTI 2021). During their first grade, Kosovar pu-

11   Ibid

RETHINKING TEACHING IN POST COVID -19 EDUCATION IN KOSOVO:
WHAT DO EDUCATORS AND PARENTS THINK ABOUT ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING?

205

pils attend school for about 3 hours, with 4 classes of 45 minutes each. The number of pupils per class in public schools in Kosovo is not more than 23, but the number is higher in urban schools (Ministria e Arsimit, Shkences dhe Teknologjise 2018). In the EU countries, as reported in 2017, the average class size in primary education is about 20 pupils per class, the largest number of pupils per class being in France with about 24 pupils, whereas the minimum number of pupils in classes is Latvia and Luxemburg with 16 pupils per class.

However, even though Kosovo's average of both the number of hours spent at school yearly and the number of pupils in classes is similar to that of the EU countries, the quality of teaching and learning is not as good. Kosovo's education system is one of the most criticized and one of the poorest in Europe. There is an urgent need for fundamental changes at all levels to address long standing structural maladies such as low school budgets, poor infrastructure, inadequate curriculum, and textbooks, and lack of teachers' professional development, especially in the field of technology.

Considering the struggles that teachers, parents, and their children faced during online learning in Kosovo it is obvious that the new curriculum expectations could not be met. MESTI officials are aware of the problems online learning has caused to teaching and learning in Kosovo. MESTI senior officer from the department of curriculum and textbooks says that "during the pandemic, learning was mainly organized online, and this has caused many problems for the proper implementation of the curriculum".[12]

Undoubtedly, the clearest indicator of the poor state in which Kosovo's education system has been for a long time is its students' performance in internationally standardized tests, such as OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which evaluates education systems worldwide by measuring the knowledge and skills of pupils aged 15 years. Kosovar pupils participated in PISA for the first time in 2015 and ranked bottom (OECD

---

12   Interview with Arber Salihu, MESTI official from the department of pre-university curriculum development, Prishtina, 11 May 2022

2018). This poor ranking was a slap in the face to the whole education system in Kosovo and a wakeup call for Kosovo's educators and other stakeholders.

In 2018, Kosovo participated in PISA for the second time and while the mean performance of pupils in reading and mathematics was equally poor, their performance in science was even worse than in 2015. In a media conference in late March 2022, the Vice Minister of Education, Dukagjin Pupovci declared that MESTI is ready for the third cycle of PISA testing. Furthermore, Pupovci said:

> "we are ready for this testing. There is a sample of 237 schools, some are elementary schools, and some are high schools, because for this testing the students should be 15-year-olds, and there is selected a random sample of 7 thousand students to participate in PISA testing. The PISA testing will take place from April 25 until May 20. Students will do the testing in classrooms in schools that have computers which will be connected to the internet. The results will be available in December 2023" (YouTube 2022).

Despite the growing awareness about the need to improve student performance, there is little room for optimism when it comes to the outcome and ranking from PISA 2022 testing, given the ongoing structural problems and the devastating impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning in the past two years, which we are trying to analyse in this article.

Teacher Development

There has been an ongoing debate in Kosovo about the importance of integrating technology in teaching. In their strategy for 2017-2021, MESTI has emphasized the high level of using information and communication technology, and according to official data, 76.6% of Kosovo's population use the internet. Even though internet is mostly used for entertaining activities, this percentage is well above the regional average. On the other hand, the opportunity to use technology in school is limited due to the lack of equipment, i.e., one computer is available for 46 students and only 57% of the teaching staff are trained for ECDL

RETHINKING TEACHING IN POST COVID -19 EDUCATION IN KOSOVO:
WHAT DO EDUCATORS AND PARENTS THINK ABOUT ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING?

207

(European Computer Driving Licence). This is the only training on technology that teachers have been provided by MESTI. ECDL included basic modules of computer essentials, online essentials, word processing and spreadsheets. But since then, teachers have not used nor advanced their skills in technology.

However, in their previous strategy for the 2017-2021 period, MESTI (2016) has foreseen that during these five years the focus will be on the improvement of these preconditions for a better integration of technology in teaching and learning. Consequently, in cooperation with international partners such as the EU and USAID, work was done on the purchase of computers and the development of electronic content and the maintenance of ICT equipment in schools. According to a MESTI report on the evaluation of this 5-year strategy (MESTI 2018), the internet connection rate of schools has increased by almost 80%, however it is reported that the education system has low access to information and communication technology and modern technology is not yet integrated appropriately in the curriculum, teaching and the overall management of the education system as a whole. This MESTI report also highlights the need to invest in and strengthen these mechanisms. However, despite these reports, if we visit the schools in Kosovo, we can observe that the internet is usually in the office of principals and in some labs, while teaching in the classroom is done mainly with projectors.

In the absence of prior preparation, during the pandemic, teachers initially began using the Zoom platform to deliver lessons, a platform completely unknown to them. As teacher 1 described it:

> "Until the start of online learning we did not know that these platforms existed. I was teaching the fifth grade when the pandemic hit, and my nephew was attending another school in Prishtina, and they had already started learning online. My nephew, a third grader at that time, was attending a course in technology and told me that it is very easy to use Zoom, he even opened an account for his teacher… He opened an account for me, and I was the first one in my school to start with online learning through Zoom." [13]

---

13   Interview with a second-grade teacher at a public school in Kosovo, conducted on April 19, 2022

39%
I prefer in class teaching using textbooks

Teachers' plans on using technology in teaching

61%
I intend to continue using technology in my classes
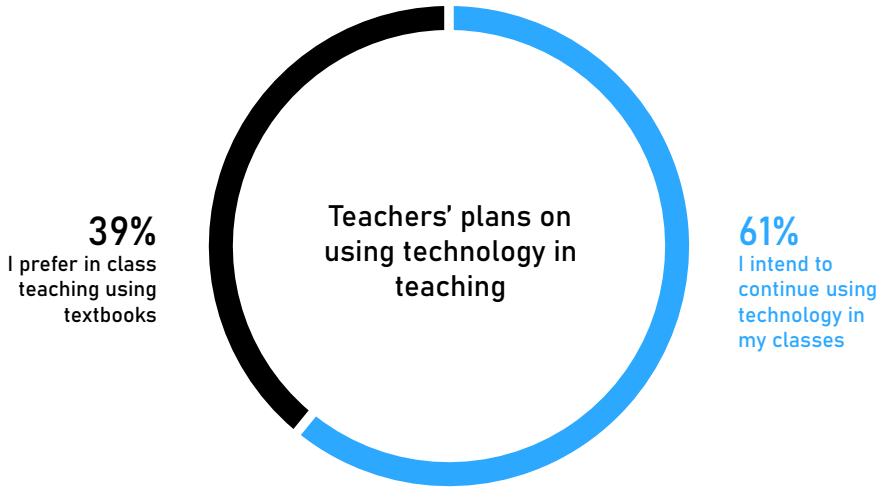
FIGURE 11: Teachers' plans for professional in teaching

18%
No, i don't

Teachers' plans for professional development: Integrating technology in teaching

82%
Yes, I do
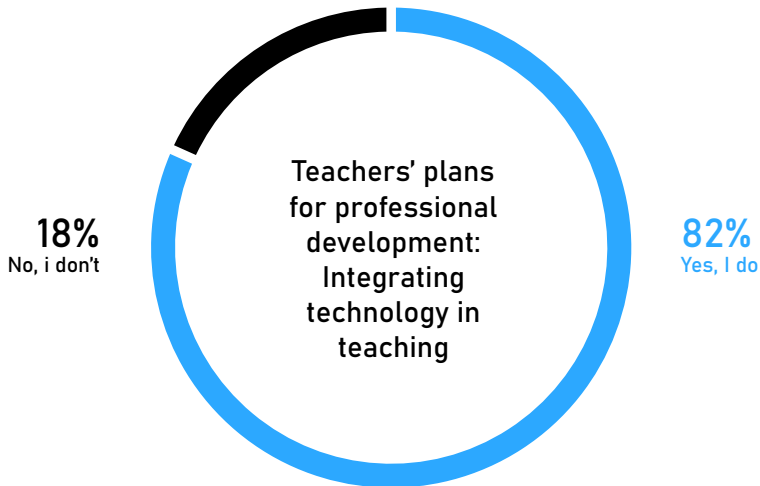
FIGURE 12: Teachers' plans on using technology development

RETHINKING TEACHING IN POST COVID -19 EDUCATION IN KOSOVO:
WHAT DO EDUCATORS AND PARENTS THINK ABOUT ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING?

209

Data from our study reveal that most of the teachers are aware of the importance of integrating technology in teaching and therefore 82% of them plan to attend trainings and 61% of the teachers have reposted to intending to continue using it in their classes.

As Teacher 1 put it,

> "I would like to advance my skills in terms of integrating technology into teaching. We finished ECDL, I had it all done, but now with this pause of not using technology due to lack of equipment the knowledge has vanished and I started to forget things. We have often asked for help, even as a school, and we, the primary school teachers, have asked for help, but when you do not have your own equipment, it is more of a problem."

Teachers are willing to attend courses and advance their skills in terms of integrating technology in learning, but such trainings were never offered to them by MESTI or other licenced educational institutions. According to Teacher 4,[14] "[t]here are different trainings offered to us, but nothing regarding the integration of technology in learning. Except for the one-day training we had about E-shkollori, which was offered at our school." Unfortunately, many trainings are not deemed very useful to the teachers as they do not use the learned content or skills in their classes: "Yes, there are many trainings, but they are not useful at all," concurs Teacher 1.[15]

Improvements in education are impossible without teachers' professional development. Reports have shown that there is a lack of teachers' skills but also equipment for integrating technology in teaching and learning. There are no data on teacher development except for the ECDL training. Skills gained at these trainings are mainly used by teachers for writing reports and lesson plans, preparing the tests, sending emails, or conducting research, if they have computers at home. Teachers in our study reported to have struggles during online learning because the online platforms were unknown to them before. However, teachers

---

14   Interview with a second-grade teacher at a public school in Kosovo, conducted on April 23, 2022
15   Interview with a second-grade teacher at a public school in Kosovo, conducted on April 19, 2022

have reported their intent to use technology in their teaching even during the in-class teaching, and they plan to attend trainings on technology if they are provided to them in the future.

Conclusions

The above analysis and research has highlighted some of the key challenges that the primary education system in public schools in Kosovo faces. MESTI's strategy plan for 2017-2021 and different reports on its implementation, with the focus on pre-university education, have similarly exposed the gaps in the strategy's implementation. The main problems presented in these reports are the lack of proper infrastructure for integrating technology in teaching and learning, lack of teachers' trainings on technology, limited capacities for the preparation of online resources, and limited capacities for new curriculum implementation. While MESTI undertook numerous activities to improve this situation, the results of this study show that no significant progress was made in this regard. The imposed online teaching during the pandemic found the schools lacking the needed infrastructure for successful teaching and learning, and most teachers were unprepared in terms of using technology in learning. MESTI made attempts to ease the process of transitioning to online learning by providing lessons which were broadcasted on the national TV and created a platform E-shkollori. They also provided a one-day trainings for the teachers to understand and be able to use this platform. But up to this date there are no detailed and credible reports on the online learning and teaching outcomes or on the number of first graders who attended this form of schooling.

This study has identified numerous challenges that teachers faced during online learning, the chief among them being lack of knowledge in using technology, which, in turn, undermined their confidence and raised anxiety and stress during this period of teaching. Therefore, it is unsurprising that

RETHINKING TEACHING IN POST COVID -19 EDUCATION IN KOSOVO:
WHAT DO EDUCATORS AND PARENTS THINK ABOUT ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING?

211

all the teachers who participated in this study have reported to prefer classroom-based schooling to online teaching. Such views are not limited to teachers alone; parents participating in this study share similar views, too. Almost all of them stated that their children are more motivated during school-based learning. These research findings show that children are not satisfied with online learning as they encounter many difficulties such as problems with internet connection, inability to access this form of learning without direct supervision from parents, not enough information available to them, and the inability to express themselves clearly during online classes. Working parents had even more problems because they could not supervise their children as much as they would like to.

Curriculum implementation was another challenge teachers were facing during online learning. It was the first time in their career they had to implement the new curriculum and at the same time adjust to the online form of teaching. This unpreparedness of teachers has direct consequences on student achievement. While it is too early to predict the scale of impact on student learning and achievement, this year's PISA testing could be a good indicator. Curriculum implementation and teaching abilities of the teachers are directly related to their professional development. Teachers in our study have declared so far that MESTI has offered them trainings on ECDL alone. Nevertheless, results show that the absolute majority of teachers understand the importance of integrating technology in their teaching and are open to new trainings in technology as they are planning to continue using it in their lessons. There are many international donors in Kosovo who offer teacher trainings on the integration of technology in learning and contribute to improving school infrastructure with ICT tools and other learning materials. However, in order to maximize the benefits of donor aid, MESTI should demonstrate it has a clearer and comprehensive vision, strategy and action plan to streamline the process and act upon it.

MESTI is currently drafting a new strategy for 2021-2026, and as shown above, it is essential to pay urgent attention to teachers' development and integration of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Math)

in teaching and learning. Many internationally acclaimed education experts regard STEAM (and its predecessor STEM) as an essential component of 21st century education. Needless to say, this would reflect in an improved PISA performance in the near future.

Considering the effect of pandemic and the inability of children to participate in online learning due to the above-mentioned reasons, and many more, it is important to conduct large-scale research and gather data on children participation. This is crucial not only in terms of getting a clearer picture of the experience of online learning so far, but also, importantly, to gain lessons about best practices that could help in dealing with similar emergencies and finding ways to help children who could not achieve competence foreseen in the curriculum.

There should also be a system in place which would support working parents and allow them to be present during their children's online learning. MESTI and other stakeholders should act fast on this important matter because losing a whole year of learning, especially the first grade, has important implications for the future of these children. The increase of quality at all levels of education depends on the teachers' abilities and their students to embrace the newest trends in education, including the integration of technology.

List of interviews

Arber Salihu Senior Officer for Curriculum and Textbooks, Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, Prishtina, 11 May 2022.

Anonymous interviewee 1, a second-grade teacher, conducted at a public school in Kosovo on April 19, 2022

Anonymous interviewee 2, a second-grade teacher, conducted at a public school in Kosovo on April 20, 2022

Anonymous interviewee 3, a second-grade teacher, conducted at a public school in Kosovo on April 22, 2022

RETHINKING TEACHING IN POST COVID -19 EDUCATION IN KOSOVO:
WHAT DO EDUCATORS AND PARENTS THINK ABOUT ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING?

213

Anonymous interviewee 4, a second-grade teacher, conducted at a public school in Kosovo on April 23, 2022

Anonymous interviewee 5, Interview with a parent of a second grader at a public school in Kosovo, conducted on April 7, 2022

Anonymous interviewee 6, Interview with a parent of a second grader at a public school in Kosovo, conducted on April 9, 2022

Anonymous interviewee 7, Interview with a parent of a second grader at a public school in Kosovo, conducted on April 11, 2022

References

Anderson, D.R., H. Lavigne, & K. Hanson. 2013. The educational impact of television: Understanding Television's potential and limitations. *The international Encyclopedia of Media Studies, First Edition*. 1-22.

Bourner, T., & S. Flowers. 1997. Teaching and learning methods in higher education: A glimpse of the future. *Reflections on Higher Education,* 9, 77-102.

Bajrami, K. 2021. Vleresimi i realizimit te planit strategjik per arsimin ne Kosove 2017-2021 Arritje te pamjaftueshme. Cilesia, llogaridhenia dhe gjitheperfshirja ne arsim 2021. KEC

Cooper, P.A. 1993. Paradigm shifts in designing instruction: From behaviourism to cognitivism. *Educational Technology,* 35, no. 5, 12-19.

Corteen, R. S. 1986. Television and reading skills. In T. M. Williams. Ed. The impact of television. New York: Academic Press.

Crawley, A. M., D.R. Anderson, A. Wilder, M. Williams & A. Santomero. 1999. Effects of repeated exposures to a single episode of the television program Blue's Clues on the viewing behaviors and comprehension of preschool children. *Journal of Educational Psychology,* 91, no. 4, 630-637.

Directorate of Evaluation, Forecasting and Performance Monitoring. (2020). *Education in Europe: Key Figures* (3rd edition). Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports, and the Ministry of Higher Education and Research and Innovation.

Ellis, N., & L. Collins. 2009. Input and second language acquisition: The roles of frequency, form, and function, Introduction to the special issue. *The Modern Language Journal*, 93, 329–33

European Commission, Commission Staff Working Document, Kosovo 2020 Report, accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the

European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. 2020 Communication on the EU Enlargement Policy. 1-118. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2020-10/kosovo_report_2020.pdf

Garbe, A., U. Ogurlu, N. Logan, & P. Cook. 2020. COVID-19 and remote learning: Experiences of parents with children during the pandemic. *American Journal of Qualitative research,* 4, no. 3, 45-65.

Gibbs, G. 2007. *The Sage qualitative kit, 8 Vols: Analysing qualitative data*. Sage.

Government of Kosovo, Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (2018, August 24). The Pre-University Education Curricula Framework. https://masht.rks-gov.net/korni-za-e-kurrikules-e-arsimit-parauniversitar

Government of Kosovo, Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (2020, August 17) Udhezues I pergjithshem per organizimin e mesimit ne vitin shkollor 2020/2021 ne kushtet dhe rrethanat e krijuara nga pandemia Covid 19. https://spinp.agency/masht/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/udhezuesi-final-file-10-09-2020.pdf

Hung, D. 2001. Theories of learning and computer-mediated instructional technologies. *Educational Media International,* 38, no. 4, 281-287.

Hung, D., & M. Nichani. 2001. Constructivism and e-learning: balancing between the individual and social levels of cognition. *Educational Technology,* 41, no. 2, 40-44.

Koohang, A., & K. Harman. 2005. Open source: A metaphor for e-learning. Informing Science: *The International Journal of an Emerging Transdiscipline,* 8, 75-86. http://inform.nu/Articles/Vol8/v8p075-086Kooh.pdf

Linebarger, D. L., K. McMenamin, & D.K. Wainwright. 2008. Summative evaluation of Super WHY!. University of Pennsylvania, http://www-tc.pbkids.org/read/files/SuperWHY_Research_

Liu, F., E. Black, J. Algina, C. Cavanaugh, & K. Dawson. 2010. The validation of one parental involvement measurement in virtual schooling. *Journal of Interactive Online Learning*, 9, no. 2, 105-132.

Moeller, B. 1996. Learning from Television: A research review. *Centre for Children and Technology*. 11, 1-37.

Mehmeti, S., L. Boshtrakaj, & F. Mehmeti. 2019. Mid-term Evaluation: Implementation of Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021. Kosovo Education and Employment Network – KEEN project.

Murphy, E., & M.A. Rodrigues-Manzanares. 2009. Teachers' perspectives on motivation in high school distance education. *Journal of Distance Education,* 23, no. 3, 1-24.

Musa, N.N. & M.D. Fojkar. 2019. Correlation between students' English listening skills, vocabulary skills and out-of-school listening exposure. *The New Educational Review,* 55, no. 1, 42-53.

RETHINKING TEACHING IN POST COVID -19 EDUCATION IN KOSOVO:
WHAT DO EDUCATORS AND PARENTS THINK ABOUT ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING?

215

Nichols, M. 2003. A theory for e-Learning. *Educational Technology & Society,* 6, no. 2, 1-10. http://ifets.ieee.org/periodical/6-2/1.html

Ojimaa, S. 2011. Age and amount of exposure to a foreign language during childhood: Behavioral and ERP data on the semantic comprehension of spoken English by Japanese children. *Neuroscience Research,* 70, no. 2, 197–205.

OESCD, PISA reports 2018:

https://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?primaryCountry=XKO&treshold=5&topic=PI

Picciano, N. & A. Elbasani. 2019. The ethnic segregation of Kosovo's education system had deep roots, but the post-war actions of the United Nations only perpetuated the situation. *Balkan Insight*. https://balkaninsight.com/2019/03/28/un-shares-blame-for-segregated-education-in-kosovo/

Pinter, A. 2011. *Children Learning Second Languages.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Pupovci, D. 2022. Media conference, preparations for PISA Testing [Video].YouTube. March 25, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=81cepLaACNk

Republika e Kosoves, Qeveria, Ministria e Arsimit, Shkences dhe Teknologjise. 2016. Plani

Strategjik i Arsimit ne Kosove 2017-2021. https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/docs/PLANI_STRATEGJIK_I_ARSIMIT_NE_KOSOVE.pdf

Republika e Kosoves, Qeveria, Ministria e Arsimit, Shkences dhe Teknologjise. 2018. Raporti vjetor i vleresimit i planit strategjik te arsimit te Kosoves 2017-2019. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Armend-Muja/publication/325895588_Raport_Vleresimi_i_Sistemit_Arsimor_ne_Kosove_2017/links/5b2b66064585150c6344b25a/Raport-Vleresimi-i-Sistemit-Arsimor-ne-Kosove-2017.pdf

Safranj, J. 2015. Advancing listening comprehension through movies. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 191, 169–173.

Siemens, G., D. Gašević & S. Dawson. 2015. Preparing for the Digital University: A review of the history and current state of distance, blended, and online learning. Arlington: Link Research Lab. Retrieved from http://linkresearchlab.org/PreparingDigitalUniversity.pdf.

Simonson, M., S,M. Zvacek, & S. Smaldino. 2019. Teaching and Learning at a Distance: Foundations of Distance Education 7th Edition. IAP.

Vygotsky, L.L. 1978. *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

HANA BACAJ

Applying a Gender Lens to COVID-19 Economic Recovery: A Spotlight on Women-led Businesses in Kosovo

— HANA BACAJ

Hana Bacaj is an experienced Research Analyst with a
demonstrated history of working in the development sector.
Due to her experience in international organizations and
consulting firms in Kosovo, the United States and Latin
America, she has become an actor of positive change in
Kosovo in the field of education or/and employment which
are two of the core determinants of community development.
Her career aspirations are helping communities in need,
mainly focusing on the education and employment of
women, youth, and other vulnerable groups. Hana has
published research papers previously, enhancing the data
availability about Kosovo, especially in the gender field.
Hana has a Master's degree in Economic Development and a
Certificate in Women's and Gender Studies from Vanderbilt
University in Tennessee, U.S

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit businesses across the globe and posed a myriad of challenges to them, but these challenges have been different across different countries, sectors, and owners of businesses. This paper examines one important dimension which is the challenges that the pandemic posed on women-led businesses and the role of the government recovery policies in mitigating those challenges. The main focus will be on how and to what extent the Kosovo government integrated gender considerations into broader policymaking and recovery strategies. The paper used mainly qualitative methods, and a combination of primary and secondary sources which helped gain familiarity with the effects of this new phenomenon and facilitated further research. More specifically, this paper was supplemented with semi-structured interviews with nine stakeholders who have been involved in policy-making or supported women-owned businesses during the pandemic. Moreover, the paper included data from three focus group discussions which explored the real experiences of women entrepreneurs pre and post COVID-19. The findings show that women-led businesses faced five key challenges during the pandemic such as decreased customer purchasing, the need to remodel the business, the threat to existence, decreased business size, and increased childcare responsibility. The support that women entrepreneurs needed to face the challenges experienced during the pandemic were financial assistance, tax reduction, business advice, greater awareness and mobilization from the institutional level. As the findings of this paper suggest, shortcomings have emerged due to a misreading of the situation; therefore, the Kosovo government did not integrate gender considerations in recovery strategies. The findings show a lack of written explanations in the design of the measures that specified the gender factor in policymaking. The paper generates important policy-relevant insights about the real experiences of women entrepreneurs and shortcomings in policymaking.

Introduction

COVID-19 has posed fundamental and multiple challenges even to most developed countries. However, the threat to developing countries like Kosovo is even more severe. Kosovo has adopted different policy measures in response to COVID-19, focusing on social well-being, business support, and grant supervision. Historically, women-led businesses are associated with lower average profits, smaller size, fewer employees, and possibly higher costs of obtaining firm social capital and engaging in relevant business networks. Moreover, the absence of schools, children and eldercare institutions has resulted in an increased family care burden on women entrepreneurs, making it hard for women entrepreneurs in Kosovo to navigate the challenges of steering businesses in turbulent economic times. More specifically, based on UN Women (UNW) reports (Ross and Taylor 2020), self-employed women in Kosovo have experienced a decrease in paid working hours by up to 72 %. Furthermore, 31 % of women-owned businesses are in the service sector, which suffered the most due to decreased human contact and policies that mitigate exposure.

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Government of Kosovo rolled out a plan with measures accessible to all businesses. Although women are an integral part of the workforce, gender is often ignored during policymaking and especially during an emergency crisis. During these crises, the most effective policies are expected to address the overall challenges without discrimination. When a country is facing a health crisis, the leaders of that country need to adapt quickly and take action. But, often, gender is the last factor they consider in policy making. Kosovo is no different in this respect, given that government-designed policies during the pandemic have not sufficiently considered gender aspects.

The paper examines the impact of the pandemic on women-led businesses and the COVID-19 economic recovery policies in Kosovo with a focus on the key factors and actors behind policymaking and their impact on women entrepreneurs in Kosovo. The main focus will be on how and to what extent the Kosovo government integrated gender considerations into broader policymaking and recovery

strategies. The main research question it addresses is: whether a gender lens was applied when designing the two main fiscal packages implemented during the most critical months of COVID-19 in 2020-2021?

The policies taken to support people and businesses have a long rather than short impact. So, to understand the measures and their impact, this study draws on in-depth interviews and secondary data regarding the situation of women's business in Kosovo. The findings of this paper will shed light on the policies that proved to be successful regarding the work dynamic of women-owned businesses and those that proved the contrary. This paper will be an evidence-based study that will also generate important policy recommendations that could help overcome the barriers women-led businesses face in Kosovo.

In the first section, I lay out the context for gender differences for women entrepreneurs, the challenges they faced during the pandemic in Kosovo and the region, and the economic recovery plan used during those times. In the second section, I discuss two theories that focus on the governments' role in handling the pandemic's impact on women-led businesses. The third section discusses the findings of the primary data collected from government officials, NGOs, donor organizations, and business owners to understand whether a gender lens was used during the fiscal packages of COVID-19 in Kosovo. In the last section, I give insights into how gender-specific problems are addressed in policy making during times of crisis by outlining some priority measures to accompany both the immediate response and longer-term recovery efforts.

Literature Review

Women in Business and Economic Growth

Entrepreneurial activities are crucial for economic development and the well-being of societies. For this reason, most countries are interested in creating sustainable

entrepreneurial ecosystems (Carranza, Dhakal and Love 2018). Nevertheless, the presence of women in entrepreneurial activities has lagged compared to that of men in most developing and developed countries (Carranza, Dhakal and Love 2018). Active participation of women in economic activities is necessary for the development of any country, and low participation of women is characterized as underutilization of human capital, which directly affects a country's economic growth (Waseem, 2018). Women in business may contribute to the development with multiplier effects because they are more prone to employ other women and have a greater concern for household welfare (Waseem 2018).

The percentage of women in business has risen over time; nevertheless, women entrepreneurs still operate in low growth sectors. For many individuals, socio-cultural and economic constraints limit micro-businesses (Carranza, Dhakal and Love 2018). Many theorists have tried to identify the key factors that help explain why most women have micro-businesses. Some findings portray women entrepreneurs as individuals who seek to supplement household income and balance work and house responsibilities (Sidi Ali 2016). While other findings state that women entrepreneurs tend to be sole owners, have less managerial experience and lack self-confidence. In general, women entrepreneurs have smaller sales, revenues, number of employees and reside in lower-profit industries (Sidi Ali 2016). In addition, gender stereotypes and limited access to networks and mentoring may create barriers to effectively running a business. For instance, women face financial barriers (access to capital) and lack knowledge of finance and accounting, due to which their business cannot flourish (Sidi Ali 2016). Women are also prone to discriminating attitudes from banks and other financial institutions because of issues such as prejudice or credibility.

The role of government is crucial in enhancing the business environment in a country, and this can be done through flexible policies, which lead to the better performance of businesses. Therefore, the country's institutional profile and business environment profoundly affect the activity of women entrepreneurs (Waseem 2018). The next section will specifically lay out the challenges that women entrepreneurs faced during the pandemic, which are closely linked with the way women operate their businesses.

The Impact of the Pandemic on Women-led Businesses

The extensive spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has endangered citizens' health and financial stability, but it has also amplified gender, race, ethnic and socioeconomic inequities. The challenges created by the pandemic lead to a tradeoff between health and economic risk, "leading to a life vs livelihoods conundrum" (Birhanu, Getachew and Lashitew 2022). The spread of the COVID-19 across countries and the emergency measures for social distancing and lockdown have strained the world economy. Specifically, the pandemic caused a major disruption to most businesses worldwide, and evidence suggests that it had a greater impact on some businesses than others. Women are under-represented among the business owners and tend to operate smaller businesses concentrated in sectors that were hit the hardest during a pandemic; women-led businesses were more likely to not survive the pandemic than men-owned businesses (Kaberia and M. A. Muathe 2020).

Data from seventeen countries, including Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, show that most women-owned firms were about 1.4 times more likely to close than the majority of men-owned firms (Yang and Kenny 2021). Data from this study shows that 17% of surveyed women-owned businesses permanently/temporarily closed in 2020, which is 6% higher than men-owned firms in services, retail, wholesale, hotels, and the food sector (Yang and Kenny 2021). The data also show that many women business owners said that childcare was a great challenge during the pandemic compared to men's business owners.

In addition, firm-level data collected during the pandemic show that women-owned businesses were more likely (7% points higher) than male-owned businesses to close for more than a week during pandemic. Moreover, women-owned companies put their businesses on hold for one more week than men-owned companies. (11 weeks and 10.1 weeks, respectively) (Hyland *et al.* 2021). Furthermore, women-led businesses during the pandemic reduced their operating hours, salaries, and benefits more than firms owned by men,

which leads to more adverse outcomes since the majority of employees in women-owned businesses are women (Hyland *et al.* 2021). Another important factor that increased the distress of women entrepreneurs was the decrease in revenues since the pandemic, especially in low-income countries and in micro-small firms. Based on the data collected from 41 countries, women entrepreneurs were more likely to apply for a loan to cope with financial distress. However, they were twice as likely to have their application rejected than men (Hyland *et al.* 2021).

The pandemic impacted women entrepreneurs also in ways which are not directly related to everyday work-related tasks. Women entrepreneurs experienced increased childcare responsibilities, impacting their work outside the home and committing their business funds to meet family obligations. In addition, travel restrictions posed during pandemic had a greater effect on women, especially in the informal sector of women-led businesses.

Therefore, during those times of crisis, many women entrepreneurs tried to adapt their businesses to continue their business, particularly in low- and middle-income countries that had less government support. According to World Bank data, on average, women-led businesses are more likely than businesses led by men to report increasing the use of digital technology (Torres *et al.* 2022). In sum, evidence suggests that women-led businesses faced greater challenges and more adverse outcomes compared to men, such as increased childcare responsibility, close of business, decrease in revenues, and limited access to finance.

The Case of Kosovo

COVID-19 had economic implications across many business sectors and social spheres in Kosovo. The pandemic hurt most businesses by sending some to bankruptcy and some to a downtrend. The business sector in Kosovo is made up almost entirely of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), 93% of which are micro-enterprises, employing less than ten

people each, providing 36% of all of the formal jobs in Kosovo (OECD et. al. 2019). In particular, 11% of businesses in Kosovo are owned by women; 31% of these businesses are in the service sector, which has suffered the most due to reduced human contact and policies that mitigate exposure during the pandemic (Bizneset e Hapura 2019).

According to an American Chamber of Commerce study about women businesses in various sectors across Kosovo, the majority (67%) of businesses considered the pandemic to have had a very negative impact on their businesses, with 70% of businesses surveyed saying there has been a decrease in demand for products and services during the first half of 2020. Women-led businesses also increased their receivables accounts since their clients had not paid their bills. These two main challenges posed difficulties for their business in covering fixed costs of the business (Hajra 2020). According to the UNDP Rapid Socio-Economic Impact Assessment (SEIA), the issues of access to finance and increase in costs within the company were higher in women-led businesses than men-led businesses by seven percentage points (2019). The most common strategy implemented among women entrepreneurs has been temporarily reducing the number of employees, reducing employees' working hours, and a small percentage had to fire some employees (Hajra 2020).

Women entrepreneurs were obliged to temporarily suspend all business activities more than men (by 7%). Data suggest that women-owned businesses were obliged to send all or some employees to work from home at a higher rate than men-led businesses. Businesses had to shift and digitalize some of their operations, which increased their investment in online marketing more than men-led businesses (UNDP and UN Women 2021). This was noticed in other studies too, where women-run companies used digital platforms more than men-led companies (The World Bank 2020).

The data collected in 2021 shows that most women-owned businesses' capacity dropped by more than 60%, which was 20% more than men-owned businesses (Rapid Socio-Economic Impact Assessment (SEIA) 2021). More than fifty % of surveyed businesses said that their sales dropped by 50-90 %.

The studies done in Kosovo show that far fewer women-led businesses could cope with the current situation longer than six months compared to businesses owned by men. Furthermore, seven percentage points higher than men, women entrepreneurs were obliged to temporarily suspend all business activities (Rapid Socio-Economic Impact Assessment [SEIA] 2021).

As discussed above, the greatest challenge women entrepreneurs in Kosovo experienced during the pandemic was having a stable financial situation. The second greatest challenge was increased unpaid work, such as the need for additional care and attention toward family (Hajra 2020). Moreover, the closure of schools and kindergartens during the pandemic has increased the burden of family care on the shoulders of women entrepreneurs, making it difficult for them to work towards their business in difficult economic times. Overall, the impact of the pandemic was greater on women-led businesses than on men at both regional countries and Kosovo. In what follows, we lay out the economic recovery policies/measures used during the pandemic in the region (Balkan countries) and in Kosovo.

COVID-19 Economic Recovery

To address the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis, governments worldwide introduced public health and economic support policies. These included activities and measures related to public information campaigns, testing, and economic recovery for businesses and households (Birhanu, Getachew and Lashitew 2022). Even though the COVID-19 crisis has been unprecedented, it was not unusual in two important ways. First, it disproportionately affected small businesses and worsened existing inequalities. Second, there were large differences across countries regarding the scope and quality of public policy responses.

Data analysis of more than 20,000 businesses across 40 countries shows that the stronger the public health policy response was, the smaller the gap in performance between men's and women-owned enterprises. In many developing countries, it was seen that women entrepreneurs did not receive a fair share

of economic support because their specific needs were not well-understood. According to Birhanu, Getachew and Lashitew (2022), this was mainly attributed to the social norms and that men dominate the landscape of politics and policymaking.

The interventions taken during the pandemic differed in scope and robustness across countries. For instance, the Croatian government created a crisis management unit in the Ministry of Health to work on preventive measures before any COVID-19 case was reported. In contrast, the responses of the Nicaraguan government were the total opposite, and they did not take any measures until they noticed a high number of cases in their country (Birhanu, Getachew and Lashitew 2022). Nevertheless, this does not mean that even countries that took early management measures necessarily considered gender in their policymaking.

Looking at some countries in the Balkans, many of them had similar measures and recovery plans which did not target specifically businesses owned by women. For instance, in Croatia, government measures against the COVID-19 pandemic were mainly focused on the economy and were perceived primarily as a support to businesses without specific focus or considerations. Grants were given to support shortened working hours, wage subsidies, and tax deferral to entrepreneurs who had a yearly decline in revenue of 20 to 50%. In addition, the World Bank provided liquidity and financial restructuring to young firms and firms owned and managed by women that have been hit by the COVID-19 pandemic (Saraga 2021).

Serbia introduced similar measures during the first wave of pandemic (in 2022) that did not specifically target women entrepreneurs. However, in 2021, the Serbian Ministry of Economy invited women entrepreneurs to apply for support in specialized advisory services and one or more specialized training and monitoring services in 40 hours (*Serbian Government Supports Young and Female Entrepreneurs* 2021).

Similar measures were taken in Albania with grants, subsidies, and tax deferral for entrepreneurs. However, in Albania, donor organizations, institutions, and business associations set a target to support women-owned micro and small

businesses, including rural women businesses, through unconditional cash distributions via digital wallets, support for E-commerce and digital solutions and capacity building in procurement. The implementations of these activities started in 2021 and will continue until the end of 2022 (UN Albania 2020).

North Macedonia's government introduced six packages of measures, similar to Croatia, Albania, and Serbia, to mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 on the economy. In addition, they had specific measures for businesses in the tourism, agriculture, and catering sector. This sector has a high percentage of women entrepreneurs, which indirectly helped them. Also, during these times, they pushed forward the implementation of gender budgeting which supported 250 female farmers with financial support to expand their businesses (UN Women 2021).

Even though the measures taken by some of the developing countries are intended for all businesses operating in the economy, many women entrepreneurs could not apply to those measures because the eligibility criteria did not cover them. While the initial government measures were rolled out rapidly, it became clear throughout 2020 and 2021 that the support did not reach many self-employed women entrepreneurs due to revenue thresholds (OECD and European Commission, 2021). For instance, women entrepreneurs who recently founded a company, which had not generated revenue yet but had staff on the payroll, were not eligible for some measures requiring a drop in revenue. Furthermore, there were issues with eligibility in cases where an entrepreneur started a small business with a partner and has not drawn a salary yet, as they do not have enough payroll to be eligible (Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub 2020).

Data from numerous countries shows that women entrepreneurs tend to invest less in innovative solutions in times of crisis and focus on cost reduction measures such as downsizing. Therefore, this raises the need for governments to provide robust economic support responses through financial means to remodel their business and restructure some processes by investing more in digital technologies (Birhanu, Getachew and Lashitew 2022). As seen above, most Western Balkan countries have not used specific gender indicators when designing the measures for COVID-19 recoveries. Nevertheless, these findings

are based on a literature review, and since the pandemic is a new topic, it can be that not much reporting has been done on this issue. The next section discloses if this was the case in Kosovo or if the opposite happened.

The Case of Kosovo

Kosovo has adopted different policy measures in response to COVID-19, focused on social well-being, business support, and grant supervision. Unfortunately, it remains a challenge to create a clear picture of the real impact that measures taken by Kosovo institutions had on women-led businesses. The lack of data and monitoring on the activities taken during the pandemic make it difficult to accurately assess whether appropriate measures have been taken for women entrepreneurs. However, using various sources available, the paper seeks to identify to what degree government policies were created to help women entrepreneurs overcome the barriers faced during the pandemic in Kosovo.

The Government of Kosovo took steps to meet the challenges posed by the pandemic with the initiation of the Emergency Fiscal Package in March 2020. This package supported the private sector, indirectly including businesses managed by women and self-employed women. This was done in the form of wages. Specifically, the Kosovo Central Bank suspended loan repayments for businesses until at least 30 April 2020, 50% cut on the interest rate on loans for SMEs operating in the tourism sector, and a 15% cut in the interest rate on loans for large companies. In addition, it involved 50 % rent subsidy and a 170-euro-payment for employees for two months only, monthly salaries coverage of 130 euros for two consecutive months for businesses that register the employees with one year contract. According to an American Chamber of Commerce survey, the number of women who benefited from the Emergency Fiscal Package was not high. Moreover, only 10% said this package had addressed their needs (Hajra 2020).

The Economic Recovery Program designed by the Government of Kosovo envisaged covering as many segments of the society as possible, supporting, among other things, business development and combating inequality. Women in business were part of this package directly and indirectly. Specifically, a 'window'

was created dedicated to women in business under the Law on Economic Recovery and the Kosovo Credit Guarantee Fund (KCGF) (Gashi and Gashi 2021). According to KCGF data for 2021, almost 13% of guaranteed loans are for women entrepreneurs in the trade, services, manufacturing, agriculture, and construction sectors. The loans guaranteed through this 'window' were higher by 9% than the loans guaranteed in the past, which clearly shows that such support is essential even after this crisis.

The Government of Kosovo has allocated EUR 2 million to The Agency for Gender Equality (AGE) of the Republic of Kosovo to support women. AGE has support-ed 115 private kindergartens and public-private partnerships for 1 Million Euros, most of which are run by women. The other part of the allocated money was used to support 24 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and 273 small busi-nesses directly managed by women (Gashi and Gashi 2021). Besides the support mentioned above, other initiatives supported women-led businesses directly or indirectly, including support from the Ministry of Trade and Industry (totalling 470,000 euros), Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, as well as the support from donors, development banks, civil society, NGOs, etc. (Gashi and Gashi 2021).

In general, governments should be aware of the issues that women-led business-es face in the country and, based on that, design the measures. Yet, as we have shown in this section, in most Western Balkan countries, no specific gender ra-tionale was used in the design of anti-COVID measures, especially for women-led businesses. Having provided an overview of government-adopted measures, we move on to discussing the extent to which the Kosovo government integrated gender considerations into broader policymaking and recovery strategies. First, we briefly outline the theoretical framework.

Theoretical Review

Given that COVID-19 is an unprecedented and ongoing issue, unsurprisingly there is limited theoretical support regarding its effect on businesses during

such uncertainties. Nevertheless, for this study, we draw on Social Feminism and Structural Inertia Theory to analyse the role of governments in handling the impact of the pandemic on women-led businesses.

In a nutshell, Social Feminism theory emphasizes differences between male and female experiences. Women have a stronger family and work relationship, thus seeing their business as an ecosystem between family, community and business. The differences in how men and women see business and in which field they operate imply that women adopt different approaches which may not be equally as effective as those adopted by men (Fischer, Reuber and Dyke 1993). During the pandemic, stay-at-home orders and the closure of schools and daycare facilities increased unpaid work for women entrepreneurs. As a result, they were devoting less time and energy to running their businesses, which needed immediate government support. In addition, in countries where government responses are limited, women entrepreneurs remain worried about the potential health hazards of their business operations and tend to display communal and caring behaviour. For instance, women entrepreneurs who adopted measures during COVID-19 were likely to remain apprehensive about the potential health hazards of their business operations and restrict their business activities for fear of exposing their workers and colleagues to potential health hazards. Given that the government lacked public awareness, many business owners, especially women entrepreneurs were not informed well about the situation and lacked support to continue the business activities during the pandemics (Birhanu, Getachew and Lashitew 2022).

The majority of women-led businesses could not adjust to changes during the pandemic. Structural Inertia Theory explains why some businesses cannot adjust when conditions change (Hannan and Freeman 1984). For instance, small businesses fail more frequently than large firms due to resource constraints. This is the case with women-owned businesses that are more likely to face obstacles than men-owned and larger firms due to resource limitations (Craighead, Ketchen and Darby 2020). During COVID-19, women entrepreneurs faced a greater risk because their businesses often lacked the resources needed for resilience during the transition in times of crisis. For instance, the government in the United States saw the need to help small and women-owned

businesses via a targeted loan program since larger businesses obtained the majority of the initial funding, leaving the small businesses in a disadvantaged position (Craighead, Ketchen and Darby, 2020).

Methodology

To examine Kosovo's COVID-19 economic recovery policies for women-led businesses, I used mainly qualitative methods and a combination of primary and secondary sources. Owing to the uncertainty and other effects of this novel virus, use of secondary data was helpful in gaining familiarity with the effects of this new phenomenon and facilitating further research. Data was collected from various sources, including policy documents, laws, regulations, and official figures regarding the gender factors and the situation of women-led businesses in Kosovo, before and during the pandemic. In addition, I looked into policy measures taken in other countries, especially for women-owned businesses.

This data was supplemented with semi-structured interviews with nine stakeholders from the Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Agency for Gender Equality, Civil Society, and Donor organizations that have direct interaction with women-owned businesses. Moreover, I facilitated three focus group discussions to explore the real experiences of women entrepreneurs pre and post COVID-19 with up to five women-led businesses in each session. Additionally, I used datasets from the Rapid Socioeconomic Impact Assessment database, the American Chamber of Kosovo and did descriptive statistics mainly.

The participants for semi-structured interviews were selected through the purposive sampling method because it is a nonprobability sampling technique in which a sample is selected after meeting particular criteria. In this study, it was necessary to interview individuals who have been directly or indirectly involved with the design of the COVID-19 measures, so the selection of respondents was

done intentionally. The interviewees decided to keep their anonymity, allowing data to be shared while preserving the privacy of the research participants. For focus group discussion, a random sampling was used in selecting women entrepreneurs taking into consideration regional and sector quotas. Women entrepreneurs from the municipalities of Prishtina, Peja, Gjakova, Prizren, Skenderaj, and Podujeva participated. They represent different sectors such as production, textile, services (nail salons, childcare, accounting, marketing, consulting), retail and agriculture.

Data analysis in qualitative studies was done through the thematic analysis method looking for patterns that emerge from the data. There are no pre-defined variables to focus on for analysis since one identifies them through a review of the data. Since this study is qualitative, all data were analysed using a software program called MAXQDA which allows the researcher to create a code system, organize, sort and use categories, and easily categorize the data, especially those derived from focus group discussions. The following analysing steps were used: (1) search - becoming familiar with the data and identifying main themes, (2) describe - examining the data in depth to provide detailed descriptions of the setting, participants, activities, etc., (3) classify - categorize and code data by physically grouping data into themes, (4) integrate.

Limitations

This study has methodological limitations ranging from data accessibility to the limited coverage of women-led businesses in Kosovo. The focus of this study is only on the registered women-led businesses and not on informal businesses, which might have been hit the hardest during the pandemic. In addition, while this study will try to identify the impact of COVID-19 on female entrepreneurial businesses, there still is uncertainty regarding the extent to which these obstacles will last after the pandemic is over. Accessibility is an issue for various data sources since organizations collect data for internal use and do not always give

access for research purposes. Much of the survey data lacks robust compara-
bility to pre-lockdown baseline data due to questions or data collection chang-
es. Results from different surveys and sources will not be comparable given the
different sampling approaches, timing, jurisdiction and questions used.

Findings

Women Entrepreneurs' Perspectiv on the Impact of COVID-19

As mentioned in the methodology, three focus group discussions (FGD) with
13 women entrepreneurs were held to get insights about real experiences.
For analysing data, I have used the thematic analysis method and noticed
several patterns regarding their general challenges during the pandemic and
their viewpoint on the fiscal packages (See Table 1).

TABLE 1: Overview of data

Discussion Codes	Patterns
• Remodelled the business and went online • Waste of material and food supply. • Mental health issues to children because kindergartens closed and opened several times within three months. • Close one kindergarten location and fire some staff from work. • It has damaged us in the centres, and we have considered whether it is worth keeping shops open. • We used digital marketing, and we were able to sell online. • We went with a budget at a loss, but we remodelled our business to track the orders online. • I only kept 17 workers and I fired the other ones. • I just opened my business and the pandemic broke out and I could not buy medicine for the bees, so most of them died. • There was a demand, but I could not treat the bees, and I was not able to produce honey.	1. The decrease in customer purchasing 2. Remodel the business 3. Work remotely to keep staff safe 4. Threat to existence 5. Shrink the business size 6. Increased childcare responsibility

Discussion Codes	Patterns
• There were challenges with reduction in budget, staff, and to pay rent. • Transport restriction made it impossible for international shipping and in that aspect not even online shopping worked. • I temporarily closed my business, because fashion designing was luxury and no chance to survive. • Decrease sale up to 40%. • Workers were not paid in lockdown. • Paid 50% of the salaries of the workers. • The burden of rent. • Had to create a website and online shopping very quickly. • Tried to keep staff and clients safe. • Had to fire some workers. • Responsibilities have increased, children at home, online learning, schools have not worked. • Sales have fallen a lot. • Decrease in purchasing power. • Increase in use of technology and conducting all of the work remotely to keep the staff safe. • Increase of responsibility because of childcare. • Close of business for one month to keep staff safe. • I had to close 4 shops in the city • I had to terminate a franchise contract • I had to start serving take-away	

Research findings suggest that women entrepreneurs reported various challenges in managing their businesses during the lockdown, particularly with a decline in their sales and business activities interruption. The pandemic imposed severe restrictions on business operations, particularly for service businesses such as kindergartens, nail salons, and gastronomy. Fashion designers have faced the toughest hit during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the discussion, most women entrepreneurs shared that they had to take care of their staff during these times of crisis and start working remotely to make sure that the staff and clients would be safe. Nevertheless, due to a decline in revenues, many women entrepreneurs were forced to lay off employees, either on a permanent or a temporary basis, thus leaving workers with no income. Some participants were also forced to close some business offices either permanently or temporarily due to operational costs.

In addition, all participants in focus groups who were mothers said that stay-at-home orders and the closure of schools and kindergartens increased their responsibilities at home with work, education, and childcare activities.

> **" I have to take calls when my kid wants my attention at the same time. … She comes to my chair when I am busy and when I cannot get up. I am thinking about giving her the right attention, running my business, the pandemic, and whether I am doing enough." – women entrepreneur**

The new situation has driven many women entrepreneurs to search for alternative ways to provide their customers with goods and services. Some adapted to distance work, focused on new models, and tried to keep their doors open. In particular, the pandemic opened a new door for women entrepreneurs in terms of technological opportunities to scale-up their businesses. Businesses had to shift and digitalize some of their operations, which increased their use of digital platforms and online marketing.

In sum, these findings suggest that the impact of COVID-19 on women-owned businesses in Kosovo has been huge and almost universaly felt in different sectors. They are in line with the data from desk research regarding the overall impact of COVID-19 on women-led businesses in both Kosovo and the world. The next sections will explain the perspective of women entrepreneurs concerning their needs during the COVID-19 crisis and if they felt that the government's decisions met their needs.

What Women-led Businesses Needed During the Pandemic

During the focus group with women entrepreneurs, seven main themes regarding the support their business needed to face the challenges experienced during the pandemic emerged. All participants reported that they needed greater financial support from institutions to subsidize their operational costs.

Almost all women entrepreneurs said they were forced to delay payments to their suppliers, landlords, or tax authorities.

TABLE 2 Overview of Data Regarding needs during a pandemic

Discussion Codes	Patterns
• Financial assistance was necessary, the government should have suggested models to work online and not promise opening then after two weeks to close again. • The instability of the state has distorted all prices and we lost customers. Therefore, we should have been better informed and mobilized. • Much more financial aid, prices for transport have increased and the government must have do something for trade. • Financial assistance to afford wages, rent, and not just one or two months. • I used family support, but there was need for tax reduction and postpone the tax deadline more. • Financial assistance, providing space and consulting on how to do digital business. • Financial assistance and an emergency package for new businesses. • Faster financial assistance. • Grants and in-kind benefits such as business advice. • The financial aspect and advice from them and without what to do in the coming months. • Transparency and information on what is happening and the funds, grants that have happened during the access time. • Financial access through loans and to cut the bureaucracy. • Grants for digitization. • Tax cuts. • Reduction in rent payment for more than two months • Tax reduction at least for the first 6 months of pandemic • Financial support for woman staff.	1. Financial assistance through loans 2. Financial assistance through grants, subsidies 3. Tax reduction 4. Business advice 5. Better mobilization from the institutional level 6. Greater awareness about the situation from the government

The focus group participants stated that their businesses needed more measures and actions to ease their liquidity constraints, such as credit guarantee schemes, direct lending, subsidized interest rates, and tax deferral. Specif-

ically, two participants who owned a business in agriculture said that they were discouraged from applying for loans since they did not have collateral and other documents required by commercial banks. Even though all were forced to somehow shift their business towards digitalization and use digital platforms, it was not feasible for them to make a great investment, giving the lack of support in shifting to digital operations. In addition, lack of transparency from institutions created confusion; therefore, it was necessary to have targeted information campaigns and simplify the application process for fiscal programs offered by institutions. What all women entrepreneurs cited the need for better mobilization from the local and central level and greater support in terms of business advice instead of confusion and hopelessness.

The Social Feminism theory supports such findings since women entrepreneurs tend to worry more about potential health hazards of their business operations and restrict their business activities for fear of exposing their workers and colleagues. This extra caution happened due to low public awareness, lack of transparency regarding the situation, and limited mentoring and financial services access.

> **There were a lot of people who had no idea how to run a business but needed to receive feedback, support and guidance to make it work so they could provide for themselves, provide for their families." – women entrepreneur**

The next chapter will discuss the policy measures taken by the government and whether the gender perspective was taken into consideration. These findings are based on in-depth interviews with officials from the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Kosovo, the Agency for Gender Equality, Kosovo Credit Guarantee Fund, and donor organizations and focus group discussions with women entrepreneurs.

Applying a Gender Lens to the Government's COVID-19 Measures

Emergency Fiscal Package

In Kosovo, many women in business welcomed the government's initiatives/measures; nevertheless, there have been concerns that during the designing of the anti-COVID-19 measures, many of the aspects and challenges that women in the business face were overlooked. This study focuses on findings from interviews with government officials, donor organizations, NGOs that support women in business, and women entrepreneurs themselves. Until February 2020, Kosovo did not have an approved budget, had limited budgetary allocations, and lacked a prior strategy for emergency cases.

All interviewees agreed that Kosovo was not prepared for any emergency when the pandemic started, given its political instability. The government official[1] from the Ministry of Finance said that the government created a fiscal package rapidly with limited resources and sought additional funds from development banks. This situation did not allow the government at that time to create a well-thought operational/implementation strategy and consider all factors when designing the measures. One of the main reasons the government could not establish an operational/implementation strategy was the lack of data and mobilization at the central and local levels. One common complaint that the first Kurti government got from businesses was that due to prolonged procedures and delays in the disbursement, businesses were not helped when they needed it the most[2].

> **In Kosovo we lack data, and therefore it was impossible to have a good planning and design measures in a way that the needs of all Kosovo citizens are addressed timely and adequately" –government official**

---

1 Personal interview with a government official from the first Kurti government who was involved in the preparation of the Emergency Fiscal Package, Prishtina, 23 February 2022.
2 ibid

Even though the government established a Special Commission for the Prevention of the Spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Kosovo,[3] it included minimal participation of women, given that a low number of women are in senior positions in institutions. Due to the situation's urgency, the government official interviewed said that they did not include any gender perspective, at least not in writing, as part of the justification they had to write during budgeting and design of the measures.

More specifically, when looking into four Emergency Fiscal measures[4] (number 3, 7, 8, and 14) designed to support the private sector and employees, the Government did not consider how these measures may impact women and men differently. The government official from the Agency for Gender Equality stated that it was the responsibility of specific ministries and institutions that implemented these measures to create an operationalization plan, the eligibility criteria and track and monitor the implementation of the measures.[5] Nevertheless, given that when the budget was allocated, no gender perspective was taken into account or mentioned in the justification, the institutions did not mention affirmative measures for companies owned by women or did not explicitly consider the different needs in different sectors. Women's needs as business owners were not explicitly targeted, and the measure might have just reinforced gender inequalities given the low percentage of women entrepreneurs in Kosovo.

The government's action and the creation of the emergency package are explained by the Structural Inertia Theory mentioned above. More specifically, the Government of Kosovo faces restricted inertia because it does not have adequate resources available to commit to a new path of action to facilitate structural change by including a gender lens in policymaking. In this case, because Kosovo has done limited gender budgeting in the past and does not

---

3   Decision No. 01/08 "On Establishing Special Commission for Preventing infection of Corona Virus COVID –19", dated 12/03/2020.
4   'Operational Plan on Emergency Fiscal Package' (2020). Minister of Finance and Transfers of the Republic of Kosovo. Available at: https://mf.rks-gov.net/desk/inc/media/29F8FA6F-8E46-483E-A8C1-76E47F3B2D9E.pdf.
5   Personal interview with representative from Agency for Gender Equality, Prishtina, 16 February 2022.

have a strategy for emergencies, it was difficult to change the structure quickly and include the gender perspective in the design of the measures. However, this inertia can lead women entrepreneurs to irreversible strategic choices for their businesses, such as closedown (Schwarz et al., 2020).

Measures like the Emergency Fiscal Credit Guarantee (measure 10) and the one for agriculture (measure 11) seem to not have used gender perspective in the design of the measure and eligibility criteria either. The measure could not include a specific 'window' for women-led businesses during that time because there was no legal base to create positive discrimination against certain groups of people. Nevertheless, KCGF pushed forward this process and included a specific 'window' for women-led businesses during the implementation of the Economic Recovery Program.[6] The newly adopted law on Economic Recovery-COVID-19[7] allows the KCGF credit coverage to micro, small, and medium enterprises with a guarantee of up to 80 % in cooperation with commercial banks. This was made possible with the capital provided by the Government of the Republic of Kosovo through the World Bank and the Development Bank - KfW.

Even the measure for agriculture (number 11) in the Emergency package did not specify which sub-sectors the Ministry of Agriculture would select, given that women and men farmers are engaged across different sub-sectors of agricultural production. As seen on the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Rural Development website, there is no information on the implementation of this measure.[8]

The interviewed government official said that during the design of the measures for the Emergency Package, the gender lens was not presented and used in any of the written justification of the budget; still, those issues may have been discussed verbally in the presence of other officials. Government officials said that the government might have not explicitly considered the

---

6   Personal interview with representative of Kosovo Credit Guarantee Fund, Prishtina, 15 February 2022.
7   Law no. 07/L-016 on Economic Recovery – COVID-19 has entered into force on December 7, 2020. Available at: https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=35478
8   https://www.mbpzhr-ks.net/sq/lajmet/deklarata-e-ministrit-te-bujqesise-pylltarise-dhe-zhvillimit-rural-besian-mustafa-ne-konferencen-per-media-sot-me-23032020

different gender norms, roles, and intersectional needs; but indirectly pushed forward the formalization of businesses. They stated an increase in the number of registration of businesses from which most were women-led. The exact data on the increase in business registration numbers have not been published yet, but the official stated that the Tax Administration of Kosovo gave them this information based on the requests they got in their system for new businesses.[9] The official believes that some of these women-led businesses registered might have a woman as a legal representative of the business just on paper and does not mean that they manage that business.

Besides the measures taken by the Government of Kosovo, in the second quarter of 2020, women-led businesses benefited from a microfinance institution - Agency for Finance in Kosovo (AFK) - which received a 1 million EUR loan from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).[10] EBRD aimed to support the unprecedented challenge of the coronavirus pandemic and women in business were part of this support. The representative from EBRD shared positive feedback about the implementation of this activity, even though this was not enough to cover a greater scope of businesses and all their needs.[11] The next section will discuss the viewpoint of women-led businesses regarding the Emergency Fiscal Package, how informed they were about these measures, and whether they found them helpful in overcoming the challenges presented during the pandemic.

> **This initiative was a success story because many micro-led businesses got access to finance, advisory services, training, mentoring and network-building activities. As a result of this activity some businesses scaled-up online and had a high turnover even in those times of crisis" – EBRD representative**

---

9   Personal interview with government official in Hoti government, Prishtina, 24 February 2022.
10   Personal interview with representative of European Bank for Reconsturction and Development, Prishtina, 04 April 2022.
11   Ibid.

Women Entrepreneurs' Perspective on the Emergency Fiscal Package

In general, women entrepreneurs who were part of focus groups were not well-informed about the first package and the measures used. They said that they were mostly aware of the subsidies for salaries, rent, and pension contributions that were being distributed to help overcome the challenges of the pandemic. Most of the businesses who participated in focus groups were micro and small businesses coming from different sectors. Seven out of thirteen (53%) participating women entrepreneurs said they have applied for subsidizing salaries, rent, and pension contributions. The majority of women entrepreneurs who applied for such benefits said that they were moderate to very dissatisfied with the measures foreseen by the Emergency Fiscal Package because these were not enough to cushion the decline in sales and revenues faced during those times of crisis.

These findings align with the American Chamber of Commerce study, which stated that the number of women who benefited from the Emergency Fiscal Package was not high, and most of them were dissatisfied. Women entrepreneurs who applied for such benefits did it because their accountants proceeded with the application and informed them about such measures. Some business owners who did not apply for any of the benefits foreseen in the Emergency Fiscal Package said they were not informed timely, and others believed that those benefits would not have helped them and it was not worth the disturbance. In general, most women entrepreneurs were dissatisfied with the operationalization of this package because there was a lack of information, and there was a lag in the disbursement of money, which meant that some had to lay off workers and close branches of their businesses until they received that minimal support.

The next section will discuss the Economic Recovery Program, which had more specific measures and was designed especially for women-led businesses.

> **I did not even bother to understand the measures, since my accountant completed the applications on my behalf" – women entrepreneur (retail business)**

The Economic Recovery Program

Amid all uncertainties from COVID-19, Kosovo experienced another crisis since the Government of Kosovo fell during the first quarter of 2020, and another one came into office in June. These changes made it more difficult to implement timely and concisely emergency recovery policies. The conflict between governments made it more difficult to share knowledge on what went right or wrong during the implementation of the first fiscal package. As part of this study, officials from the Hoti government were interviewed, and to their understanding, no written document with lessons learned was shared unless some of the things were said verbally. Nevertheless, the government officials said they continued preparing for a new recovery plan with limited capacities and amid that political instability.

On 13 August 2020, the new Government of Kosovo adopted its Plan for the Implementation of the Economic Recovery with 15 measures, amounting to 365 million EUR.[12] One of the measures (number 1) was to facilitate access to loans for private enterprises to finance investment projects and business continuity; this included coverage of new loans through the Kosovo Credit Guarantee Fund. As mentioned above, the KCGF representative said that KCGF did not have the opportunity to create affirmative action for women-led businesses in the first package due to a limited legal base. However, KCGF created a specific 'window' for women in business as part of the Economic Recovery Program, which would address the needs for liquidity and investment. The designed window would increase credit guarantee coverage by up to 80 % of the loan value in commercial banks. This program started in September 2020 and continued until December 2021, when all funds allocated for this program were disbursed.

Below in Table 3 the number of loans guaranteed to women in business by sector and the amount approved are presented. The KCGF representative stated that this 'window' increased the share of women in business in the guaranteed

---

12   Office of the Prime Minister. "The Government Approves the Plan for the Implementation of the Economic Recovery," August 13, 2020. https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/en/the-government-approves-the-plan-for-the-implementation-of-the-economic-recovery/.

portfolio by 9 % compared to other years.[13] Women entrepreneurs who were part of this program said they forecast to create 470 new jobs. Nevertheless, there is no monitoring system to trace the creation of new jobs and the impact of guaranteed loans on women-led businesses.[14]

TABLE 2 Credit Guarantee to Women in Business

Sector	Number of loans	Amount approved
Trade	88	4,336,115
Service	82	3,826,400
Production	59	2,374,600
Agriculture	30	837,700
Construction	10	361,400
Total	**269**	**11,736,215**

KCGF created several awareness-raising activities and made this 'window' a success involving 269 women in business; however, not much could have been done by their side since it was in the hands of commercial banks to seek women entrepreneurs.[15] Given that KCGF did not provide quotas to commercial banks on how many loans they should lend for women in the business 'window', the commercial banks were more interested in lending guaranteed loans to businesses of greater size. Since the guaranteed credit did not explicitly assign quotas, it reinforced existing gender differences and inequalities among women and men in business. Nevertheless, compared to the first fiscal package, this measure was a good initiative to help women entrepreneurs, and KCGF will continue to push forward with such 'window'.

Another measure (number 2) in the Economic Recovery Program was easing the tax burden on businesses to improve their short-term liquidity. According to government officials' response, when designing this measure,

---

13 Personal interview with representative of Kosovo Credit Guarantee Fund, Prishtina, 15 February 2022.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibdi.

they did not consider gender factors, and as a result, the majority of women in business were not eligible for this measure.[16] One measure (number 10) in the Economic Recovery Program seeks to address women's needs as an affirmative measure. This measure was designed to provide financial support for projects and initiatives to improve the position of women in society and the economy in the amount of 2 million EUR and was implemented by the Agency for Gender Equality (AGE).

During the interview, the AGE representative reported that the proposal of AGE approved by the Government, in the amount of 1 million EUR, aimed to support employed mothers and fathers with childcare services by giving financial support to preschool education institutions and private kindergartens. In addition, this would provide financial sustainability for these private institutions, which employ mainly women and are run by women. In October 2020, AGE started the implementation of this measure and financed 115 private kindergartens for 1 million EUR, which already employed 1145 women, and 108 of those kindergartens are run by women.[17]

> Another issue was that the 1 million EUR which were meant for businesses and NGOs needed to be spent until December 2021 (from June 2021) which was a short time to inform people, to apply, evaluate the applications and complete the implementation" – AGE representative

In May 2021, AGE continued implementing the second part of this measure and supported 24 NGOs - women's organizations, in the amount of 647 thousand EUR.[18] These supported NGOs would implement initiatives to support women in business through training in business management, improving product quality, supporting B2B, improving marketing and social networking and research initiatives that seek to improve women's role in the economic sector. Through the funding of these 24 NGOs, the first monitoring data show that 803 women

16 Personal interview with government official in Hoti government, Prishtina, 24 February 2022.
17 Personal interview with representative from Agency for Gender Equality, Prishtina, 16 February 2022.
18 Ibid.

were trained to open new businesses, sell products online, market products, establish a brand, and operate sites for selling individual business products. In addition, AGE has directly supported 273 micro businesses owned by women who employ a maximum of 2-3 women, and approximately 207 thousand EUR were spent on these businesses.

There were several difficulties in the implementation of this measure, and one of the main ones was the lack of data which did not allow the allocation of budget for businesses with the most need (specific sector) and the other one was the operationalization of the money.[19] The agency for years had a budget of approximately 200 thousand EUR, and within one month, they had the responsibility to manage 2 million EUR.[20] Inevitably, this created issues because they could not spend all that money and operationalize the funds timely. Unfortunately, there was no result chain in place to measure the impact of such measures on women in business and to track the funds given by NGOs, which limits the agency to understand the usefulness of this measure for future reference. As per Structural Inertia Theory, this is another example of structural inertia, more specifically, the habitual inertia in which structural change is feasible and possible, but routine hinders organizational adaptation. In other words, although one of the government's departments (AGE) experienced a budget increase change, the routine and its associated bureaucracy still made it impossible to adapt to this change (Schwarz et al., 2020).

In addition, the government allocated 470 thousand EUR to the Minister of Trade and Industry (MTI), specifically the Kosovo Investment Enterprise Agency (KIESA), to support women-owned businesses. By the end of 2020, MTI supported 32 micro, small, and medium enterprises that employ 240 people. When these grants/subsidies were designed, no specifications or factors were considered in terms of services, business size, and locations that were most impacted during the pandemic for women-led businesses.[21] The money allocated for women entrepreneurs in the past had been used for fairs, and since it was a period of pandemic, they

---

19   Ibid.
20   Personal interview with representative from Agency for Gender Equality, Prishtina, 16 February 2022.
21   Personal interview with representative from Kosovo Investment Enterprise Agency, 4 March 2022.

reallocated it for women in business.[22] Overall, the interviews confirmed a limited gender perspective involved in designing grants and subsidies for businesses, and none was used during the disbursement of grants/ subsidies in the pandemic.

> **The situation was the same for both genders", and thus no gender perspective was needed within justifications"– government official**

In general, the government has provided millions in emergency relief support, including programs for businesses, but in many cases, the size and structure of women's businesses made them ineligible. Altogether, interviews with government officers from the two governments from 2020 to 2021 in key ministries said that in the meetings they were present, they did not consider a gender perspective in the process of designing any of the measures. In addition, officials stated that there are no monitoring mechanisms to see the result-chain of these measures. The findings from this section answer one of the main research questions of this study, namely the key factors used behind COVID-19 measures and to what extent the Kosovo government integrated gender considerations into recovery strategies. The next section will present the perspective of NGOs run by women who benefited from the Economic Recovery Program and women entrepreneurs who were part of the focus group discussions regarding this package.

Women Entrepreneurs' Perspective on the Economic Recovery Program

As mentioned in the methodology above, this study included in-depth interviews with two beneficiary NGOs from the Economic Recovery Program, donor organizations that supported women in business (EBRD) and insights from 13 women entrepreneurs as part of focus group discussions. Based on

---

22   Ibid.

the findings of this qualitative research, three patterns were repeated in all of them. One pattern identified was a lack of information or awareness regarding such benefits. Based on the focus group discussion with women entrepreneurs, 4 out of 13 participants said they were informed about the measures directed towards women in business from this package and one of them benefitted from these measures. The informed participants said that the 2 million EUR was not designed to help their businesses since it was directed towards childcare businesses or other micro-businesses rather than small ones.

> **I did not even bother to apply for this measure, because the amount which I would get was not worth the hassle of preparing all those documentation, since it was one-time cash transfer. – Women entrepreneur in goods sector (fashion)**

One of the beneficiaries of this package owning a childcare business with 80 employees, said that the help from AGE during these times was welcome, but they were informed very late and had to engage some experts to prepare the documentation for the application. The business owner claimed that many childcare businesses were unaware of this measure, and others who could not afford to engage an expert to prepare the documentation were discouraged from applying. Women entrepreneurs shared similar viewpoints even for the guarantee 'window' offered for women in business. One of the participants who has a business in beekeeping said that she went to apply for a loan but was discouraged from applying since she needed to gather a lot of documentation. She did not have anyone around here to help/guide her, which shows that the government did not consider these factors.

One of the interviewed NGOs said that the AGE tried its best to implement this measure, but they were not prepared and had limited human resources.[23] The NGOs who benefited from this measure said that the activities' implementation period was not specified when they applied. This lack of information created problems for the NGOs since they needed to finish every activity

---

23   Personal interview with representative from Women4Women NGO, 12 April 2022.

faster than expected, which jeopardized the quality of the work. In addition, both NGOs said that there were no specific targets put by AGE on what sectors to support or with what services, and there were no mechanisms put in place to help avoid NGOs supporting the same businesses twice or more.

> **We were not correctly informed that we had to implement all the activities which we put in the proposal for less than 6 months (approx. 110k EUR)" – NGO who supported women in business**

The second pattern noticed during the interviews with NGOs, donors and focus groups was the lack of mobilization within institutions at the local and central levels. Women entrepreneurs mentioned that the government took precepted action and did not make consistent decisions across all institutions. One business owner mentioned that these measures would have been designed better if they involved directly NGOs or business chambers which are more informed about the situation of women. The same viewpoint was echoed by the representative of EBRD and two NGOs who said that no one ever called them for support or for ideas on what women in business need in Kosovo. Given that most NGOs and donor organizations collect data timely to assess the needs of women entrepreneurs in Kosovo, it would have been more beneficial to create working groups and design measures that can have a long-run effect and not the opposite.

> **I have the perception that when the government designed these, they did not ask anyone and just two people set and wrote something. If they would mobilize and call the right people, maybe I would considered applying for these measures. In this way I just knew it was a waste of my time and I did not trust the process" – business owner in service sector (digital marketing)**

During the interviews, the third repetitive pattern identified was related to the fact that, according to most interviewees, these measures were not de-

signed to benefit all women-led businesses equally. The two NGOs said that this measure helped some businesses more and some less since they could only target a small number of businesses with the amount of money (20 businesses max per NGO). [24]The help provided ranged from in-kind benefits to cash transfers, and one-time cash transfers are insufficient to withstand the pandemic shocks and improve business viability for several months.

In general, NGOs that support women in business who benefitted from the Economic Recovery Program and women entrepreneurs were not fully satisfied with the second fiscal package and find themselves unsupported or see these measures designed is such manner that won't help all women in business equally.

Conclusion

This research gives deeper insights into how gender-specific problems are addressed in policymaking in Kosovo during times of crisis. Based on the focus group discussions with women entrepreneurs and desk research, this study disclosed the diversified experiences of women managing their businesses during the COVID-19 lockdown period. The five key challenges women entrepreneurs in Kosovo faced were decreased customer purchasing, the need to remodel the business, the threat to existence, decreased business size, and increased childcare responsibility. Besides these challenges, according to World Bank data and insights from focus groups, women entrepreneurs in Kosovo increased the use of digital platforms during the pandemic; still, they show a lower probability of making new investments in digital solutions. The findings from focus groups revealed that all our participants relied on their savings during the lockdown as their sales decreased. The support that women entrepreneurs needed to face the challenges experienced during the

---

24   Personal interview with representative from Kosovar Gender Studies Center NGO, 21 February 2022.

pandemic were financial assistance, tax reduction, business advice, greater awareness and mobilization from the institutional level.

The main research aim of this study was to understand to what extent the Kosovo government integrated gender considerations in recovery strategies. As noted, considerable shortcomings have emerged due to misreading of the situation and problems women-led businesses face. Since most institutions in Kosovo do not have gender-disaggregated data, it is difficult to create policies that consider the gender factor. In the design of fiscal packages during the pandemic little to no consideration was given to gender factors when helping businesses in Kosovo. The in-depth interviews with government officials, NGOs, and donor organizations revealed a lack of written explanations in the design of the measures that specified the gender factor in policymaking. This was noticed during the analysis of each measure, in which most women entrepreneurs were not eligible to apply.

In addition, the two measures created to target women in business had issues with the implementation due to limited resources, lack of time and mobilization. Even though women entrepreneurs comprise a small percentage of businesses in Kosovo, the missing piece in policymaking regarding women in business threatens to undo the progress made in closing the gender gap in entrepreneurship. The findings of focus groups show that most women were not informed about the measures targeted towards them, and some of them were discouraged from applying since the way the measures were designed was not going to help their business.

The study findings might be useful for policymakers by creating awareness about the real experiences of women entrepreneurs and the shortcomings in policymaking. Further, the findings suggested some significant strategies in line with Social Feminism and Structural Inertia Theory which are useful especially for women in business. First, women entrepreneurs share different experiences compared to men and second, women-led businesses cannot adjust as fast as men in business when conditions change. Whether short-term or long-term, all policies should be designed while considering gender as an

important factor. The findings of this study should serve to make institutions aware of the need to take continuous actions in building more support frameworks and comprehensive gender plans for better management of similar situations.

List of interviews

Personal interview with representative of Kosovo Credit Guarantee Fund, Prishtina, 15 February 2022.

Personal interview with representative from Agency for Gender Equality, Prishtina, 16 February 2022.

Personal interview with representative from Kosovar Gender Studies Center, 21 February 2022.

Personal interview with a government official from the first Kurti government who was involved in the preparation of the Emergency Fiscal Package, Prishtina, 23 February 2022.

Personal interview with government official in Hoti government, Prishtina, 24 February 2022.

Personal interview with representative from Kosovo Investment Enterprise Agency, 4 March 2022.

Personal interview with representative of European Bank for Reconsturction and Development, Prishtina, 04 April 2022.

Personal interview with representative from Women4Women, 12 April 2022.

Bibliography

Birhanu, A.G., Getachew, Y.S. and Lashitew, A.A. (2022) 'Gender Differences in Enterprise Performance During the COVID-19 Crisis: Do Public Policy Responses Matter?', *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, p. 104.

Bizneset e Hapura (2019) *Bizneset e Hapura*. Available at: http://biznesetehapura.com/sq/vizualizimet (Accessed: 17 April 2022).

Carranza, E., Dhakal, C. and Love, I. (2018) *Female entrepreneurs how and why are they different*. Washington, DC: The World Bank, p. 64.

Craighead, C.W., Ketchen, D.J. and Darby, J.L. (2020) 'Pandemics and Supply Chain Management Research: Toward a Theoretical Toolbox '', *Decision Sciences*, 51(4), pp. 838–866.

Fischer, E.M., Reuber, A.R. and Dyke, L.S. (1993) 'A theoretical overview and extension of research on sex, gender, and entrepreneurship', *Journal of Business Venturing*, 8(2), pp. 151–168. doi:10.1016/0883-9026(93)90017-Y.

Gashi, A. and Gashi, P. (2021) *Inclusiveness of the government response to the COVID-19 crisis*. Prishtina, Kosovo: Agency for Gender Equality, pp. 12–20.

Hajra, A. (2020) *The impact of covid-19 on women-owned businesses in Kosovo*. Kosovo: American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo, pp. 8–30.

Hannan, M.T. and Freeman, J. (1984) 'Structural Inertia and Organizational Change', *American Sociological Review*, 49(2), p. 149. doi:10.2307/2095567.

Hyland, M. *et al.* (2021) *Female-owned Firms during the COVID-19 Crisis*. Washington, DC: World Bank Group, pp. 1–6.

Kaberia, S.K. and M. A. Muathe, S. (2020) 'Effect of Covid-19 Pandemic on Performance of Women Owned Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises in Kenya', *International Journal of Social Science Studies*, 9(1), p. 7. doi:10.11114/ijsss.v9i1.5089.

OECD *et al.* (2019) *SME Policy Index: Western Balkans and Turkey 2019: Assessing the Implementation of the Small Business Act for Europe*. OECD (SME Policy Index). Available at: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/sme-policy-index-western-balkans-and-turkey-2019_g2g-9fa9a-en (Accessed: 17 April 2022).

OECD and European Commission (2021) *The Missing Entrepreneurs 2021: Policies for Inclusive Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment*. OECD (The Missing Entrepreneurs). Available at: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/the-missing-entrepreneurs-2021_71b7a9bb-en (Accessed: 18 April 2022).

Ross, J. and Taylor, K. (2020) *The impact of COVID-19 on women's and men's lives and livelihoods*. Prishtina, Kosovo: UN Women, pp. 5–52.

Saraga, I. (2021) *World Bank Supports Croatia's Firms Hit by COVID-19 Pandemic | HBOR*. Available at: https://www.hbor.hr/en/world-bank-supports-croatias-firms-hit-by-covid-19-pandemic/ (Accessed: 18 April 2022).

Schwarz, G.M. *et al.* (2020) 'A classification of structural inertia: Variations in structural response', *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 37(1), pp. 33–63. doi:10.1007/s10490-018-9588-6.

Serbian Government Supports Young and Female Entrepreneurs (2021) *Karanovic & Partners /*

Commercial Law Firm. Available at: https://www.karanovicpartners.com/news/serbian-government-supports-young-and-female-entrepreneurs/ (Accessed: 18 April 2022).

Sidi Ali, R. (2016) 'Feminist theory and its influence on female entrepreneur's growth intentions', *International Entrepreneurship Review*, 2(2), pp. 27–42.

The World Bank (2020) 'The COVID-19 Business Pulse Survey Kosovo in a Regional Perspective'. Kosovo.

Torres, J. *et al.* (2022) 'The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Women-Led Businesses', *The World Bank Research Observer*, p. 2. doi:10.1093/wbro/lkac002.

UN Albania (2020) *UN Albania Covid-19 Socio-Economic Recovery & Response Plan*. Albania, pp. 27–90.

UN Women (2021) *Women agricultural producers in North Macedonia get help to grow their businesses*, *UN Women – Headquarters*. Available at: https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2021/10/feature-women-agricultural-producers-in-north-macedonia-get-help-to-grow-their-businesses (Accessed: 18 April 2022).

UNDP and UN Women (2021) 'Rapid Socio-Economic Impact Assessment (SEIA)'. UNDP.

Waseem, A. (2018) 'Female Entrepreneurship And Economic Growth: An Institutional Theory Analysis', *Pakistan Journal of Gender Studies*, 16(1), pp. 15–36. doi:10.46568/pjgs.v16i1.113.

Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (2020) *The Impact of COVID-19 on Women Entrepreneurs*. Canada, pp. 7–46.

Yang, G. and Kenny, C. (2021) *New Estimates of the Impact of COVID-19 on Women's Jobs and Enterprises*. Washington, DC: Center for Global Development., pp. 1–3.

THE CHALLENGES OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY TRANSITION

BLIN BERDONIQI

Multi-level Governance and the Mapping of Actors Involved in the Just Energy Transition of Kosovo

— BLIN BERDONIQI

Blin Berdoniqi is a Project Analyst for Green Transition at UNDP Kosovo. He previously worked as a Senior Officer for Energy Efficiency and Cogeneration at the Ministry of Economy, Kosovo. During his time at the Ministry, Blin has coordinated many legislative processes and studies. He has also written papers on Energy Transition, Energy Poverty and Energy Efficiency. Blin holds a Master's degree in Energy Policy from the University of Sussex and a Bachelor's Degree on Public Policy from Rochester Institute of Technology.

Abstract

This research aims to analyse the energy sector of Kosovo and its pathway towards decarbonization. The paper identifies the main barriers to the energy transition and maps the main stakeholders responsible for it. Furthermore, using the theoretical framework of multi-level governance, it analyses the position of each set of stakeholders (international, national and local) on the energy transition and what are their main drivers of supporting or halting the process of transition. It identifies how cross-level power imbalances shape communication and collaboration across different levels of governance. The framework is then applied to examine the nature of cross-level interactions in energy policy processes. The paper identifies major barriers in the communication and collaboration between national and sub-national levels because of power imbalances between levels of governance and lack of capacities within the local government structures. Furthermore, the paper identifies the importance of civil society organizations and international community and their impact on the energy transition.Lastly, the paper identifies enablers and blockers of the energy transition.

Introduction

As is the case with many economies of the region and the world, Kosovo's energy sector is highly based on the exploitation of fossil fuel resources. As the world is moving towards greener and more innovative solutions, it is very likely that there will be winners and losers from such processes. According to an official from Ministry of Economy, there are a few thousand employees of the Kosovo Electricity Corporation (KEK)[1] who will be directly impacted by this transition, and there are even more who will be affected by the chain of coal production[2]. With this in mind, and with the need of smoothing the line of winners and losers the idea of just transition was formed. To respond to the possibilities of new inequalities being formed, labor unions in the U.S. introduced to the concept of *a just and fair transition*; promoting a fair energy transition that is inclusive and leaves no one behind (Bedayn 2022). The idea behind such transition does not only concern job losses, but also redistributing the cost of new investment in modern infrastructure, sharing wealth between and within the countries, as well as using the opportunity to solving problems in regards to energy poverty.

The imbalances created by the centralized system need to be tackled sooner than later, as job opportunities that have existed only in few municipalities, with the deployment of Renewable Energy Sources (hereafter RES) technologies will be available everywhere (IRENA 2021). However, the disappearance of particular jobs and college majors will be unavoidable. Those issues can be solved with the coordinated intervention of local, national and supranational agencies through reskill and professional programs. The EU has already introduced financial programs to support such transition under the EU Green Deal program. In addition, these programs were further extended to aspiring

---

1 KEK (Kosovo Electricity Corporation) – State owned company and the main electricity producer in Kosovo, covering more than 85 percent of electricity needs of the country.
2 A. i. (2022, April). Interview regarding the Energy Transition in Kosovo, Representative of Ministry of Economy. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer) Prishtina, Kosovo.

candidates[3] under the WBIF[4] (Voß, Weischer, & Schön-Chanishvili 2020). The aim of this program is to support the transition in developing countries and to ensure the coordination of all stakeholders ultimately supporting all industries and people who will be penalized by the energy transition.

Despite the near-universal recognition that just energy transition and sustainable development is a desirable policy goal, there is little understanding in how that should be applied in the context of developing countries and low-income countries as is the case with Kosovo. Most of the studies and analysis are developed in the technical context of how much can green energies be integrated in the energy infrastructure of Kosovo, what should be the balancing technologies, how expensive they are and who will finance those shifts. Yet, studies have failed to analyse the critical questions concerning the political and policy dynamics between different levels of stakeholders and most importantly the cooperation needed to achieve the success of such policy goals. Hence, this study will analyse the energy sector of Kosovo, the journey towards the energy transition; and by applying the multi-level governance approach this research will aim to analyse the role of each set of stakeholders (international, national, and local), their definition of just energy transition, and the coordination between them throughout this process.

For the purpose of this paper, semi-structured interviews with six anonymized EU, Kosovo officials, policy researchers, academics and civil society representatives were conducted between March and May 2022. The interviews were held in person or by utilizing digital platforms such as zoom. The interviewees were selected and approached based on prior knowledge of the situation on the ground and lasted between 30 minutes to 1 hour. Some of them were recorded while others were not, in line with the interviewees' preferences.

---

3 Western Balkan 6- Kosovo, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia and Hercegovina and Albania.
4 Western Balkan Investment Framework- is a joint initiative of the EU, financial organizations, bilateral donors and beneficiaries, aimed at enhancing harmonization and cooperation in investments for the socio-economic development of the region and contributing to the European perspective of the Western Balkans.

Kosovo Energy Sector Snapshot

The energy system in the Republic of Kosovo is a highly centralized system, composed of electricity generation, electricity transmission, electricity distribution, and thermal energy generators (District Heating capacities) (ERO 2021). Generation is mainly based on lignite power plants (TPP[5] A and TPP[5] B), and hydro power plant (HPP) Ujmani which are owned by the Government of the Republic of Kosovo, whereas other HPPs and other RES are privately owned (Ministry of Economy 2017). Kosovo's power system is mainly designed to produce basic electricity and is highly based on lignite as raw material. However, due to the inflexibility of the system, Kosovo cannot generate for maximum load coverage which usually reaches its peak during the winter months and does not have balancing capacities (battery or hydro storage capacities)(Energy Regulatory Office 2020). Kosovo has installed generation capacities of 1,431 MW, including generation capacities from RES, but the operational capacity is considered 1,099 MW, of which lignite thermal power plants (TPP) account for about 87.36%, while the rest consists of HPP Ujmani with 2.91%, wind power plants "Kitka" (wind energy) with 2.95% and other RES (hydro power plants, solar panels and wind power plants) with 6.78% (ERO 2021).

These capacities, in most of the period would be sufficient to cover demand as well as to export, but due to power plant aging and insufficient flexibility to accommodate demand at different times, especially at peak times, then imports, and sometimes exports, are needed to balance the system (ERO 2021). Kosovo has large reserves of lignite as a primary source of energy, which allows for a long-term production of electricity, but remains an environmental issue due to greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants.

---

5   Thermal Power Plant (hereafter TPP)

Kosovo's Journey Towards Just Energy Transition and Institutional Mapping

Kosovo is a signatory party to the Treaty establishing the Energy Community (hereafter EnC), which was signed on 25 October 2005, ratified, and entered into force on 1 July 2006 and began to be implemented on 1 July 2007 (European Commissio n.d). The objective of the EnC is to provide support so that prospective members of the EU can bring their energy market closer to that of the EU. Based on this, Kosovo has taken legal obligations to fulfill all requirements set forth by the Energy Community regarding the energy sector, with the sole aim of bringing its market closer to that of the European Union. The decisions taken by the EnC are regarded as *acquis communautaire*, implying that all Contracting Parties, including Kosovo, must transpose the EU energy legislation into their national legislation.

Liberalisation of the energy market and the energy transition was regulated through the third energy package transposed in six energy laws in Kosovo: namely Law on Energy, Law on Energy Efficiency, Law on Energy Regulator, Law on Thermal Energy, Law on Natural Gas and Law on Electricity (Energy Community 2021). Furthermore, the strategic objectives in promotion of RES were defined in the National Energy Strategy 2017-2026, and are also mentioned in the new National Energy Strategy 2022 – 2031, where the RES sector was defined as a strategic sector for the Government of Kosovo (Ministry of Economy 2017).

Apart from the legislation, Energy Community through renewable energy targets has pushed towards a faster decarbonization of the energy sector. This was operationalized through Feed-in Tariff (FiT)[6] schemes set in place

---

6   FiT- is a policy mechanism designed to accelerate investment in renewable energy technologies by offering long-term contracts to renewable energy producers.

from 2014 until 2020. Utilizing this scheme, 31 projects in RES sector were implemented with a total capacity of 228 MW. Further, an additional 5 MW of solar energy for self-consumption was promoted through the scheme for self-consumption (ERO 2021). Adding the usage of biomass for heating, which accounts for around 16% of total energy consumption, Kosovo managed to achieve its 2020 target of 25.7% final energy consumption being RES (Energy Regulatory Office 2020). Being one of the main drivers of the Energy Transition, EnC supported by other international and foreign state actors (see annex 1) influences the policy making and project planning through regulations, financial support, and technical assistance.

Different international actors support and influence the energy transition by effecting national actors. The mapping below shows the connections that we were able to draw through projects that those actors are carrying and have carried in terms to the energy transition (for projects see annex 1). The national institutions are dependent on the financial and technical support of the international actors. As it will be argued below, the just energy transition will strongly depend on the definition of the just transition that the international community imposes on it.

While the Kosovo Assembly has a coordinating power, its power is limited due to the parliament majority being of the same party as the executive institutions. Therefore, the main national institutions that regulate and define the energy transition and the just component are the Ministry of Economy and Energy Regulatory Office. Ministry of Economy is responsible for preparing and monitoring the implementation of legislation in the energy sector. Through the energy department, the Ministry of Economy develops policies, laws and strategies that target energy transition. Through the Energy Strategy that is developed by them, they target energy poverty, the workforce, municipalities, and their efficiency targets and the decarbonization of the district heating capacities. As seen on the figure below, the Ministry of Economy, while being the sole responsible body for the decarbonization agenda, it has had limited capital and human capacities in implementing it. Therefore, their agenda and policies have been influenced and supported

by many international actors including the World Bank, the Energy Community, KfW, GIZ, USAID and others.

Moreover, the Energy Regulatory Office (ERO) is an independent energy regulator established by the Kosovo Assembly. They oversee market operations and register new generators. Until 2020, ERO was responsible for the FiT and promoting new investments in the RES sector. Additionally, ERO also decides on the energy price and regulations, ensuring customer protection. Therefore, ERO serves as the main body that oversees the implementation of a decarbonization strategy. While, by legislation ERO reports only to the Kosovo Assembly, they have collaborated closely with Ministry of Economy and other relevant institutions in policy development. Furthermore, they have also been engaged in cooperation with different international and local stakeholders including the Energy Community and the World Bank.

Lastly, the Municipalities are the highest local regulative body, responsible for issuing construction permits and planning the urban infrastructure. Their importance in the energy transition increases with the decentralization of energy generation. Municipalities are the first gate keeper towards ensuring a just and fair transition. Their local plans affect the investment opportunities and the decarbonization agenda. Therefore, they interact with potential investors, the Energy Regulatory Office, the District Heating companies and power producing companies and with the national government. Their interaction with international community as seen on the figure below is limited and only of concern when it comes to technical assistance or similar issues.

The figure below it shows the interaction between the three levels of stakeholders.
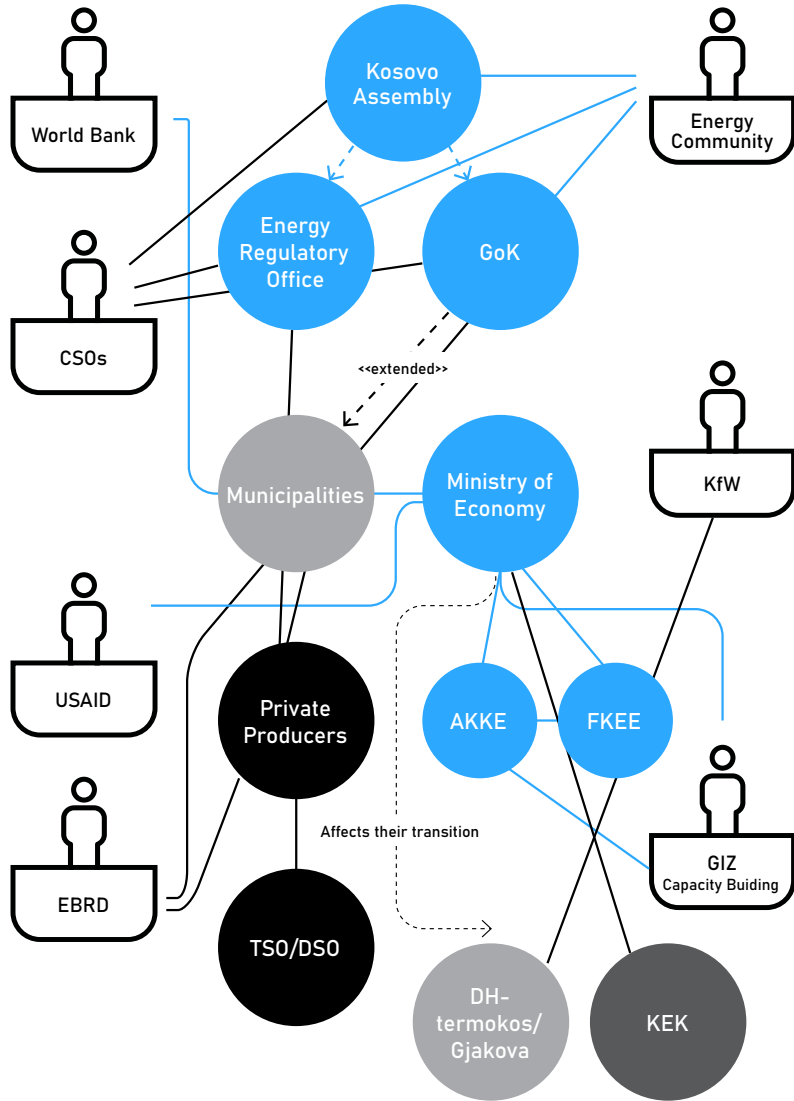
FIGURE 1 Actor mapping

This mapping shows the complexity of interaction between different sets of stakeholders and below we will try to analyse how that has been reflected in policy making processes and project developments.

Defining the Just Energy Transition in Three Levels of Governance

According to Bouzarovski et al. (2015), "even though the term 'energy transitions' implies that a shift towards a socially desirable end-state, there is no consensus among practitioners or academics as to the exact shape of this future as far as the on-going process of decarbonization is concerned." The lack of consensus has also been reflected in the case of Kosovo and what Just Energy Transition means. Thus, there is a fundamental difference in opinions on how the energy transition should be tackled in Kosovo, and through these disagreements, the coordination between the actors involved is much harder.

The above-mentioned international actors (hereinafter: International Community) are mostly unified on the pathways that Kosovo should take towards the energy transition, namely promoting the adoption of directives transposed through Energy Community. Therefore, the dimensions of market liberalisation, reduction of Greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions, promotion of renewable energy and the decarbonization of the energy sector are topics of main interest when it comes to their definition of energy transition. Numerous projects have been implemented in support to that, starting from studies in the RES technical capacity of Kosovo, gas interconnection feasibility study, feasibility study for solar District Heating in Prishtina, capacity building in public institutions, direct support in infrastructural projects such as Co-generation DH in Gjakova (biomass fueled) and Prishtina (cogeneration through Kosovo B THPP)[7], etc. Further, few projects were also implemented in regards of smoothing the transition. Those projects were implemented in Energy Efficiency measures including the Subsidies for Energy Efficiency in Kosovo (SEEK) project funded by the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), and numerous projects in public buildings supported by GIZ and World Bank.

---

7   A. i. (2022, April). Interview regarding the Energy Transition in Kosovo, Representative of GoK. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer)

When it comes to foreign actors' role in this transition, the international community, both EU and non-EU, seem to have reached a somewhat consensus when it comes to just energy transition in Kosovo. This conclusion can be drawn from the fact that most of their work revolves around supporting the relevant stakeholders, namely ministries, in adopting the EU legislation and obligations that derive from the Energy Community. In hindsight, while, the international community has been implementing different projects, to making the transition a fair and a just one by improving Energy Efficiency, decreasing energy poverty, supporting the infrastructure, and building the workforce, most of those projects have been technical assistance in market liberalisation and competitiveness. Thus, the argument that their definition of a just transition include elements of fair, free, competitive, and de-centralized market has been formed.

Whilst the international community has focused more on offering their assistance in creating an enabling environment for fair, free and competitive and de-centralized market, the national actors have approached the process from a different angle. As previously mentioned, the energy system in the Republic of Kosovo is a highly centralized system, with the Government of Kosovo owning the majority of electricity generators (power plants and HPPs). When it comes to the Government of Kosovo, the term just and fair transition is fairly reflected throughout the National Energy Strategy 2017-2026 and is more so argued throughout the draft National Energy Strategy 2022-2031. The Government of Kosovo through its strategic objectives has promoted the energy transition by focusing on the energy security as the main pilar and driver of the transition. More so, the concerns regarding the energy price as per Kosovo's economic standard have been the main determinants on the speed of the transition. The Energy Strategy 2017-2026 predicted a slower energy transition, with a main pilar a new thermal power plant being built, however, due to the lack of funding as it will be argued below, this project failed to be implemented. Therefore, the need for a new energy strategy was risen, hence the government's decision to review the energy targets. The Draft Energy Strategy, puts the people and diversification of energy sources in the middle of energy transition, aiming to achieve a sustainable energy market

without harming the people. Its main mission being "to create the conditions for a reliable and secure energy supply for increasing energy demand, through the development of generation, transmission, and distribution capacities, taking into account the diversification of resources, the efficient use of energy, and maximal utilization of renewable energy resources, as well as environmental protection in all sector activities" (Ministry of Economy 2022). In function of promoting diversification of energy sources and the transition towards Renewable Energy Sources, National Energy Strategy 2017-2026 set the Feed in Tariff scheme and the targets of Renewable Energy per source including hydropower, wind, biomass and solar (ERO 2021). Although the targets set by NES 2017-2026 have been heavily criticized due to hydro power plants target being too high and dangerous for the biodiversity, are being reevaluated by the GoK, they gave a glimpse into the limitations of the energy sector of Kosovo. This goes to show the complexity of coordinating the relevant stakeholders in the energy transition process, and why coming to an overall accepted consensus is a difficult task to be tackled by anyone entity.

While given their multiple roles as decision-makers, planning authorities, managers of municipal infrastructure, and role models for citizens and businesses, local governments are, in many ways, the ideal drivers of change, there have been little initiatives taken by them. The local governments, still do not possess a clear agenda on what they think of the energy transition in Kosovo and their role throughout this process. According to our interviews[8]:

> "While the municipalities do not have a set vision for energy transition, they have proved to be a good support for either companies or the GoK when it comes to the implementation of the project. Furthermore, they have also been passively supporting the RES companies in identification of sites for projects".

---

8 A. i. (2022, March). Interview reagrding the Energy Transition in Kosovo, Representative of Academia. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer) Prishtine, Kosovo.

However, while the Government of Kosovo has had several meetings with the donor organizations, civil society and businesses, there has not been a meeting to coordinate the activities with the municipalities in regard to the draft National Energy Strategy 2022-2031[9].There are only a few government-led activities taken to address this issue, including the feasibility study for developing new District Heating capacities in eight municipalities. The study aims to decarbonize the heating sector in municipalities with potential for district heating, which municipalities generally view as beneficial and do offer ongoing support. Municipalities in Kosovo are responsible for their local economic development, which is directly linked with employment rates in those vicinities. Hence, their main drivers for supporting the energy transition revolve around new opportunities for local employment, better access to energy (electricity and thermal), and new infrastructure and business activities[10].

Civil Society is a more complex union of non-market activities, including social movements, NGOs, unions, and business associations pressing for rights, making demands upon governments and businesses, as well as holding them to account. While the response to the question of what just transition means for Kosovo has been heterogeneous, one common element among all actors has emerged. Civil society tends to promote environmental justice and sustainable natural resource usage as the main driver of the energy transition[11]. This was seen the most in the case of hydro powerplants. A coalition of civil society organizations launched a petition to support the wave of protests against the construction of hydropower plants in the Municipality of Sterpce. The petition is directed at the Kosovo Assembly and the Government and calls for an immediate halt to the construction of numerous small-scale hydropower plants on Kosovo's rivers.[12]

---

9   A. i. (2022, April). Interview reagrding the Energy Transition in Kosovo. Representative of International Community. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer) Prishtine, Kosovo.
10   A. i. (2022, April). Interview regarding the Energy Transition in Kosovo, Representative of Academia. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer)
11   A. i. (2022, April). Interview regarding the Energy Transition in Kosovo, Representative of Ministry of Economy. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer) Prishtina, Kosovo.
12   A. i. (2022, April). Interview regarding the Energy Transition in Kosovo, representative of CSOs. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer)

Overall, while the definitions of what just energy transition means seem to differ across governance levels, there are many interactions between these groups of stakeholders. As a result, in the policy making process and due to many passive supporters and deniers of the process, the applicability of one definition alone is impossible. Thus, the following section will analyse how all these levels of governance interact with each other and what is their role on the energy transition process.

Applying the Multilevel Governance Approach to the Energy Transition in Kosovo

Energy policy governance has evolved into a very complex governance structure that extents from global to national and sub-national levels of governance. The adoption of green and transitional policies relies on both formal and informal networks and policy channels. Policy and project development has involved international, state and non-state actors ((Jehlinga, Hitzeroth, & Brueckner 2019). Such a complex governance structure shows the global nature of such transition but also its impact on multi levels of governance. While research on multilevel governance framework and its applicability on climate and energy issues has increased in the past years, it has yet to address the power behind the main drivers of transition. According to Gregorio et al., the multilevel governance literature has focused on national-supranational relations, while the national-subnational ones remain less explored.

In the case of Kosovo, the energy transition analysis and the roles of each set of stakeholders, whether international, national or local, tend to take place in isolation. The strategic documents of the Government of Kosovo tend to promote the top-down approach in the energy sector with defined responsibilities and powers for each institution. Therefore, as Obradovic and Dodds

(2015) argue, Kosovo appears to have a model of governance where state and non-state actors coexist and interact; however, the distribution of power is not reflected in practice due to the involvement of external actors and incentives given by them.

Multilevel governance involves a substantial shift of power and authority and it happens along three dimensions: 1) decentralization of power from central to local governments; 2) increased sharing of power between the state and civil society, and; 3) reduction of state sovereignty through joining of international coordination mechanisms (Gregorio, Fatorelli, Paavola, & Locatelli 2019).

Schmidt argues that Europeanization has disrupted the institutional patterns and decision-making of all its member states, shifting upwards more power and authority towards EU (Schmidt 2005). This shift in power was particularly felt on topics that are considered to be common values of the European Union, such as the green agenda. This disruption also had an impact on prospective members. For example, as explained earlier, by being a member of the Energy Community, Kosovo has lost some of its policy independence, meaning that most of its legislation regarding the energy sector is based on adopting EU directives[13]. The policy process starts with the adoption of a new directive in the Energy Community, and then a formal request to transpose is directed to the Government of Kosovo and its Ministry of Economy. Throughout the drafting phase of the law, a working group consisting of all the relevant stakeholders is in function that includes Ministry of Economy, Energy Regulatory Office, the Association of Municipalities and other relevant line ministries; however, apart from formal coordination little contribution is seen from the three levels of stakeholders as the directives leave little for discussion[14].

---

13   A. i. (2022, March). Interview reagrding the Energy Transition in Kosovo, Representative of Academia. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer) Prishtine, Kosovo.
14   A. i. (2022, April). Interview reagrding the Energy Transition in Kosovo. Representative of International Community. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer) Prishtine, Kosovo.

Coordination between national and international actors is also reflected on the National Energy Strategy 2017-2026, where numerous projects are identified and planned. However, apart from two donor-led projects with the municipalities, there are no projects that are coordinated with the local level. In addition, the strategy identifies the need for a more active role of the municipalities and local actors in the energy transition, starting with capacity building, project development and implementation of energy transition policies. As the National Energy Strategy 2022-2031 is on its drafting process, it is important for it to recognize the critical role of coordination between the national and local governments. According to Breokhoff, the role of local governments is crucial during the just transition process. They can take decisions that help or hinder national energy transitions. Without an inclusive approach, both local and national governments will not be able to fulfill their decarbonization agenda. Local governments should open the doors to local investments and decentralization of the energy sector, so that they are empowered to establish a more critical role in ensuring that the energy transition is just, fair and beneficial to all social groups (Broekhoff 2021).

As the National Energy Strategy 2022-2031 estimates that around 1500 MW of energy generation to be built on the time span of the next ten years, the coordination between all three sets of stakeholders needs to be intensified and well aligned[15]. To support city governments in the implementation of national targets, national government policies could include policies that address lack of skills and funds, facilitate reforms that improve coordination and accountability. And lastly, introduce monitoring platforms of the implementation of Energy Transition policies[16].

The District Heating capacities are local level owned, therefore, local authorities have a proven record and long history in planning and executing energy-related projects. To date, much activity has focused on infrastructure – particularly DH generation and energy efficiency projects. Local governments have taken on a

15   A. i. (2022, April). Interview regarding the Energy Transition in Kosovo, Representative of GoK. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer)
16   A. i. (2022, April). Interview regarding the Energy Transition in Kosovo, Representative of Academia. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer)

range of roles, including direct asset ownership, development of public-private partnerships and acting as intermediaries between communities, businesses and other local stakeholders to develop and deliver decarbonization visions[17]. Hence, in the first phase of the energy transition, when the focus is mostly on building green electricity generation, local actors have an important role to play. There are multiple ways that local governments can complement a national effort to decarbonize the energy sector. By joining national policy decision making and planning, they bring in the table firsthand knowledge of local situation "do's and don'ts". The manner in which local governments contribute will depend on their capacities, resources and governance responsibilities. The lack of coordination between the tree levels of stakeholders was witnessed with the Solar District heating project where the lack of coordination in regards to allocation of land, led to an almost two years postponement of the project[18].

In the case of energy transition initiatives, the activism of civil society over the past two decades has been deemed as one of the main drivers to pushing the institutions and businesses to think further about low-carbon futures. Their engagement on the process was mostly dominated by public campaigns, studies and research and small-scale projects promoting green transformation. Those projects and research mostly have been conducted by the civil society in coordination with the international community rather with the national government. While the multilevel governance framework calls for an increased sharing of power between the state and civil society, with the aim of enhancing acceptability and legitimacy of change, contributing to improved efficiency of decisions, promoting innovation, and improving the quality of decision making; there has been little to no shift of power in this regard. Recognizing the role of civil society groups in the energy transition and alignment of activities will be critical factor for the success of such a demanding process. Fortunately, aware of this reality, the GoK and several cities have pursued collective action, but they often lack the right tools to establish these strategic partnerships and integrate them into their

17   A. i. (2022, April). Interview regarding the Energy Transition in Kosovo, representative of CSOs. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer)
18   A. i. (2022, April). Interview regarding the Energy Transition in Kosovo, representative of CSOs. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer)

policy planning and actions. Those initiatives are mostly done through public consultations and have been intensified throughout the drafting of the National Energy Strategy 2022-2031. Furthermore, small yearly grants given from line ministries and municipalities tend to promote the green activism and promotion of innovative green ideas that support the energy transition[19].

The role shift of power from national government to international level and Civil Society Organizations is mostly affected by the lack of national funds to carry specific actions and policies. According to the Interview 6,

> "GoK would continue to pursue carbon-oriented policies and either rebuild Kosovo A or build Kosovo e re[20] if the lack of national funds was not a problem, thus, it is on the hands of the World Bank and European banks if they decide to support these kinds of projects. And since the withdrawal of World Bank from Kosova e re project, the Government of Kosovo has actively sought to intensify its decarbonization agenda as that's what international banks are ready to finance".

The same interviewee claimed that some of the strongest passive enablers of the energy transition are the attitude of the population towards EU and international community and their trust in the green agenda of EU.

Decarbonization of Heating and Power Systems

Kosovo's heating system must be decarbonized as part of the country's energy transition process. DH's goal is to electrify the heating sector where possible and employ geothermal sources where feasible. Prishtina, Gjakova, Mitrovica, and Zvečan are four municipalities that already have district heating systems; nevertheless, they only cover 3-5% of the heat demand (Energy

---

19   A. i. (2022, April). Interview regarding the Energy Transition in Kosovo, Representative of GoK. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer)
20   Kosova e Re: was a coal fired- thermal power plant planned to be built in Kosovo. However, due to the lack of financing it was canceled and the investor withdrew.

Regulatory Office 2021). The Prishtina heating plant used heavy fuel oil until cogeneration started in unit B1 of the Kosova B power plant in 2014. Still, energy consumption remains low, considering the potential to cover more parts of the city.

Similarly, in Gjakova, a new biomass plant running on wood waste and vine pruning began operation in October 2021, replacing the city's use of heavy fuel oil. Gjakova's district heating appears to be fueled by renewable resources, but it will need to be closely monitored to ensure that it stays under air pollution limits and uses only wood waste rather than prime forest biomass. Other municipalities, such as Obiliq and Drenas, have great potential to decarbonize the heating system. Obiliq's location is particularly advantageous because of its proximity to the Kosovo B power plant, which allows it to connect to the cogeneration system. Drenas is also close to "Feronikel", which wastes thermal energy from the melting process (WBIF 2022). As the demand for connection grows, obsolete thermal systems in towns like Mitrovica and Zveçan must be entirely repaired in order to extend services to new households.

To address the district heating problem in Kosovo, a project funded by the Western Balkans Investment Framework is evaluating the feasibility of new heating systems in eight municipalities, namely Gjilan, Ferizaj, Prizren, Peja, Drenas, Obiliq/Kastriot, Mitrovica and Zveçan, including Cost-Benefit Analyses and an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment Report (2022). This study will introduce the options using environment-friendly and local available primary energy sources with different technologies and distribute the heat through high-efficiency District Heating systems.

In cooperation with the German Embassy, GIZ and KfW, the Government of Kosovo have recently presented the Solar4Kosovo project. This project, which is expected to be one of the largest solar power plants in Europe, will be a combination of two components: solar district heating (Termokos) and photovoltaic energy (KEK) (The Prime Minister's Office 2022). Through this project, about 70 MW will be added to the heating system of Prishtina. The project is expected to cost 64 million euros and will be financed by the Federal Repub-

lic of Germany and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The project includes, among other things, the construction of solar collectors of about 69,000 m2 (The Prime minister's office 2022).

Up to 12,000 families or 60,000 inhabitants will be connected to the central heating network due to network expansion measures aimed at the distribution of heat from the solar thermal system. Solar4Kosovo will also decrease the demand for electricity for heating and improve air quality by saving approximately 40,000 tons of CO_2 per year (The Prime minister's office 2022). While this project was planned to start being implemented in early 2021, the project was postponed for nearly two years due to miscoordination between the three levels of stakeholders (Ministry of Environment, Municipality of Obiliq and Prishtina and local population) in regard to parcel identification[21]. Moreover, in efforts to diversify the energy sector and move towards renewables, the Ministry of Economy and the Energy Regulatory Office are planning to auction 100 MW of solar capacity, thus aiming to attract domestic and foreign investors. According to Minister Rizvanolli, the pilot auction will launch by the end of this year, which will be managed by the Ministry of Economy, Energy Regulatory Office, as well as Transmission, System and Market Operator. The auction announcement comes just weeks before the publication of the Energy Strategy 2022-2031.

Additionally, in an effort to diversify the energy sector and move towards renewable energy, the Ministry of Economy and the Energy Regulatory Office plan to auction off 100 MW of solar capacity, aiming to attract domestic and foreign investors (Balkan Green Energy News 2022). According to Minister Rizvanolli, the pilot auction will be launched by the end of the year and will be managed by the Ministry of Economy, ERO, and KOSTT. The announcement of the auction comes just weeks before the publication of the National Energy Strategy 2022-2031 (2022). In addition, Kosovo recently announced plans to connect 1.4 gigatons (GW) or 1470 MW of new renewable energy capacity by 2031, which could also reflect a key element of the strategy (2022).

---

21 A. i. (2022, April). Interview regarding the Energy Transition in Kosovo, Representative of GoK. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer)

Enablers and Blockers Where Does Power Lie?

As argued above, the multilevel governance framework predicts a substantial shift of power and authority happening from state to local and civil society and from national towards international community. While there has been a noticeable shift of power through decentralization of the energy sector, there is a lot more to be done for a full independent energy market. This shift of power has been noticeable especially in terms of the government's decision to halt the development of new capacities in coal induced electricity and the lack of new capacities of HPP[22].

There are many factors that are enabling the energy transition towards a more just, inclusive, and clean system among them the international organizations and civil society organizations mentioned in the annex 1. Moreover, the latest energy crisis showed the vulnerability of the system as it is now. According to our interviews[23]

> "The energy crisis showed the Government of Kosovo that being dependable in only a couple of generating unit is not the smart way to go, and decarbonization and decentralization of the energy system is the only pathway. Thus, energy transition is not anymore only about a just and fair society, but also about security and sustainability".

Thus, the need to build new generating capacities due to the oldness of the existing ones is one of the biggest enablers of the transition.

Investments in RES have been characterized as private investment from domestic and international companies. Fundamental shifts in technology have enabled the emergence of new and disruptive business models that are cost effective, cleaner, more effective and customer centric. Thus, innovation in this

22   A. i. (2022, April). Interview regarding the Energy Transition in Kosovo, representative of CSOs. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer)
23   A. i. (2022, April). Interview regarding the Energy Transition in Kosovo, Representative of Academia. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer)

sector has become a powerful catalyst and support for the government policies. Furthermore, with the alignment of the energy legislation with that of European Union and the Energy Community directives little is left for internal discussion. However, in terms of strategic objectives and actual project implementation, the Government of Kosovo, through the decision to postpone/halt the decision for gas interconnection, has shown that the main driver for decarbonization is not only environment/infrastructural led, but also cost-oriented. The decision was taken with little to no consultation with local actors or civil society.[24]

Regarding the blockers of the energy transition, funding and the socio-economic standard of the people of Kosovo remain as one of the biggest blockers of the transition. The investment in RES technologies and new generating capacities will definitely affect the electricity prices for the end consumers[25]. This coupled with the investment needed in both distribution and transmission lines to support the decentralized energy production will create a burden that the end consumer may not be able to bear. Therefore, the biggest blockers of the transition are considered to be the electricity related companies (KEDS[26], KEK[27], KOSTT[28]) due to the investments needed on their part to support the transition.

Lastly, another factor that blocks the energy transition is the lack of flexible generating capacities such as hydro and gas and the abundance of coal. According to our interviews,[29]

> "coal reserves in Kosovo are seen as the symbol of independence, security and strength. They have always been the single resource that has carried on their shoulder the economic development of Kosovo, therefore, letting it go it is something that is hard to do. Furthermore,

---

24   A. i. (2022, April). Interview regarding the Energy Transition in Kosovo, Representative of Academia. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer)
25   A. i. (2022, March). Interview reagrding the Energy Transition in Kosovo, Representative of Academia. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer) Prishtine, Kosovo.
26   Private owned company tasked with Electricity Distribution Services in Kosovo
27   State Owned Electricity Generating Company– Kosovo Energy Corporation
28   Electricity Transmission, System and Market Operator
29   A. i. (2022, April). Interview regarding the Energy Transition in Kosovo, Representative of Academia. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer)

> Kosovo B is further connected through cogeneration with Termokos another big employer in the region of Prishtina and a company that is considered as the pried of the capital city".

Thus, Kosovo's energy sector has come a long way in terms of decarbonization and modernization. However, the process of developing the National Energy Strategy 2022-2031 and identifying the pathways for the next decade has shown that the approach of the Government of Kosovo is top-down and most of the projects are identified from the line ministries. This can also be attributed to the lack of capacities at the local level to impose a local decarbonization agenda. Many factors are driving the energy transition, starting from civil society, businesses, the innovation of RES technologies that have made them competitive and others. Nevertheless, when it comes to strategic decision making, the cost of investment and the socio-economic standard of customers remain the main determinant.

Conclusions

In the case of Kosovo, analyses of 'international', 'national' and 'local' energy policies tend to take place in isolation. There is little coordination between the three levels of stakeholders in the agenda setting and policy development. However, when it comes to the implementation of just energy transition policies, the coordination between the three levels needs to intensify. While Kosovo has managed to reach its 2020 RES target of 25 percent set by the Energy Community and European Commission, there is a lot more to be done to decarbonize the energy sector. Liberalisation of the energy market and the energy transition was regulated through the third energy package transposed in six energy laws in Kosovo.

When it comes to the energy transition, Bouzarovski et. al.., argue that consensus is yet to be reached between actors on what the energy transition im-

plies and what shape should it take (Bouzarovski, et al. 2015). This has been also identified in the case of Kosovo where different levels of stakeholders promote different pillars. Namely, the international community promotes a free and fair market, decrease of GHG emissions and decarbonization of the energy sector; the national level promotes diversification of energy sources as a tool for energy security; the civil society promotes energy transition as a tool for environmental justice and sustainable use of resources; and lastly, the local level actors promote energy transition as a tool for opportunities and investments.

The multilevel governance framework predicts a substantial shift of power and authority happening along three dimensions: 1) decentralization of power from central to local governments; 2) increased sharing of power between the state and civil society, and; 3) reduction of state sovereignty through joining of international coordination mechanisms. Those shifts of power have been identified in Kosovo, especially with the reduction of the coal usage in energy generation and the cancellation of plans in developing new capacities in hydro power generation. However, while there has been a considerable increase in consultation between actors throughout the development of draft National Energy Strategy 2022-2031, a better coordination between actors in project development is necessary for the successful implementation of the green agenda.

Acknowledgements

List of Interviews

This research benefited from semi-structured interviews with six anonymized EU, Kosovo officials, policy researchers, academics, and civil society representatives. The interviews were conducted between March and May 2022 and were held in person and by utilizing digital platforms such as zoom. The interviewees were selected and approached based on prior knowledge of the situation on the ground and lasted between 30 minutes to 1 hour. Some of them were recorded while others were not, in line with the interviewees' preferences.

#1, A. i. (2022, April). Interview reagrding the Energy Transition in Kosovo, Representative of ME. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer) Prishtina, Kosovo.

#2, A. i. (2022, March). Interview reagrding the Energy Transition in Kosovo, Representative of Academia. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer) Prishtine, Kosovo.

#3, A. i. (2022, April). Interview reagrding the Energy Transition in Kosovo. Representative of International Community. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer) Prishtine, Kosovo.

#4, A. i. (2022, April). Interview regarding the Energy Transition in Kosovo, Representative of GoK. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer)

#5, A. i. (2022, April). Interview regarding the Energy Transition in Kosovo, Representative of Academia. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer)

#6, A. i. (2022, April). Interview regarding the Energy Transition in Kosovo, representative of CSOs. (B. Berdoniqi, Interviewer)

References

Bami, X., & Travers, E.-a. (2020). Construction of Coal-Fired Power Plant in Kosovo Halted. *Balkan Insight*.

Bankwatch Network. (2020). The energy sector in Kosovo. *Bankwatch*.

Bedayn, J. (2022). *Just transition' bill for oil industry workers exposes labor rift.* California.

Bouzarovski, S., Herrero, S. T., Petrova, S., Frankowski, J., Matoušek, R., & Maltby, T. (2015). *Multiple transformations: theorizing energy vulnerability as a socio-spatial phenomenon.* tandfonline.

Broekhoff, D. (2021). Decarbonising electricity: how collaboration between national and city governments will accelerate the energy transition.

Daniell, K. A., & Kay, A. (2017). Multi-level Governance: An Introduction. *researchgate*.

Dobravec, V., Matak, N., Sakulin, C., & Krajačić, G. (2021). Multilevel governance energy planning and policy: a view on local energy initiatives. *Energy, Sustainability and Society*.

Energy Regulatory Office. (2020). *Annual Report 2020.* Prishtine: GoK.

Energy Regulatory Office. (2022, March). *https://www.ero-ks.org/zrre/sq/konsumatoret-shtepiak/energjia-elektrike/tarifat-e-energjise-elektrike*. Retrieved from https://www.ero-ks.org: https://www.ero-ks.org/

Energy Community . (2021). *Kosovo Country Report.* Vienna: EnC.

Energy Community Secretariat. (2020). Annual Implementation Report.

ERO. (2021). *ERO Annual Report 2021.* Prishtine: GoK.

European Commission. (n.d.). *Energy Community.*

Gallagher, M., & Wykes, S. (2014). Civil Society Participation in the Sustainable Energy for All Initiative. *hivos.org*.

Gregorio, M. D., Fatorelli, L., Paavola, J., & Locatelli, B. (2019). *Multi-level Governance and Power in Climate Change Policy Networks.* Researchgate.

Hoppe, T., & Miedema, M. (2020). A Governance Approach to Regional Energy Transition: Meaning, Conceptualization and Practice. *MDPI*.

IRENA. (2021). *Renewable Energy and Jobs Annual Review 2021.* Irena.org.

Jehlinga, M., Hitzeroth, M., & Brueckner, M. (2019). Applying institutional theory to the analysis of energy transitions: From local agency to multi-scale configurations in Australia and Germany. *sciencedirect*.

Ministry of Economy. (2017). *Energy Strategy 2017-2026.* Prishtine: GoK.

Ministry of Economy. (2022). *Draft Energy Strategy 2022-2031.* Prishtine: Government of Kosovo.

Morina, D. (2019). Kosovo halts power plant after the protest in Peja. *Prishtina Insight*.

nationalgeographic. (2015). The Future of Coal Passes Through Kosovo. *nationalgeographic*.

Obradovic, J., & Dodds, A. (2015). Environmental Governance in a Contested state: the influence of European Union and other external actors on energy sector regulation in Kosovo. .

Schmidt, V. A. (2005). *Democracy in Europe: The Impact of European Integration.* American Political Science Association.

Schön-Chanishvili, M. (2018). Kosovo: Energy transition feasible despite 97% lignite fired-generation? *German Watch*.

Team, E. (2017). Why Kosovo needs climate friendly energy alternatives.

Todorović, I. (2020). Kosovo suspending works on small hydropower plants. *Balkan Green Energy News*.

United Nations. (2021). Theme Report on Energy Transition.

Voß, M., Weischer, L., & Schön-Chanishvili, M. (2020). Supporting the Western Balkans Energy Transition: An Imperative Task for the German EU Council Presidency. *Germanwatch*.

Wälde, T. W. (n.d.). The role of selected international agencies in the formation of international energy law and policy towards sustainable development. *Energypedia*.

World Bank Group. (2019). Kosovo: A Future of Green Transport and Clean Air.

 Energy Regulatory Office. (2022). *Annual report 2021.*

WBIF. (2022). *EU allocates additional grant to introduce district heating in eight municipalities in Kosovo*. Western Balkans Investment Framework.

The Prime Minister Office . (2022, March 23). *Kryeministri Kurti dhe përfaqës uesit e KFW-së Diskutuan për projektin 64 milionë euro "solar4kosovo"*. Zyra e Kryeministrit të Kosovës.

Balkan Green Energy News. (2022, May 20). *Kosovo* plans to launch auctions for 100 MW of Solar*. Balkan Green Energy News.

Energy Regulatory Office. (2022). *Annual report 2021.*

WBIF. (2022). *EU allocates additional grant to introduce district heating in eight municipalities in Kosovo*. Western Balkans Investment Framework.

The Prime Minister Office . (2022, March 23). *Kryeministri Kurti dhe përfaqës uesit e KFW-së Diskutuan për projektin 64 milionë euro "solar4kosovo"*. Zyra e Kryeministrit të Kosovës.

Balkan Green Energy News. (2022, May 20). *Kosovo* plans to launch auctions for 100 MW of Solar*. Balkan Green Energy News.

Energy Regulatory Office. (2022). *Annual report 2021.*

WBIF. (2022). *EU allocates additional grant to introduce district heating in eight municipalities in Kosovo*. Western Balkans Investment Framework.

The Prime Minister Office . (2022, March 23). *Kryeministri Kurti dhe përfaqës uesit e KFW-së Diskutuan për projektin 64 milionë euro "solar4kosovo"*. Zyra e Kryeministrit të Kosovës.

Balkan Green Energy News. (2022, May 20). *Kosovo* plans to launch auctions for 100 MW of Solar*. Balkan Green Energy News.

Energy Regulatory Office. (2022). *Annual report 2021.*

WBIF. (2022). *EU allocates additional grant to introduce district heating in eight municipalities in Kosovo*. Western Balkans Investment Framework.

The Prime Minister Office . (2022, March 23). *Kryeministri Kurti dhe përfaqës uesit e KFW-së Diskutuan për projektin 64 milionë euro "solar4kosovo"*. Zyra e Kryeministrit të Kosovës.

Balkan Green Energy News. (2022, May 20). *Kosovo* plans to launch auctions for 100 MW of Solar*. Balkan Green Energy News.

Energy Regulatory Office. (2022). *Annual report 2021.*

WBIF. (2022). *EU allocates additional grant to introduce district heating in eight municipalities in Kosovo*. Western Balkans Investment Framework.

The Prime Minister Office . (2022, March 23). *Kryeministri Kurti dhe përfaqës uesit e KFW-së Diskutuan për projektin 64 milionë euro "solar4kosovo"*. Zyra e Kryeministrit të Kosovës.

Balkan Green Energy News. (2022, May 20). *Kosovo* plans to launch auctions for 100 MW of Solar*. Balkan Green Energy News.

Energy Regulatory Office. (2022). *Annual report 2021.*

WBIF. (2022). *EU allocates additional grant to introduce district heating in eight municipalities in Kosovo*. Western Balkans Investment Framework.

The Prime Minister Office . (2022, March 23). *Kryeministri Kurti dhe përfaqës uesit e KFW-së Diskutuan për projektin 64 milionë euro "solar4kosovo"*. Zyra e Kryeministrit të Kosovës.

Balkan Green Energy News. (2022, May 20). *Kosovo* plans to launch auctions for 100 MW of Solar*. Balkan Green Energy News.

Energy Regulatory Office. (2022). *Annual report 2021.*

WBIF. (2022). *EU allocates additional grant to introduce district heating in eight municipalities in Kosovo*. Western Balkans Investment Framework.

The Prime Minister Office . (2022, March 23). *Kryeministri Kurti dhe përfaqës uesit e KFW-së Diskutuan për projektin 64 milionë euro "solar4kosovo"*. Zyra e Kryeministrit të Kosovës.

Balkan Green Energy News. (2022, May 20). *Kosovo* plans to launch auctions for 100 MW of Solar*. Balkan Green Energy News.

Appendix. INSTITUTIONAL MAPPING OF STATE AND NON-STATE ACTORS IN KOSOVO

International and Foreign State Actors

The *World Bank* is supporting Kosovo through 31 million USD for energy efficiency and renewable energy project, which aims to reduce energy consumption and fossil fuel use in public buildings. The World Bank has been supporting the just transition through feasibility studies of the least cost generation capacities.

The *European Bank for Construction and Development* (EBRD) in Kosovo is also focused on supporting green energy transition, in particular supporting businesses in implementing RES projects.

The *Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Internazionale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ) is the German state development agency that has worked extensively within the energy efficiency dimension. GIZ has been engaged in capacity building of public sector in regards to just energy transition.

The *United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)* is an international organization with a large number of projects in Kosovo. Part of UNDP's focus are sustainable development and climate and disaster resilience. UNDP has supported climate actions, promoting projects that aim to support environmental justice and just energy transition.

The *United States Agency for International Development (USAID)* is the official development agency of the United States. USAID supports Kosovo's energy sector through the Energy Sustainability Activity, which aims to improve energy security by strengthening the capacity of local institutions to develop open and regionally integrated electricity markets, build resilient

and sustainable power networks, and boost investments in renewable energy infrastructure.

Other international organisations and governments involved in similar work in Kosovo include the KfW Bank, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the Governments of Denmark, Switzerland and Luxemburg, European Office in Kosovo etc.

National Actors

Kosovo Assembly – is the highest legislative institution, elected with a four-year mandate. It approves the laws and strategic documents. Thus, it ensures that the energy transition is as fair and just to all the people of Kosovo.

The Government of Kosovo (GoK) – is the highest executive power. It drafts laws and strategies. In coordination with line ministries, it drafts laws for the energy sector. Therefore, it is the main institution that defines the outcomes of the energy transition.

Kosovo Energy Efficiency Agency (KEEA) - oversees the implementation of Energy Efficiency Policies.

Kosovo Energy Efficiency Fund (KEEF) - functions as an Energy Service Company and implements Energy Efficiency measures in public buildings. Furthermore, through grants and loan programs KEEF's main aim is to decrease the energy demand and make the infrastructure ready for the increased energy prices.

Kosovo Operation System, Transmission and Trade (KOSTT) – is responsible for the transmission lines and trade operations. Their operations are important for ensuring a stable transmission line and expanding RES adoption.

Kosovo Electricity Distribution and Supply (KEDS) – is responsible for the distribution and supply system. Their operations are important for ensuring a stable distribution line and expanding RES adoption.

Kosovo Electricity Supply Company (KESCO) – is a certified supplier, there are other suppliers in the market, but none of them are functional.

Kosovo Energy Corporation (KEK) – The main generator of electricity, and the biggest employer in coal industry.

Other Generators: "Sowi Kosovo, Air Energy and Ujmani. Those three are connected into the transmission system and have established themselves as national actors.

Non-Governmental Organizations – Some of the most vocal NGOs in the energy sector that promote just energy transition are: KFOS[30], INDEP[31], PIPS[32], BGF[33] etc. Their work revolves around policy development, research, capacity building and supporting the public institutions during the policy processes. They are among the most vocal organizations for a swift energy transition in Kosovo and continuously support the policy processes with informed policies.

Local Actors

Municipal Assembly - is the highest body of the Municipality, which exercises the function of local government.

Department of Strategic Planning and Sustainable Development - drafts programs, municipal development plan, urban development plan and urban regulatory plans of settlements and other entities. Collects, processes and

---

30   Kosovo Foundation for Open Societies
31   Institute for Development Policy
32   Prishtina Institute for Political Studies
33   Balkan Green Foundation

completes the documentation of spatial development, in accordance with the Law on Spatial Planning and other provisions issued based on it.

Termokos and District Heating "Gjakova"- The prominent thermal district heating companies located in the municipalities of Gjakova and Prishtina.
Local energy NGOs- Let's do it Kosova, Let's do it Peja etc.

Local Energy Generators: The table below shows all the electricity generators that are connected to the grip and that are under the jurisdiction of the municipalities.

Hydropower generators	Solar Energy Generators	Wind Energy Generators
Kelkos Energy	Led Light Tehnology Kosova	Wind Power
Eurokos J.H	ONIX	
Hydro-Line	Birra Peja	
Matkos Group	Frigo Food Kosovë	
Renelual Tahiri	Eling	
Hidroenergji	Solar Green Energy	
Dilli – Com		
Eko -Energji		

MARTA SZPALA

Cold is Coming: Living in the Energy Poverty in a Time of Crisis – Reflections from Kosovo

— MARTA SZPALA

Marta Szpala - political analyst, specializing in the Western Balkans. Holds an MA in International Relations and studied Slavic Studies at the Warsaw University. Works as a Senior Fellow in the Centre for Eastern Studies in Warsaw. Coordinator of the Think Tank Forum during the Polish presidency in the Berlin Process. Author and editor of publications on political and economic transformation of the Balkans states (i.e Current state of stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina). Visiting lecturer at the University of Warsaw and the College of Europe in Natolin. Writes about the Balkans for Polish Weekly Tygodnik Powszechny. Frequently appears in media on Western Balkans and other related topics.

Introduction

Energy poverty rate in Kosovo is one of the highest in Europe, due to a combination of economic and infrastructural factors. The situation of the energy-poor households was exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic as their incomes decreased due to restriction on economic activity. Moreover, electricity and fuel prices have been on the rise in Kosovo since autumn 2021, and the war in Ukraine has reinforced this trend. Additionally, at the turn of 2022 increased consumption and a reduction of domestic production led to system overload and local energy crisis. The Kosovo Energy Distribution Services (KEDS) was forced to introduce temporary electricity outages in different regions of Kosovo. This crisis highlighted the need for the urgent modernization of the country's energy sector. Moreover, Kosovo, as a member of the Energy Community (EnC), is required to harmonize its legislation on climate, energy and the environment with EU regulations. Such a profound transformation intended to achieve sustainable energy supply will require significant investment, what will lead to further increase in electric energy tariffs. Furthermore, these rapid changes on the energy market have been paired in Kosovo with the highest inflation ever, which reached 12.5% year-on-year in April 2022. Food prices have risen especially significantly (17.1% year-on-year). That would mean that most households have significantly less financial resources to cover their energy needs, and far more people may fall into energy poverty. Although similar trends are affecting countries throughout Europe, the situation in Kosovo – where many households had problems with paying their energy bills and keeping the houses warm even before the current crisis – is especially challenging.

The government of Kosovo is committed to ensuring a socially just energy transformation, and to protecting and empowering vulnerable consumers by guaranteeing that they have access to affordable energy. This was highlighted in the recently published Draft of a new Energy Strategy 2022-2031 (ME 2022, 6). The approach to energy poverty in Kosovo is primary based on the Energy

Community's recommendations, which focus on such indicators as low income, energy-inefficient homes, and high energy costs to measure energy poverty. As Longhurst and Hargreaves (2019) argue, this kind of framing reduces fuel and energy poverty to a primarily technical problem which can be analysed through statistical data. In the case of Kosovo, however, basic reliable data on energy consumption, energy burdens (the share of energy expenditure in income), the various socioeconomic characteristics of households, the quality of dwelling etc. is very limited (as in other Western Balkan countries). So, apart from the other limitations of the technical approach, which many scholars have elaborated (such as Middlemiss et al. 2018, Longhurst & Hargreaves 2019, Bouzarovski & Petrova 2015), this lack of data hinders the ability to even measure the number of households living in energy poverty (Ban et al.), let alone designing the policy intervention to address energy poverty issues.

This paper seeks to understand energy poverty in Kosovo through a qualitative exploration of the lived experience of energy-poor households. Energy poverty is multifaceted problem and it reaches into multiple domains of people's lives, such as housing, employment status, education, social relations, health, energy, etc., which are mutually interconnected (Middlemiss & Gillard, 2015). The multidimensional problem of energy poverty is requiring a multidisciplinary response and as Middlemiss & Gillard (2015), argue, more nuanced understanding of the lives of the energy-poor through their lived experience can help to shape a more appropriate policy, which will better address the needs of energy-poor households in their specific social context. Therefore, to construct broader picture of energy poverty in Kosovo I combine researching the lived experience of energy poor households to get an insight into their living conditions, different challenges caused by a lack of access to energy services and vulnerability associated with it, with analysis of policy context conducive to energy poverty.

In this study, the term *energy poverty* is used according to the term's usage in the EU's Third Energy Package and the official documents of Energy Community. Energy poverty in this article is understood as Bouzarovski et

al. (2021) define it: "a condition in which a household is unable to secure the socially and materially necessary level of energy services in the home, while the term secure refers here to both affordability and accessibility dimensions". The methodology of this study combines desk research with twelve semi-structured interviews with people, which could reflect on situation of communities especially vulnerable to energy poverty. Interviews were conducted with NGOs activists and representatives of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities from Fushë Kosovë and Gračanica/Graçanicë, rural communities in the Prizren and Peja areas, low income households in Prishtina, and women living in Prishtina, Klina and Mitrovica in May and June 2022. In the interviews, the research's aim and scope was explained in more detail, and consent was obtained. The identities of the respondents have been anonymised. On average the interviews lasted an hour and focused on the characteristics of housing, the use of energy, strategies to reduce energy consumption, the impact of energy poverty on households' everyday life, the consequences of energy poverty on people's health and well-being, and the awareness of programmes targeted at energy poor. Due to the limited time and the preliminary nature of the study, I did not aim to obtain a statistically representative sample; instead I wanted to cover interviewees from a broad geographical spectrum, various ethnic groups, different types of settlements, and households with various gender compositions and different economic backgrounds, in order to obtain better insights into the living conditions of different groups. Regarding the desk research, the paper is based on a review of national and international sources, such as strategic documents concerning energy policy and energy poverty, and the reports & policy papers of various institutions. These are complemented by data from discussions with professionals dealing with the energy sector and energy poverty in Kosovo.

The paper begins with a review of Kosovo's energy sector. Then, the paper elaborates the drivers and indicators relevant to energy poverty issues in Kosovo. Following is an examination of the current legislative attempts to address energy poverty in Kosovo with an overview of the policy provisions and recommendations made by the Energy Community (EnC) and the data obtained during the interviews. In this empirical section the paper focuses on

the perspectives of the activists, NGO representatives and community leaders, who reflect on situation of energy poor households. Unless otherwise stated, the opinions come from a cross-section survey of different interview groups. In describing the lived experience of energy poor household in Kosovo the paper focuses on identifying convergences between the experience of different groups. The results of the survey are analysed in detail in line with drives and indicators of energy poverty proposed by the Energy Community (accessibility, affordability, quality of dwelling, arrears in utility bills). Divergence between the groups in terms of geographical location, ethnic and social background and gender was also identified. The paper has used female interviewees to introduce gender perspective on energy poverty. The data from interviews with representatives of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians was used in describing the experience of these communities and also of people living in severe energy poverty. Interviewees from Peja and Prizren reflected on experience of people living in rural areas.

An Overview of Kosovo's Energy System

Electricity generation in Kosovo is heavily dependent on two ageing lignite plants (Kosovo A and Kosovo B). In recent years the share of renewable energy sources (RES) in Kosovo's electricity production has increased moderately to 6.3%, provided mainly by hydro sources and wind plants, and to a lesser extent by solar (ME). Kosovo reached the national RES target of a 25% share of energy from renewable recourses in 2019, although this was mainly due to a revision of the biomass consumption data.

The public company Kosovo Energy Corporation (KEK) generates 90% of the country's electricity, complemented by some small private generation operators. The supply and distribution system is dominated by the Kosovo Company for Supply and Energy (KESCO) and Kosovo Energy Distribution Services (KEDS)

respectively. Both companies are owned by the Kosovo Çalık Limak Energy Sh.A - consortium of Turkish companies Çalık Holding and Limak Holding companies. KESCO holds a 100% share of the retail market. This is a consequence of the so-called Bulk Agreement signed by KEK and KEDS in October 2012 in the framework of the privatisation of KEDS, which obliged KEK to sell its production to KEDS/KESCO to the extent it needs to meet its public service obligation. There are a few other licenced operators, but they cannot compete against the low electricity prices that KEK provides to KEDS/KESCO. Therefore, despite privatization and unbundling in the electricity sector, there is no true competition on the local electricity market and consumers also have very limited options in choosing suppliers and procurement energy from environmentally friendly sources.

Households in Kosovo have very limited heating options, due to the lack of consistent policy from state institutions to develop a more efficient central heating systems. The options are either electricity, fossil fuels or biomass, which mostly depends on the type and location of dwelling. Nor can households change their electricity suppliers, due to a lack of competition on the market. Meanwhile, as the income of some parts of society rises, these people have started to switch to electric heating systems, which is much more convenient than using biomass. The prices of energy are low in most of the new-built apartments, the number of which has risen significantly in recent years; only electric heating has been installed in such places. Neither the construction companies nor the clients buying new apartments pay attention to the energy efficiency of the new dwellings, and go ahead with installing heating appliances (in Kosovo there are still no regulations concerning energy efficiency in new buildings). These, combined with the increase in the number of appliances used at home, have resulted in households being responsible for a significant increase in electricity demand. Demand for electricity in households rose from 181.93 ktoe in 2016 to 287.45 ktoe in 2021. The household sector is responsible for 59% of energy demand.

Nevertheless, biomass still represents the largest share of final energy consumption in Kosovo households (61%), followed by electricity (35%). Heat from district heating, which is only available in four municipalities (Prishtina,

Gjakova, Mitrovica and Zvečan) represents 2% each of the final energy consumption in households, while the share of oil derivates (mainly diesel oil) is also 2% (Ban et al. 2021). According to official data, the use of coal (mainly lignite) for heating is minimal, less than 1%. However, there may be some underestimation of wood and coal consumption in Kosovo as some households acquire them informally. Kosovo has no supplies of natural gas nor any gas infrastructure. Compressed natural gas is used in low volumes.

Energy Poverty in Kosovo

Energy poverty is usually correlated with low-income, high-energy costs and energy-inefficient buildings and Kosovo is seen to be one of the most energy poverty-vulnerable countries in Europe due to its geographic location, the low incomes of the population, the legacy of a centrally planned economy and the model of economic transition adopted. Most reports on energy poverty in Kosovo estimate that 40% of households (c. 133,000) are energy-poor, based on the "inability to keep home adequately warm" indicator in the SILC survey (KAS 2018b, 15). This is the highest such rate among the EnC's contracting parties. Due to a lack of reliable data, a more precise estimate of the number of households thus affected is impossible, and this number may be even higher.

Despite being located in southern latitudes, Kosovo's climate is characterized by cold winters. Due to climate change, more and more frequent heat waves have been recorded during summer, and the cooling of dwellings (especially in urban areas) is also a growing problem. Per capita income in Kosovo has risen more than tenfold, from about USD 400 in 1995 to over USD 4000 in 2021 but this is still only 12% of the average in EU member states (World Bank 2021, 10). This dynamic growth has not been sufficient to provide enough formal employment for the young population, and the employment rate remains very low: less than a third of Kosovars aged between 15 and 64 are in work (KAS 2021, 2). Moreover, the increase of average salaries was slower than that of the GDP (378 euro in

2021, Ban at al., 176), and average salaries are higher in all the other Western Balkan states. The poverty rate fell by 7.8 percentage points between 2012 and 2017 (World Bank 2021, 12) but it is estimated that 18% percent of Kosovo's population still lives below the poverty line, while 5.1% of the population live below the extreme-poverty line (KAS 2019, 4). Nearly two-thirds of poor and extremely poor people reside in rural areas (KAS 2019, 9). Therefore, although energy prices in Kosovo are very low, housing costs (mostly energy) account for 29% of the total households' expenditure (KAS 2018a, 7). Therefore, many households spend more than 10% of their income on energy services, which is an indication of energy poverty adopted in some EU countries and in Great Britain. Even people who have regular salaries have problems with paying their energy bills and ensuring sufficient energy services.

Energy consumption per household in Kosovo is the second highest among Western Balkans countries (20 MWh annually). However, families in Kosovo are larger than in other countries (Ban et al. 2021); as a consequence, final energy consumption per capita is significantly lower (3.7 MWh annually). The building stock in Kosovo is relatively new, and over 52% of the buildings were constructed in the past 20 years; despite this, most of them are not thermally insulated. In the total number of residential buildings, the vast majority (83,58.%) of dwellings are single or terrace houses. The dwellings are usually occupied by their owners. 93.1% of them are legally-owned houses/apartments, and 4.7% of households are legally owned with a mortgage. Only 0.5% of households are tenants paying rent at market rates; for 0.4% of households, accommodation is rented at a lower market price, while accommodation is provided for free for 1.3% of households (KAS 2018b). Due to the large number of illegal settlements and complicated ownership structures, this data may not be accurate.

Access to affordable, clean, modern energy supplies in Kosovo is very limited. The vast majority of rural dwellers use wood and coal stoves for various purposes: domestic hot water (DHW), heating and cooking. According to IDRA opinion polls, 78% of respondent use wood for heating purposes. Families whose economic situation is better use pellet for heating. Only those whose economic situation is very good install individual electric heating systems in their houses.

In apartment blocks, especially the new ones, people have no other choice than to use electricity for heating. They usually have individual heating systems with electric thermo-accumulation stove or electric radiators, which are not very energy-efficient. According to many interviewees, the type of fuel used for heating reflects the user's social position in society.[1] Installing an electric heating system in an individual house is a symbol of economic success. Although the economic situation of the people who use electricity for heating is usually much better, they also sometimes spend over 10% of their income on energy. Electricity in urban areas is also used for domestic hot water and cooking on a large scale.

According to the all interviewees, energy-related expenses are one of the greatest concerns for the vast majority of Kosovar society and many families have problems paying their energy bills and buying fuel. This goes in line with results of the SILC survey, which indicated that for the 53.4% of households, housing expenditures are heavy financial burden and for the 36.5% of households, housing expenditures are presented as a financial burden, while for 10.1% light financial burden (KAS, 2018b). Therefore, although the energy tariffs in Kosovo are the lowest in Europe, the majority of the society still struggles to pay its energy bills. In order to cover their energy expenses, people often reduce their other expenses on food, clothing or medicine.

Energy Poverty and the Legal Framework

The issue of energy poverty is gaining growing attention in the European Union and the Energy Community. There has been a great deal of energy-related legislation which touches upon this issue[2], and awareness of this problem among

1   Interview with journalist, Prizren, 10 June 2022; Interview with NGO representative, Peja 17 May 2022; Interview with representative of Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities, Gračanica, 8 June 2022.
2   For example: Directive 2009/72/EC of 13 July 2009 on common rules for internal market for electricity and Directive 2009/73/EC of 13 July 2009 on common rules for internal market for gas require the Member States

EU member states is rising due to spiralling energy prices. In 2020 the European Commission adopted a Recommendation on Energy Poverty (2020) which states that "energy poverty is a situation in which households are unable to access essential energy services, where adequate warmth, cooling, lighting and energy to power appliances are essential services that underpin decent standards of living and health". However, as of now there is still no common definition of energy poverty in the EU. Efforts to address energy poverty have been made as part of the Energy Community Just Transition Initiative, aimed at ensuring that the processes of energy transformation and moving away from fossil fuels in Kosovo and the other Contracting Parties is socially just. In January 2022 the new Centre for Alleviating Energy Poverty in the EnC Contracting Parties was established to collect data and information on energy poverty and promote the development of appropriate policies and measures on the national level to address this issue.

As in many other Balkan countries, the most important elements shaping energy policy in Kosovo include the implementation of the *acquis communautaire,* compliance with the Second and Third Energy Package (Robić et al. 2017, 206), and, as Obradović-Wochnik & Dodds (2015) point out, the pressure of external actors. Therefore, as Obradović-Wochnik & Dodds explain, policy change is driven by EU conditionality and donor preferences, and not by domestic debate and demands, as the local non-state actors seem to be excluded from the decision making process (Obradović-Wochnik & Dodds 2015, 947). This is also the case of the Kosovo government's action in addressing energy poverty mainly shaped by pressure from the Energy Community.[3] That results in very limited regulations concerning energy poverty and energy vulnerability, without measures in place that would tackle the structural issue of energy poverty (Ban et al. 2021). Alleviating energy poverty thus seems to be neither a priority for the government nor the subject of any real political debate.

As of now, the institutional and regulatory framework concerning energy poverty in Kosovo is very limited, and no systematic approach to address the is-

---

and Contracting Parties to ensure adequate safeguards for vulnerable consumers.
3   Interview with energy expert, Prishtina 8 June 2022.

sue of energy poverty has been undertaken (Ban et al. 2021). Kosovo has only a general definition of 'the consumer in need' in the Electricity Act and the Natural Gas Act, but lacks more precise criteria to identify such consumers and set up measures to support them. In turn, The Energy Strategy of Kosovo 2017-2026 (MED) use a term *vulnerable consumers* and states that the government will develop a programme to protect them, but there is still no such document. In the recently published draft of the new Energy Strategy for Kosovo 2022-2031 (June 2022) there is still no precise indicators of vulnerable consumers. According to this document, at least two new energy-related schemes for vulnerable consumers (energy efficiency, heating solutions, solar panels) are to be implemented by 2024, and a further four by 2031. However, as there is also no definition of energy poverty nor vulnerable consumer, it is impossible to measure it and extend and develop policy to address the needs of the energy-poor. Without basic data and definitions it will be very challenging for the government to implement within the given timeframes programs, which bring real help to people in energy poverty.

The programme to subsidize electricity bills for different types of households under the Social Assistance Scheme (SAS) is the only such plan in Kosovo which aims at mitigating energy poverty. The electricity subsidies are provided for c. 35,000 households with an allocated budget of €4.5 million (Ban et al. 2021, 44). Government assistance is not limited to low-income households under SAS, but also other categories such as people receiving war-related pension, who are usually better off than the average family in Kosovo, also can apply for electric energy subsidies (66.4% of electricity subsidises beneficiaries are SAS recipients). Moreover, the eligibility for SAS, which is a gateway for electricity subsidies is not only means-tested: in order to qualify for social assistance, there should be at least one child under five in the family (or under 15 in the case of a single parent); or none of the people in the household are able to work. This means that a vast number of energy-poor households do not meet the criteria for this support. According to a World Bank study (2021), the programme to protect electricity-vulnerable consumers in 2017 covered only 7% of the population, while according to the same study at least 15.8% were classified as energy-poor.

Moreover, the programme reduces the burden of energy poverty to only a limited extent[4] and only temporarily, without removing the main causes of energy poverty. Not all the low-income families who receive SAS support also gain electric subsidies. According to the interviewees, this is mainly due to a lack of knowledge about the support scheme, or because they are illegally connected to the power network.[5] Decisions on granting social assistance and electricity subsidies are based on arbitrary decisions by municipal clerks who verify whether a given household is eligible for help, while precise criteria are lacking. The Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers issues decisions to allocate subsidies on the basis of recommendations by municipal officials. This system creates many opportunities for corruption and abuse. The draft of the Energy Strategy for Kosovo 2022-2031 acknowledges the problems with the current subsidy scheme and its limited funding, According to the Strategy, a new price-support scheme will be introduced by 2024, and the means-tested scheme will be reformed within the framework of the more generally reformed social assistance scheme by 2031. However, in document there is no details about what specific changes would be introduced to improve the system.

Affordability

Almost all households in Kosovo have access to electricity and are supplied at regulated prices, which are the lowest in Europe, after Ukraine and Georgia (Ban et al. 2021, 177) . But despite energy spending is a huge burden for the households and for 40.2% of households it was unaffordable to keep a warm home adequately (KAS 2012a).

In February 2022, the Kosovo regulator, Energy Regulatory Office (ERO), decided to introduce a new tariff system. The new tariff for consumption above

---

4   The average subsidy monthly is €10 per household, regardless of it size.
5   Interview with representative of Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities, Gračanica, 8 June 2022; Interview of representative of Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities, Fushë Kosovo, 06 June 2022.

800kWh per month is 5.9 per kWh (low nighttime tariff) and 12.52 per kWh (high daytime tariff). The price for supplies up to 800 kWh stays unchanged, and is also divided into two intervals: 2.89kWh (daytime) and 6.75 (nighttime). The increase in tariffs was aimed at reducing the electricity consumption of high- and middle-income households and motivating them to invest in energy efficiency (Spasić 2022).[6] Increased consumption in 2021/2022 led to system overloads, and constantly growing energy demand will increase the risk of blackouts during the winter season peaks (Vllahiu 2022). However, the ERO's decision to introduce the new tariff system was suspended by the Basic Court of Prishtina, as the opposition Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) challenged the new tariff system in court. The Court of Appeals then upheld the decision to suspend its implementation till final ruling. At this point, then, it is still unclear when or if the new tariff system will be implemented (Zeqiri 2022). However, this decision has not had any effect on the situation of energy-poor households, which usually consume far less electric energy. According to the Draft of Energy Strategy, Kosovo will be ready to introduce a carbon pricing system by 2025, and is aiming to be fully integrated into the pan-European market and the EU ETS by 2031. Projections in the report published by the Energy Community show that if carbon pricing is introduced, final energy prices for the households will increase (EnC 2021a, 75). That would be another burden for energy-poor households.

Coping with Cold and Meeting Energy Needs

Electricity is rarely used for heating in poor households, as it is perceived as something only the better-off can afford. Poor households use fossil fuels and biomass to heat the stoves in their houses: coal or wood are the cheapest available fuels. Interviewees reported that the average family uses c. 12 m3 wood and 3 to 4 tons

---

6   Interview with energy expert, Prishtina, 6 July 2022.

of coal annually to heat the household.[7] In rural areas many people can also obtain wood at no additional cost by cutting down trees on their own property. People can also ask the municipality for permission to cut down trees by themselves in public forests for a relatively small amount of money. Interviewees mentioned that sometimes people cut down more than permitted because the state institutions have only a limited ability to control how much is cut.[8] The third option is to cut wood illegally on private or public property. Although the penalties for doing so are high, it is impossible to monitor the situation in rural areas. Thus, people are able to obtain wood for heating at relatively low prices, or even at no cost, but at great detriment to the natural environment in Kosovo as the deforestation progresses.

Lignite is mainly used in settlements close to mines in Prishtina, Mitrovica and the surrounding areas, where there is no forest and wood is more expensive. According to the interviewees from wider Prishtina area,[9] coal as a fuel is cheaper: 1 m3 of wood costs the same as 2 tons of lignite. Officially only the public company can sell lignite, but people also buy it from illegal pits. This is usually low-quality wet lignite, with low energy efficiency and greater amounts of contaminants. People who use it praise the fact that coal keeps the heat longer than wood. One of them mention that he have given up the use of lignite out of concern for the consequences for their children's health, but both of them emphasised that few people take into account the negative health impacts of the type of heating they use.[10] In urban areas, households living in extreme poverty also use various types of waste as fuel. If people use woodstove for cooking and DHW, in summer they usually use LPG (Liquefied Petroleum Gas) for it.

Most families spend most of their income on food and energy. According to all interviewees, many families have to cut their expenditure on food, clothing and hygienic products in order to meet their basic energy needs they fre-

---

7   This part is based on an Interview with representative of NGO, Prizren, 7 June 2022 and Interview with journalist, Prizren, 10 June 2022 and Interview representative of Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities, Gračanica, 8 June 2022.
8   Interview with NGOs activist, Peja 17 May 2022; Interview with journalist, Prizren, 10 June 2022.
9   Interview with representative of Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities, Gračanica, 8 June 2022; Interview with representative of Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities, Fushë Kosovo, 06 June 2022.
10   Ibid.

quently face the dilemma "heat or eat" The In the case of people living in severe energy poverty (such as Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians) their disposable income is only sufficient for the cheapest foods like beans, chicken wings and bread, and if anything is left it goes on medicine. In case of people living in urban areas who use electricity for heating, cooking and DHW, the lack of financial resources means that they also sometimes do not use hot water and do not cook hot meals, even in winter time. They eat only ready-made products, which has a negative influence on their health condition. The interviewee working with income poor households in Prishtina frequently mention that the poor families in urban areas frequently ask for wood or other fuel to warm their house or prepare hot meals.[11] At present the government has no scheme to help those families who use wood or coal as their basic fuel. Some charity organization provide food for low-income families, but not fuel. Any such help for these families is usually provided by private persons.

Most people in Kosovo heat only part of the dwelling they live in. The average dwelling size is 83.3 m^2, and the average area heated is 51.58 m^2 (KAS 2015, 11). 22% of households in rural and 21% in urban areas heat only up to 20 m^2 of their dwellings. That means that they heat only one room (usually the kitchen). All the interviewees mention that in the winter they are able to heat only a maximum of two rooms, where all the members of the - sometimes multimember - families spend the day and sleep during the nights. Usually, at least one person in energy poor household is unemployed so they have to heat the house all day, which also increases the cost of heating. As many interviewees mention, heating only one space influences the sanitary conditions in which the energy-poor live. In winter, they have no possibility to wash themselves, do laundry or dry clothes. The situation of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians, and other people who depend on daily irregular wages, is particularly challenging.[12] They are then forced to buy fuel at higher winter prices as usually can't buy it in advance in summer because daily wages are very low. In winter there is also far less seasonal daily work so they seek help from social networks, asking for money for fuel or wood. If there is no other option, then they burn waste.

---

11   Interview with representative of Kosovo Women's Network, Prishtina 19 May 2022.
12   Interview with representative of Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities, Gračanica, 8 June 2022; Interview with representative of Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities, Fushë Kosovo, 06 June 2022.

In the case of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, who usually live in such conditions, the severe energy poverty deepens their social exclusion, restricts their employment opportunities, or forces children out of school as they are bullied, and have no appropriate place to study in the overcrowded home space, which negatively affects their results in schools. Some Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children spend time in community centres run by NGOs, where during the winter they can stay warm and study; but the number of such places is limited, and they can accommodate only a small share of the children.

The number of appliances used in energy-poor houses are very limited. People living in severe energy poverty usually have a refrigerator, a TV and sometimes an old, inefficient boiler. Not all of them have modern telephones and internet access. Even though their appliances are usually old and inefficient, they need far less electric energy than middle- and high-income households as they limit their energy needs to the basic minimum. Therefore the amount of money they spend on electricity bills is not the main indicator of fuel poverty. Most of such households spend far less than is needed to live a decent and healthy life. The system of electricity subsidies also discourages people from changing their appliances for the new more energy efficient ones. According to the interviewees, if the household buys a new device, the municipal official considers this as an improvement of living conditions and withdraws their entitlement to the allowance.[13]

Unreliable Electricity Supplies

Not only is affordability a problem in Kosovo, but the accessibility and safety of electricity supplies are as well. Although almost all households are connected to the electric energy grid, electricity outages and voltage fluctuations were mentioned as common problem in rural areas and Roma, Ashkali and

13   Ibid.

Egyptian settlements. It was reported that some villages around Prizren and Dragaš have no electricity supply for six months of the year and due to the bad condition of the power grid, even moderate weather phenomena such as wind and light snow or rain cause power cuts.[14] The interviewees also complained that it takes much longer, sometimes up to a week, to repair faults in the transmission network in areas inhabited by the energy-poor. Therefore, in many rural areas households have alternative energy sources, usually diesel generators. The interruption and voltage fluctuations frequently cause the failure of home appliances and electronic equipment. The use of alternative energy recourses and protection devices creates yet another additional cost for those households that can afford it.[15] Those who live in severe energy poverty use candles for lighting in order to avoid the extra costs and got used to not using other electric devices in case of outages. Because of the frequent risk of voltage fluctuations, people are also more disinclined to buy the costlier more energy-efficient energy devices. They also tend not to exchange cheap incandescent light bulbs for more energy-efficient light devices as they are afraid that they will quickly be burned out.

Arrears on Utility Bills

Data from the Central Bank of Kosovo shows that 9% of households often have arrears of over 2 months in paying their monthly utility expenses (water, electricity, waste, property tax). 45.7% and 28.5% respectively stated that they sometimes or rarely have arrears. Only 16.8% have no problem in paying their bills (Central Bank of the Republic of Kosovo 2022, 56). All the interviewees emphasized that consumers are disconnected from the power grid after not paying two, or a maximum of three, of their energy bills. In areas where modern meters have been

---

14　Interview with representative of religious community, Prizren, 7 June 2022; Interview with representative of local NGO, Prizren, 7 June 2022; Interview with journalist, Prizren, 10 June 2022.
15　Ibid.

installed the cut-off is done remotely. In case of the older grid structures prevalent in poorer parts of the cities and rural areas, the company's workers come to households to cut off the electricity manually. In the case of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian settlements, the company representative is usually accompanied by police officers as people try to prevent the disconnections by means of force. Interviewees also reported that since the Turkish Kosovo Çalık Limak Energy Sh.A took over the majority stake in Kosovo's electricity distribution utility KEDS in 2013[16] the company has become very strict about collecting payments and cutting off electricity without warning, even if the non-payment was simply due to inattention. Reconnection to the grid is an additional burden on people with low income. This means that all customers try to pay energy bills, even if that means cutting expenses on food and other essential products.

Some people who live in extremely poor conditions are connected to the electric grid illegally, at a cost of around €20, but their electricity consumption is usually low. They use electricity for lighting and charging phones if they have them. KESCO is progressively replacing older meters with modern ones, which prevents and disables illegal connections. The company is also introducing network monitoring by its workers to detect illegal connections; this monitoring is usually done once a year. In consequence, commercial losses since 2013 have fallen by 7.4 percentage points to 12.1%; this also includes 372 GWh or 5.95% of electricity sent to four northern municipalities, which don't pay energy bills (ERO 2022, 105);[17] the other consumers cover the cost of commercial losses. But in rural and illegal sentiments illegal connections are still possible, and KESCO is more reluctant to eliminate them or at least the interviewees did not notice any attempts to do so on a larger scale.[18] It seems that this is a *de facto* informal method enabling people living in extreme poverty to have some access to electric energy. On the other hand, these people are outside the official energy system, and they cannot apply for electricity subsidies even if they meet the criteria.

---

16 In 2015 the distribution segment of the company was separated and transferred to KESCO.
17 In June 2022 Kosovo and Serbia reached an agreement, which enables to charge consumers for energy supplies in these Serb-majority municipalities. The implementation of the agreement is pending.
18 Interview with representative of Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities, Gračanica, 8 June 2022; Interview with representative of local NGO, Prizren, 7 June 2022

Taking into account the vast use of wood and coal, that consumption sometimes decreased to basic minimum, the illegal connection to electricity grid and the ability to warm a small part of household (see below), it appears that the amount of and arrears in energy bills can be misleading when calculating the true scale of energy poverty in Kosovo.

Energy Savings

According to the all interviewees, the vast majority of householders make efforts to save energy. People switch off electricity and heating when they are not needed, use appliances during the lower night-time tariff period, and use only a limited number of appliances, usually old TVs, refrigerators and sometimes a washing machine or boiler for DHW. In rural areas people prefer wood-burning kitchen stoves due to their multifunctionality. They can be used for heating the house, cooking food and boiling water for washing and laundry, so they use electricity only for illumination, charging phones etc. They cook and warm water for laundry or washing during the evening, when they heat the dwelling for the night. In many households in energy poverty electricity consumption is reduced to the basic minimum (illuminating the house with a single bulb) and families apply extreme coping mechanisms, which lead to health problems. Attempting to reduce energy consumption among the energy-poor by means of campaigns about simple energy savings behaviour will thus achieve very little.

Change Through Investment

The current model of the electricity and energy market does not encourage consumers to increase their energy efficiency. According to some interviewees, for high-income families electric energy prices are still low,

so although they cons ume a great deal of energy they are not interested in making the appropriate investments.[19] Middle-income families try to adapt to rising prices by changing their heating model, depending on the prices of various fuels and electricity, and they too are not interested in investing in energy efficiency. This corresponds with the results of an opinion poll conducted by IDRA Research & Consulting and a study commissioned by Millennium Foundation Kosovo. Despite the fact that most of the dwellings in Kosovo are thermally insulated, in the opinion poll 50% of respondents declared that they are not willing to change heating appliance and 25% would do so only if they get financial assistance. According to the Millennium Foundation latter study 33% of the respondent declared that they would like to invest in implementing energy efficiency measures (of which 16% would invest up to EUR 1,000) (MFK 2020).

People living in energy poverty are so focused on raising money for fuel and electricity that they do not even think about taking any action which could help them to reduce their energy demands through insulation or changing their domestic appliances.[20] Some interviewees perceive the insulation of the house as such a huge investment that only a limited number of people could afford it.[21] As energy consumption of people living in energy poverty is low the financial benefits of the investment is not high enough to convince them to undertake it.

People living in energy poverty also are unaware of retrofitting programmes. Only two interviewees[22] were aware of the so-called 'green loan', whereby applicants can obtain a grant of up to 20% of loan renovation to increase the house's energy efficiency.[23] But at the same time, neither they nor the people in their community wanted to apply for the loan as they did not have the funds

---

19   Interview with energy expert, Prishtina 8 June 2022.
20   Interview with representative of Kosovo Women's Network, Prishtina 19 May 2022; Interview with repre-sentative of Jahjaga Foundation, Prishtina 20 May 2022; Interview with NGO representative, Peja 17 May 2022.
21   Interview with NGO representative, Peja 17 May 2022; Interview with representative of Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities, Gračanica, 8 June 2022.
22   Interviews with NGO representatives, Peja, 17 May 2022.
23   Within the framework of the EBRD's Green Economy Financing Facility (GEFF) programme.

to make their own contribution. Energy-poor households are also ineligible to receive such loans as they do not have stable job, or the legal status of their property is unclear. Some interviewees thought that insulating the dwelling is only effective for a few years, so such investments for them make even less sense financially.[24] This belief may arise from the low-quality materials which were used for insulation ten to twenty years ago. Many families also receive help to cover their energy bills from the diaspora. Families abroad usually prefer to send small amounts of money throughout the year rather than make an investment to save money in the long term.[25] As a consequence, usually only people who are better off and have higher social positions benefit from various programmes i.e. for insulation and "green loans" and they are perceived as "not for poor or even middle-income" people.[26]

The Question of Trust

People in Kosovo seem to have got used to living in energy hardship. As many families around them live in the same conditions they do not consider their situation as exceptional or being stigmatized in their social milieu. They have high degree of self-reliance and mainly turn only to their inner circle for help in struggling with energy poverty. In this context, families living in rural areas have better options to meet some of their basic energy needs as their social networks are stronger; they can also obtain some additional electric energy or wood informally, or collect wood from the forest. People in urban areas with scare resources have no such option.

As the study of K. Grossmann et al. (2021) has shown, trust in institutions can significantly strengthen the capacities of energy-poor households to combat

---

24   Interview with NGO representative, Peja 17 May 2022.
25   Interview with NGO representative, Peja 17 May 2022; Interview with representative of Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities, Gračanica, 8 June 2022.
26   Ibid.

sources of energy poverty. While lack of trust in institutions discourages people from applying for support they are entitled to, their state of energy poverty deepens. According to the interviewees, people living in energy poverty has very limited trust in institutions, government campaigns in the press or TV.[27] Nor do they expect help from the government or municipality when struggling with energy poverty. As all interviews show, people rely only on family, neighbours or friends for securing support when they can't afford to buy fuel or electricity. Interviewees frequently mention that they are helping households in severe energy poverty by delivering fuel personally or as part of community activities.[28] People living in energy poverty seem to think that the government is doing nothing to help low in-come households. They are assessing that most of the programs are targeting only people who are better off. This belief is also based on the perception that many recommendations for increasing energy poverty and decreasing energy consumption don't match the needs of the energy poor and go beyond their financial capacity. Some of them mentioned that previous campaigns were also sometimes misleading; for example, the government has been trying to convince people to switch to oil stoves, which appeared to be less efficient and cost-effective than promised.[29]

The distrust to institutions is enhanced by the behaviour of officials and social workers towards energy poor. It was reported that many of them are biased, especially against Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian and people in rural areas, who are frequently accused of energy theft and are therefore denied assistance.[30] Some people mentioned that municipal clerks demanded a bribe in exchange of granting social assistance. Interviewees also expressed disappointment with KESCO's and KEDS's actions as according to them company they are not interested in modernizing the energy grid in rural areas and Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian settlements or to provide them with modern meters.

---

27 Interview with NGO representative, Prizren, 7 June 2022; Interview with representative of Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities, Gračanica 8 June 2022; Interview with representative of local NGO, Prizren, 7 June 2022.

28 Interview with representative of Kosovo Women's Network; Interview with representative of Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities, Gračanica; Interview with a representative of religious community, Prizren, 7 June

29 Interview with representative of local NGO, Prizren, 7 June 2022.

30 Interview with representative of Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities, Gračanica 8 June 2022

They also reported that people are feeling powerless when facing problems with paying energy bills or electricity disconnection without warning. There is no possibility to repay the debt in instalments, and the entire debt must be repaid in order for the delinquent household to be reconnected, something that is often impossible.[31] People are cut off even in winter time as there is no protection for vulnerable consumers in winter and no regard for visible economic hardship of the family or small children in households (only people who are getting subsidies are by law protected from disconnection). It seems that this feeling of powerlessness is making the energy-poor justify and legitimize a perceived inferior status rather than strive to change it, as K. Grossmann et al. (2021) has observed referring to the study of J. van der Toorn et al. (2014).

People generally seem to consider woodstoves as the most reliable and cheapest appliance to meet their energy needs. This perception was further reinforced with the return of energy restrictions during the winter of 2021/2, when many households who were entirely dependent on electricity supply experienced serious problems. Thus those who live in poverty and are afraid of any additional cost are especially reluctant to abandon their woodstoves for another type of heating. Moreover, as the woodstove offers many functions, replacing it would require the purchase of many new appliances, which people simply cannot afford.

The lack of trust in institutions can reduce the response to programs targeting energy poor household and programs aimed at increasing energy efficiency as people tend to not believe in governments and NGOs campaigns. In the hectic situation on energy market they are even more keen to rely on traditional woodstoves, even if they are energy inefficient.

31 Interview with representative of Kosovo Women's Network, Prishtina 19 May 2022; Interview with representative of Jahjaga Foundation, Prishtina 20 May 2022.

The Gender Perspective

The interviews revealed that in all mixed-sex households living in energy poverty, the men take the important decisions on financial issues concerning energy, about the appliances used to heat and cook, on choosing and buying fuel, and on investing to improve the households' energy efficiency.[32] Men are also responsible for collecting the biomass or waste used for heating houses. The employment rate among working-age females is only 15.9%, compared with 42.8% for males (KAS 2021). Women are financially dependent on men and do not participate in taking decisions on energy supply, even though they are responsible for cooking and keeping the house warm.

As they do not work and take care of the children at home, women in households living in energy poverty are more exposed to indoor pollution and toxic chemicals released when burning waste. The main concern of women living in energy-poor mixed-sex households is the safety and health of the children. The interviewees working with women reported that many of them worry about the physical safety of their children due to low-hanging unprotected power lines, unsafe electrical installations and damaged, worn or corroded electrical wires; which increase the chances of electrical accidents involving their children. They also worry that the children are exposed to burning and scalding risks from hot water and hot surfaces when they use old types of stove for heating and cooking. If the candles used for illumination, they are also concerned about the risk of fires. The health hazards due to burning waste were rarely mentioned in these interviews because it seems that many of them have no other choice than to burn waste to warm the house during winter.

According to the data, single females have the greatest difficulties in keeping their homes adequately warm (66%). The percentage for single people,

---

32   This part is based on Interview with representative of Kosovo Women's Network, Prishtina 19 May 2022 and Interview with representative of Jahjaga Foundation, Prishtina 20 May 2022.

usually women, with dependent children is lower, at 49% (EnC 2021a, 250). Interviews revealed that women living with dependent children have little agency to improve the energy efficiency of their dwellings in order to decrease energy spending. Some of them are unaware that they are entitled to energy subsidies. They mostly focus on providing their children with minimum warmth and enough food at home, and feel guilty if they are unable to do so. They try to use as little electricity as possible: they eat ready-made products and do not eat warm meals even in winter if they do not have a woodstove. If they have electric heating they try to warm household to only the necessary minimum, and use additional blankets.

Energy Poverty in Times of Crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic in Kosovo, as in the rest of Europe, triggered a recession in 2020 and decreased the GDP by 6.9% due to the economy's strong dependency on services, especially that driven by the diaspora. It was the first ever recession for the new state. However, exact data on how the recession influenced the country's income and poverty rates are still not available but in the past two years arrears in utility bills increased significantly. According to data provided by KESCO, the company collected 90.85% and 91% of the billed amount in 2021 and 2020 respectively. Until 2019 the collecting rate had been around 99% (ERO 2022, 107). In terms of district heating, the bill arrears seem to be significantly higher as the public company DH Termokos was able to collect only 51.69% of payments in 2021 (ERO 2022, 135) in comparison to a collection rate of 70.86% in 2019 (ERO 2020, 131). This is an indicator that the pandemic has had a very negative impact on the people's ability to pay their energy bills.

The current situation on the energy markets has led to increases in prices for wood and coal. According to various interviewees, prices have risen from be-

tween 30% and 50% depending on the region.[33] One m³ of wood cost around €35 last year, but now the price is around €50–60 per m³. That would mean the cost of wood for winter season would rise by €200–300 depending on consumption, which would impose a heavy burden on many households. With the rising prices of food, families also have less financial resources for heating. As the overwhelming majority of total household consumption in Kosovo goes on food and housing (40% and 29% respectively, KAS 2018, 7) opportunities to save on other categories of expenses are very limited. Therefore, most probably people will be looking for cheaper options for heating. The interviewees observed that some households which switched to electric heating in recent years are now thinking about returning to wood as they can no longer afford to heat with electricity.[34] In these circumstances, households would probably extend their use of coal or waste for heating. All of these processes will lead to an increa se in air pollution and the living condition of many will further deteriorate.

High inflation discourages also people from investing to decrease energy consumption. Households have fewer financial resources to exchange their house appliances for more energy-efficient units. The dramatic rise of the prices of construction materials discourages from retrofitting, which now seems to be even less cost-effective. If people were reluctant to invest in energy efficiency measures even before the price increases, now only people with huge savings can afford to do so. The process of improving the energy efficiency of buildings and appliances, which was already slow, will most probably be halted completely, as will the change of heating models to more modern equipment and shifting away from coal and wood.

---

33 Interview with NGO representative, Prizren, 7 June 2022; Interview with representative of Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities, Gračanica 8 June 2022; Interview with representative of local NGO, Prizren, 7 June 2022.
34 Ibid.

Conclusion

Energy poverty in Kosovo is strongly associated with a lack of access to clean and modern energy due to poor infrastructure (i.e., lack of district heating) and low incomes, meaning that many households still rely on wood, coal and even waste for heating, which negatively impacts the living condition of the whole society. Therefore, energy poverty in Kosovo has determinants (lack of availability of modern energy resources) and consequences (detrimental impacts on health, gender inequality, education, and economic development) that, as Bouzarovski & Petrova (2015) describe, are typical to the developing countries of the Global South. Whereas, in most of the EU countries policies to address energy poverty focus mainly on the issue affordability of energy and energy and the health consequences affect individual persons living in such condition. Therefore, the approach of EnC to energy poverty shaped by a much broader experience of the EU and its member countries does not always correspond to the needs and challenges in Kosovo.

Addressing the issue of energy poverty will be a serious challenge for Kosovo government, mainly because the phenomenon is so widespread and the problems with access to clean energy are structural ones. Although the definition of a socially vulnerable customer in the electricity sector proposed by the EnC explicitly states that "the definition shall not include more than a minority of the population" (EnC 2021, 22), a large share of the population in Kosovo live in energy poverty according to the various calculations. As of now, the main goal of Kosovo's government is to modernize and decarbonize the energy sector, and to increase the use of renewable resources. As the Kosovo government has no financial resources to introduce mechanisms which would significantly change the situation of the energy-poor in the short term, it seems to assume that transforming the energy system and improving the economic situation would also automatically reduce the number of households affected by energy poverty. Therefore, it prefers to focus on the long-term transformation of the energy system than on short-term aid to the energy-poor.

The projects and programmes to decrease energy consumption are mainly financed by foreign donors and offer solutions that are effective in countries of the Western Europe. As such, they rather target middle- and high-income households, and not those living in energy poverty as such. These middle- and high-income households consume much more electric energy, and have the financial resources to benefit from the proposed programmes, which require the householders to make their own contributions. Therefore, the people whose economic situation is better and consume more energy will be able to take advantage of retrofitting programmes by installing more efficient energy devices such as convectors, heat pump and solar panels etc., and thus further improve their living conditions and spend less money on their energy needs. Those living in energy poverty will still have to use biomass or even waste burned in inefficient appliances. This would also result in persistently high levels of pollution and the continuation of the deforestation process. Moreover, a large share of the population would live in constantly deteriorating conditions, unable to meet their basic energy needs and the social disparities in Kosovo will widen significantly.

In shaping solutions which would suit the circumstances in Kosovo and improve the living conditions of the energy-poor, empowering domestic institutions and non-state actors representing vulnerable groups, and including the latter in the decision-making process are of utmost importance. The second priority should be expanding knowledge about the living conditions and needs of people living in energy poverty, considering social, economic, geographical and gender differences of the energy-poor. Qualitative research based on lived experience would seem to be the best option to obtain in a relatively short period of time the better understanding of energy poverty in Kosovo which is necessary for shaping better measures. Third issue is the adoption of an accurate definition of the vulnerable consumer, with specific indicators taking into account the particular context of Kosovo which would enable this group of energy consumers to be correctly identified and measured. That should fall in line with reforming the system of electricity subsidies, which should target a wider number of energy-poor households. The clear definition of vulnerable consumer/consumer in need would also enable introduction of the require-

ment to include a certain number of vulnerable households to various programs for increasing energy efficiency of dwellings and appliances. Thus, the funds would not only go to families that are better off.

To conduct effective actions targeting energy-poor, their trust to institutions should also be rebuilt. Therefore, measures and campaigns targeting the energy poor should primarily involve the use of in-person contact with vulnerable groups. These campaigns should also take into account specific vulnerabilities and concerns of women, which seem to be more aware of the detrimental effect of energy poverty. Raising tariffs further should also be considered, as this would encourage households consuming a lot of energy to invest in improving energy efficiency; attention should also be given to financing special programmes for those who have limited access to energy services. Without that any tangible result in alleviating energy poverty will be impossible and the energy transition, contrary to government announcement won't be socially just. It will deepen social equalities and enhance deprivation of energy poor households.

The current energy crisis will most probably lead to a further deterioration of the situation of low- and middle-income households in terms of energy affordability. The continuous increase in energy prices and high inflation result in more and more households in Kosovo facing problems covering their basic energy needs. Their living conditions are deteriorating, which poses a serious threat to their health and wellbeing due to high indoor pollution, food insecurity and the need to cut spending on other essential goods, such as clothing appropriate to the season, hygienic products or medicine. During this winter many households will most probably encounter huge problems with keeping their houses adequately warm. At present, the government is downplaying this problem, stating that in the longer term, and when new investments have been made, other energy sources will become more affordable.

In the context of the chaotic situation in energy markets the government should also undertake quick and simple measures which improve situation of vulnerable groups in the coming winter. First of all, measures to protect vulnerable consumers against disconnection during the winter season should be intro-

duced as quickly as possible. KESCO could consider implementing a scheme which would enable consumers to pay off their energy bills in instalments. The government, along with KESCO, should take steps to regulate the situation of households connected to the system illegally, while simultaneously informing them about the possibility of obtaining electricity subsidies, for which the budget allocation should be increased. The government should consider implementing simple and low-cost energy efficiency measures such as draught-proofing windows & doors, and using reflective foils or construction materials to eliminate draughts and leaks, which are quick to implement and do not require professionals and the cost of these programs will be lower than retrofitting of entire houses. Such measures could be introduced at the municipal level. The government and donors should also reconsider transitional solutions such as replacing woodstoves with more efficient ones. This is not in line with the policy of moving away from burning wood and fossil fuels, but would help households living in energy poverty which cannot afford to switch to other sources of heating. The issue of providing emergency wood supply to the families living in extreme poverty should also be considered. Otherwise, this winter can be extremely hard for many households.

List of interviews

Anonymous interviewee 1, NGO representative, Peja 17 May 2022

Anonymous interviewee 2, NGO representative, Peja 17 May 2022

Anonymous interviewee 3, NGO representative, Peja 18 May 2022

Anonymous interviewee 4, representative of Kosovo Women's Network, Prishtina 19 May 2022

Anonymous interviewee 5, representative of Jahjaga Foundation, Prishtina 20 May 2022

Anonymous interviewee 6, representative of Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities, Fushë Kosovo, 06 June 2022

Anonymous interviewee 7, representative of religious community, Prizren, 7 June 2022

Anonymous interviewee 8, representative of local NGO, Prizren, 7 June 2022

Anonymous interviewee 9, representative of local NGO, Prizren, 7 June 2022

Anonymous interviewee 10 representative of local NGO, Prizren, 8 June 2022

Anonymous interviewee 11, representative of Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities, Gračanica, 8 June 2022

Anonymous interviewee 12, journalist, Prizren, 10 June 2022

References

Ban, M. et al. 2021. Study on Addressing Energy Poverty in the Energy Community Contracting Parties Vienna, Energy Community Secretariat. Available at: https://www.energy-community.org/dam/jcr:f201fefd-3281-4a1f-94f9-23c3fce4bbf0/DOOREIHP_poverty_122021.pdf

Central Bank of the Republic of Kosovo. 2022. Household Indebtedness in Kosovo. Available at: https://bqk-kos.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/CBK_HIK.pdf

Bouzarovski S., R. Sarlamanov, S. Petrova. 2012. Energy poverty policies in the EU: A critical perspective, Energy Policy, Volume 49, 2012,

Bouzarovski S., H. Thomson and M. Cornelis. 2021. Confronting energy poverty in Europe: A research and policy agenda, *Energies*, 14, 858

Bouzarovski S., S. Petrova. 2015. A global perspective on domestic energy deprivation: Overcoming the energy poverty-fuel poverty binary. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 10, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2015.06.007

Buzar S. 2007. The 'hidden' geographies of energy poverty in post-socialism: Between institutions and households, *Geoforum*, 38, 224–240

Energy Community (EnC). 2021. A carbon pricing design for the Energy Community. Final Report. Available at: https://www.energy-community.org/dam/jcr:82a4fc8b-c0b7-44e8-b699-0fd06ca9c74d/Kantor_carbon_012021.pdf

European Commission. 2020. Commission Recommendation of 14.10.2020 on energy poverty. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/recommendation_on_energy_poverty_c2020_9600.pdf

Energy Regulatory Office (ERO). 2022. Annual report 2021 https://www.ero-ks.org/zrre/sites/default/files/Publikimet/Raportet%20Vjetor/Annual%20Report%202021.pdf

Energy Regulatory Office (ERO). 2020. Annual report 2019 https://www.ero-ks.org/zrre/sites/default/files/Publikimet/Raportet%20Vjetor/Annual%20Report%202019_%20ERO.pdf

Grossmann K., G. Jiglau, U. Dubois, A. Sinea, F. Martín-Consuegra, M. Dereniowska et al. 2021,

The critical role of trust in experiencing and coping with energy poverty: Evidence from across Europe. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 76 102064

IDRA Research & Consulting (IDRA). 2021. Research on heating practices in the Residential Sector of Kosovo* https://smarterstoves.resfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/KOS-presentation-final.pdf

Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS). 2021. Labour Force Survey, Q1 2021. Available at: https://ask.rks-gov.net/en/kosovo-agency-of-statistics/add-news/labour-force-survey-q1-2021

Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS). 2019. Consumption poverty in the Republic of Kosovo. Available at https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/210201560762490515/pdf/Consumption-Poverty-in-the-Republic-of-Kosovo.pdf

Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS). 2018a. Results of the Household Budget Survey 2017. Available at https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/4169/results-of-the-household-budget-2017.pdf

Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS). 2018b. Results of the Statistics on Income and Living Conditions 2018. https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/5621/silc-2018-anglisht.pdf

Kuhn S. & F. Kutzner. 2022. Behavioural insights to change energy consumption patterns of urban households in Prishtina, Kosovo. Available at https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/giz2021-en-behavioural-insights-to-change-energy-consumption-patterns.pdf

Longhurst N. & T. Hargreaves. 2019. Emotions and fuel poverty: The lived experience of social housing tenants in the United Kingdom, *Energy Research & Social Science*, 56, 1-9.

Middlemiss L. & R. Gillard. 2015. Fuel poverty from the bottom-up: Characterising household energy vulnerability through the lived experience of the fuel poor, *Energy Research & Social Science,* 6, 146-154.

Middlemiss L, R. Gillard, V. Pellicer, K. Straver. 2018. Plugging the gap between energy policy and the lived experience of energy poverty: five principles for a multi-disciplinary approach, In C. Foulds, R. Robison. Eds., *Advancing Energy Policy: Lessons on the Integration of Social Science and Humanities*, Bern, Springer.

Millan N., Z. Anusic, S. Koettl-Brodmann, S. Coll-Black, J.P. Rigolini, C. von Lenthe. 2021. Western Balkans Social Protection Situational Analyses. Washington, D.C. World Bank Group. Available at http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099255003172230352/P176230099581a01a-099140dad12d38ba14

Millennium Foundation Kosovo (MFK). 2020. Residential Buildings Efficiency Retrofits Baseline Study (Final Draft). Available at: https://millenniumkosovo.org/seek/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/MFK_ENE_PIEE_IC_DEL_4.1_5.1_HER_AER_BaselineStudy_200326.docx

Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (MESP). 2019. Guidelines for Implementation of Minimum Requirements for Energy Performance in Existing Building in the Residential Sector – Typology of Building in the Republic of Kosovo. Available at https://konsultimet.rks-gov.net/Storage/Consultations/40596-UpdAl.pdf

Ministry of Economic Development (MED). 2017. Energy Strategy of the Republic of Kosovo 2017 -2026. Available at https://me.rks-gov.net/repository/docs/Energy_Strategy_of_the_Republic_of_Kosovo_2017_-_2026.pdf

Ministry of Economy (ME). 2022. The Energy Strategy of the Republic of Kosovo 2022–2031. Draft. Available at https://konsultimet.rks-gov.net/Storage/Consultations/18-23-41-07062022/Draft_Energy-Strategy-of-the-Republic-of-Kosovo-2022-2031.docx

Obradovic-Wochnik J & A. Dodds. 2015. Environmental governance in a contested state: the influence of the European Union and other external actors on energy sector regulation in Kosovo, *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 33, 935–949

Petrova S. and N. Simcock. 2019. Gender and energy: domestic inequities reconsidered, *Social & Cultural Geography*, 22, 849–867

Robić S, I. Rogulj and B. Ančić. 2017. Energy poverty in the Western Balkans: Adjusting policy responses to socio-economic drivers, In N. Simcock, H. Thomson, S. Petrova and S. Bouzarovski. Eds. *Energy Poverty and Vulnerability*. Routledge

'Selecting Indicators to Measure Energy Poverty', Trinomics B.V. https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/documents/Selecting%20Indicators%20to%20Measure%20Energy%20Poverty.pdf

Spasić V. 2022. Kosovo* doubles electricity prices for households. Available at: https://balkangreenenergynews.com/kosovo-doubles-electricity-prices-for-households/

van der Toorn J., M. Feinberg, J.T. Jost, A.C. Kay, T.R. Tyler, R. Willer, C. Wilmuth. 2014. A sense of powerlessness fosters system justification: implications for the legitimation of authority, hierarchy, and government, *Political Psychology*, 36, 93–110

Vllahiu E. 2022. Protesters Condemn Looming Hike in Electricity Bills. Available at: https://prishtinainsight.com/protesters-condemn-looming-hike-in-electricity-bills/

Vitia D. 2020. Kosovo's energy market: when will the monopoly end?. Available at https://prishtinainsight.com/kosovos-energy-market-when-will-the-monopoly-end-mag/

World Bank. 2019. Poverty and Distributional Analysis of Electricity Poverty and Protection of Vulnerable Customers in Kosovo.

World Bank. 2021. Kosovo Country Economic Memorandum, November 2021: Gearing Up for a More Productive Future. Available at: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/36896

World Bank. 2022, Western Balkans Social Protection Situational Analyses: Kosovo. Available at https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099255003172230352/pdf/P176230099581a01a099140dad12d38ba14.pdf

Zeqiri A. 2022. Court of Appeals Upholds Suspension of Electricity Price Rises. Available at: https://prishtinainsight.com/court-of-appeals-upholds-suspension-of-electricity-price-rises/

REVISITING EUROPEAN INTEGRATION IN TIMES OF CRISES

PETR ČERMÁK

Czech EU Presidency and the Western Balkans: The Story of a Sidelined Policy

— PETR ČERMÁK

Petr Čermák is a Research Fellow of the Association for International Affairs, a Prague-based think tank, and a Researcher at the Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University in Prague focusing on Western Balkan politics. He holds a Ph.D. in International Relations and European Politics from Masaryk University in Brno. His research interest focuses primarily on ethnic politics in post-conflict areas of the Western Balkans. He has conducted extensive field research in different parts of the region where he investigated local dimensions of power-sharing mechanisms in ethnically diverse areas. Petr graduated in International Relations at Masaryk University in Brno and had an opportunity to study and conduct his research at universities in Sarajevo, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Graz, and Tirana. Besides his academic activities, he has been engaged in think tank projects dealing with the Western Balkans region and its political dynamics.

Abstract

The Czech Republic has taken over the Presidency of the Council of the EU in July 2022. Czech officials had initially proclaimed that a breakthrough in Western Balkans' stalled EU integration process would be a top priority for the Czech Presidency. But after the Russian invasion of Ukraine changed the course of European politics, the announced Western Balkan priority gradually disappeared from the Czech political debate on the Presidency agenda. The chapter documents how the Czech political discourse on the Western Balkans changed during the year preceding the Presidency as a result of domestic and international political turmoil. Based on the comprehensive analysis of their statements, it identifies the key political actors of the Czech EU Presidency and reconstructs their positions on the Western Balkan agenda. The findings show that the governmental actors who are politically driving the course of the Presidency and setting its agenda opted to invest the limited political capital into the strategic issues related to the war in Ukraine while sidelining the Western Balkan agenda. However, the chapter also argues that the Czech EU Presidency cannot afford to avoid the volatile region completely in its agenda because of the anticipated turbulent developments in the Western Balkans. The Czech response to potential regional challenges is expected to be reactive and only pulled by external incentives rather than grounded in any profound political initiative for the region that could accelerate the Western Balkans' stabilization and European integration.

Introduction

Czech foreign policy towards the Western Balkans has recently undergone a change as a result of the earth-shattering international developments. Shortly after the change of government following the October 2021 elections, the Czech Republic took over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union from France in July 2022. The outgoing government declared the Western Balkans and its European integration to be among the top political priorities of the Presidency agenda and the new government initially reaffirmed this commitment. However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 changed the political reality from the ground up. The new Czech government made a strategic decision to catch on to the escalating conflict and has devoted most of its capacities to supporting Ukraine not only in its defence but also on its path to the EU.

At the rhetorical level, the response to Russian aggression and the question of Ukraine's European perspectives quickly overshadowed the Western Balkan agenda in the debates on the political priorities of the Czech EU Presidency. However, past commitments toward the Western Balkans and external calls for active engagement in the volatile region have still resonated in the public debate. The new administration thus found itself in a delicate position. The Czech government needs to cautiously consider where to invest its limited political capital in the foreign policy sphere, and the situation in Ukraine is clearly its primary strategic point of interest. The war and its consequences understandably dominated over other issues including the Western Balkans in the Czech and European political agenda and have a direct impact on the Czech public that must cope with massive refugee flows and energy insecurity. However, the conflict in Ukraine only underlined the geopolitical significance and vulnerability of the Western Balkans.

The Czech government is thus still confronted with the previous political commitments to the Western Balkans that do not lose their geopolitical urgency with the war in Ukraine. From the position of the presiding country, the Czech

Republic inescapably has to deal with the burning regional issues going beyond the stalled process of EU enlargement. Protracted institutional crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, escalating tensions in Montenegro, and the deadlocked dispute between Kosovo and Serbia might all enter the European agenda during the Czech Presidency. However, it has been unclear whether the new government is truly devoted to engaging in the Western Balkans, and what positions it will take on the challenging regional issues.

From the Western Balkan perspective, expectations from the Czech Presidency are amplified by the fact that the region and the progress in its European integration were previously presented as priority agenda. This agenda-setting has already positioned the Czech Republic into a presumed role of an active player in the region in the upcoming months. In the context of the longstanding deadlock of the EU enlargement to the Western Balkans, any significant breakthrough in the integration process can hardly be expected within the six-month EU Presidency term. However, the Czech presidency has to get involved in the region as long as it attempts to keep its European perspective on the agenda and meet the expectations that have been already set.

Research Questions

To address this state of uncertainty, the aim of this paper is to capture and analyse the course of the political debate on the position of the Western Balkan agenda in the priorities of the Czech EU Presidency. The paper comprehensively maps positions of relevant political actors who have defined the agenda of the Czech Presidency, and particularly their changes in the aftermath of the war in Ukraine. Based on the recorded standpoints of the key stakeholders, the paper intends to identify possible trajectories of Czech policy towards the region in the upcoming period.

Research questions investigated through the paper are formulated as follows:
- Who are the political actors defining the agenda of the Czech Presidency and what are their positions to the Western Balkan agenda? (descriptive)

- What are the expected approaches the Czech EU Presidency will take towards the Western Balkans? (predictive)

Methods of Data Collection

Empirically, the paper is grounded in collection of data from a variety of primary and secondary sources. The data collection was based on a continual monitoring of the political debate regarding the role of the Western Balkans in the Czech EU Presidency. The collected data were first used for the identification of relevant stakeholders in the debate, and subsequently for reconstructing their political standpoints to the Western Balkan agenda. In total, the analysis is based on the content of over one hundred relevant sources dating from mid-2021 until mid-2022 and consisting of public statements, press releases, interviews, and other media outputs. The desk research was supplemented with unofficial talks with relevant key informants from the media, the think-tank sphere as well as the state administration. While the author officially asked the key policymakers for interviews to openly discuss the topic of the research, these requests were rejected in the aftermath of the war in Ukraine as the key officials were preoccupied with responding to the crisis and the Western Balkans was disappearing from their agenda. Therefore, the supplementary material to the desk research is limited to off-the-record information gathered from informed interlocutors.

Theoretical Background and Relevance

Conceptually, the paper departs from and contributes to the ongoing broader scholarly debate about the institutional role of the EU Presidency and its potential for agenda-setting in particular policy areas. While the EU Presidency as a sui generis institution has been studied intensely from the perspective of EU institutional structure (Tallberg 2003; Schalk et. al. 2007; Häge 2017; Vaznonytė 2020) as well as in comparative perspective (Drulák and Šabič 2010; Bengtsson, Elgström, and Tallberg 2004; Quaglia and Moxon-Browne 2006),

its potentially active role in the enlargement process has not been covered systematically within the existing literature. However, in the political context of the EU enlargement to the Western Balkans, the role of EU Presidencies has proved to be an important element within the integration dynamics.

The paper reflects this broader theoretical and empirical context by discussing the formal and informal powers of the EU Presidency as an institution within the politics of EU enlargement. Furthermore, it also overviews the experience of past Presidencies that have declared the Western Balkans EU integration as their priority, with a special emphasis on the last two Presidencies preceding the Czech one, Slovenian (2021) and French (2022), which both also committed to the European perspective of the Western Balkans in their priority agendas. By linking the empirical policy-oriented focus with the broader scholarly debate on the political powers of EU Presidencies, the paper not only directly communicates with the existing state of the art in the literature, but also contributes to it with an exploratory case study of the Czech 2022 EU Presidency.

EU Presidencies' Role in the Politics of Enlargement: (In)formal Powers and the Empirical Record

Informal Power of Agenda-setting

The rotating presidency of the Council of the EU is a specific institutional mechanism within the complex structure of the EU inter-governmental decision-making. Every six months, one of the 27 member states takes over the presidency of the Council of the EU, which is, together with the European Parliament, the main legislative institution of the EU. In contrast to the Parliament, the Council works on an inter-governmental basis and member states are rep-

resented by their executive officials, commonly ministers of the national government responsible for the specific area (Lewis 2014). The Council Presidency is thus effectively conducted by the government of the presiding country whose ministers, supported by the national bureaucratic apparatus, chair the sessions of various sectoral configurations of the Council (Thomson 2008).

The mechanism of the rotating presidency was introduced back in 1957 within the European Coal and Steel Community and was subsequently incorporated into the emerging EU institutions. Since then, the political incentive of the mechanism has been to provide each of the member states, regardless of their unequal size and power, an opportunity to formally lead the legislative process and counterbalance the supranational power of the Commission (Kollman 2003). Over more than six decades, the powers and political relevance of the Presidency have significantly transformed. As the number of member states grew rapidly from the original six to the current twenty-seven, the Presidency developed from a rather routine formality to an extraordinary political opportunity that each member state is now granted only every thirteen years. Content-wise, the agenda processed in the Council has significantly increased as the European integration deepened and widened. On the other hand, the executive powers of the Presidency were partially reduced with the institutional reform introduced by the Lisbon treaty in 2007. Besides introducing the mechanism of Presidency trios to improve the continuity in agenda-setting, it also established the individual positions of permanent President of the European Council and Representative for foreign policy (Warntjen 2013; Missiroli 2010; Batory and Puetter 2013; Bunse and Klein 2014). The rotating Presidency held by national governments thus lost the exclusivity in the EU external representation (Dinan 2013).

While the Council is considered the most powerful among the three main institutions of the EU (Council, Commission, and Parliament), its Presidency itself has only very limited formalized power in the decision-making process (Schalk. et al. 2007). The role of the presiding country is mainly procedural and rests in the coordination of the Council's legislative process and intergovernmental mediation (Puetter 2014). The presiding country is thus expect-

ed to put aside its own interests and work primarily on seeking the consensus among 27 member states as it "transforms a national actor to a supranational European role" (Raik 2015, 20).

While it is commonly presented and perceived as a high-profile political opportunity for the national governments of member states, the EU Presidency provides the leading country with almost no tools to promote its national interests. However, what makes it a certain opportunity for each member state is the informal power that the country's government can potentially draw from its privileged position in the influential institution to shape the agenda (Häge 2017; Vaznonytė 2020). The model of the Presidency's informal influence developed by Tallberg (2003) distinguishes three dimensions of potential agenda-shaping power for the national government: *agenda-setting*, *agenda-structuring,* and *agenda exclusion*. On the other hand, the above-cited authors also agree that the space for informal power in high EU politics through agenda-setting and negotiating from a privileged position is constrained by the institutional settings. The actual influence of the presiding country thus to large extent depends on its long-term negotiating reputation and diplomatic capacities. Member states usually attempt to utilize this limited political opportunity to accent specific issues related to their own national interests in the EU agenda within their Presidencies.

Historical Record

Since early 2000s, there have been several Presidencies that had the ambition to make a significant footprint in the European integration of the Western Balkans. Those Presidencies based their intended political impact on their long-term focus on the region and engaged in intense agenda-setting and negotiating both on the EU level and with the Western Balkan countries, bringing a varying level of political impact on the enlargement process. While the Western Balkans and its EU integration have been quite a frequent priority area of the EU Presidencies, only a few of them are remembered as truly groundbreaking and making a significant footprint in the currently deadlocked process.

Among those Presidencies that are remembered as bringing a breakthrough for the Western Balkans, the Greek Presidency in 2003 is probably the most notable one. In the shadow of the war in Iraq and anticipated Eastern Enlargement, the Greek Presidency was able to reach a consensus among the fifteen member states on the strategic commitment to the European perspective for Southeast Europe (van Meurs 2003). The declaration delivered as the outcome of the summit with the five countries of the region offered the region a clear perspective of EU integration leading to full membership based on the principle of conditionality (Koktsidis et. al. 2014; Armakolas and Triantafyllou 2017). The Greek Presidency thus succeeded in its agenda by strategically transforming the approach of the EU towards the region and establishing the cornerstone of the enlargement process for upcoming decades.

Much more recently, the Bulgarian (2018) and Croatian (2020) Presidencies were those that also declared substantial ambitions directed toward the Western Balkans' European integration (Simić 2018; Leutloff-Grandits 2019). However, in contrast to the remarkable impact of Athens in 2003, both Sofia and Zagreb were unable to deliver any significant progress within the deadlocked process. Their agenda-setting opportunities were substantially constrained by a combination of international and domestic limits as they faced a lack of political will and agreement on the EU level, but also domestic pressures related to the politically sensitive regional issues (Cipek 2020; Matias 2018).

Slovenian 2021 Presidency: Experience of Unfulfilled Ambitions

The case of the recent 2021 Slovenian presidency under the controversial (former) Prime Minister Janez Janša illustrates the crucial importance of the informal negotiating position and reputation of the presiding state and its government at the EU level. Slovenia took over the EU Presidency in July 2021 after two Presidencies, German and Portuguese, that were preoccupied

with responding to the pandemic and the enlargement agenda remained on the margins of European politics. In line with its long-term geopolitical interests, Slovenia from the early stage of its second EU Presidency publicly proclaimed substantial ambitions regarding the Western Balkans and its EU integration (Kočan and Lovec 2021). However, these ambitions were from the onset limited by the controversial political profile of PM Janša whose government was in charge of the Presidency. Janša, nowadays a political veteran who started his career as a Yugoslav youth dissident in the 1980s, has faced harsh criticism on the EU level for his populist political style and disregard for the freedom of media (Bayer 2021; Vladisavljević 2021). Shortly prior to the start of the Presidency in July 2021, the credibility of the Ljubljana's Western Balkan agenda was disrupted by the affair of the non-paper that proposed partition of Bosnia along ethnic lines and whose authorship was allegedly linked to Janša (Tuhina 2021; Pusić and Biserko 2022).

In line with its program, Slovenian Presidency approached the Western Balkan agenda proactively and organized various political events organized during the six months (Dovžan 2021). This initiative was intended to culminate with the high-level informal summit of EU and Western Balkan leaders in Brdo in October 2021 which was a flagship of the whole Presidency (Rettman 2021). Despite the efforts of the Slovenian hosts, the EU-WB summit failed in setting a timeline for the southeast enlargement and opening of the accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania (Lynch and Vela 2021). While the Slovenian EU Presidency was overall assessed as a success, it did not achieve the intended progress in its priority area of the Western Balkan enlargement, bringing another disillusionment on both sides (Juzová, Ilková, and Pešek 2022). Apparently, the Slovenian agenda-setting capacity was not strong enough to escape the long-term ambiguity of the EU approach maneuvering between the commitment to enlargement and the emphasis on EU capacity to absorb new members.

French 2022 Presidency: Western Balkans Overshadowed by the War in Ukraine and Domestic Politics

The agenda and prospects of the Czech presidency was to a large extent pre-defined by the preceding French presidency which was the first within the trio composed of France, the Czech Republic, and Sweden.[1] As a major European power, France has a long-term strong political role in agenda-setting and policy-making on the EU level, which was recently amplified by holding the Presidency. In regard to the Western Balkans, France has been on one hand generally uninterested in the regional agenda, and on the other was perceived as one of the most vocal opponents of the EU southeast enlargement among member states because of its reluctant position to extend to candidate states progress in the accession talks (Marušić 2019; Hübner et. al. 2022). In 2019, France blocked opening accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania, calling for a comprehensive reform of the enlargement policy (Sandford 2019). To meet the French demands, new enlargement methodology was introduced in 2020, yet failed in delivering any progress in the Western Balkans' accession process, and only deepened the frustration within the region (Stratulat 2021).

Contradictory to its past position, France proclaimed Western Balkans' European perspective as one of the three main priorities in its Presidency program. In December 2021, President Macron announced a new 'strategic initiative' towards the region to 'clarify its European prospects' (Pollet and Moussu 2021). While some experts initially considered the French Presidency as an opportunity to break the stalemate in the enlargement policy, others predicted that it "will do little to advance Balkan EU accession" (Xhambazi 2022; Oxford Analytica 2022).

---

1 The 'Trio' mechanism was introduced in 2017 with the institutional reform of the rotating presidency defined by the Lisbon Treaty to enhance the continuity in agenda of the Council (Batory and Puetter 2013). The trio consists of the three subsequent presiding member states who coordinate their presidency programs and agree on long-term priorities exceeding the single presidency terms.

French Presidency's commitment to the enlargement agenda was from the early stage defined in rather vague terms. Ambiguity was apparent in Macron's inaugural speech in the European Parliament in January 2022. While he called for a clear perspective of accession, he also openly stated that the EU is currently not prepared to absorb new members (EWB 2022). Macron's initial vagueness needs to be interpreted in light of the French presidential elections that were set to be held in April 2022, and which inevitably shaped Macron's political course on the EU level, particularly in regard to foreign policy issues that are potentially sensitive to the French electorate. After he was successfully re-elected, Macron had some more room to maneuver domestically during the final stage of the French Presidency to bring a more ambitious agenda to the table. However, he still had to to cautiously consider the Parliamentary elections in mid-June when he unsuccessfully sought broad support for his new government (Basso 2022). Most importantly, the Russian aggression against Ukraine dominated both the agenda of the French EU Presidency and the election campaign in France. It became clear that the last months of the French Presidency would be fully dominated by the urgent political agenda related to the war in Ukraine and its consequences on the EU level.

French Presidency only turned attention to the Western Balkan agenda occasionally and rather inconsistently towards the end of its term. In early May, Macron provoked confusion with his vague proposal for formation of a 'European political community', without explaining what the formal role of such platform would be and whether it would be complementary with the existing enlargement policy (Ivković 2022). Confusion was followed by frustration among Western Balkan leaders after the high-level meeting organized alongside the European Council session in Paris in late June. Western Balkan states' hopes for a breakthrough in their integration process fueled by enlargement enthusiasm towards Ukraine remained unfulfilled and some of the regional politicians used unusually critical tone in their statements directed to the EU (Marušić 2022b). Finally, France proposed a controversial negotiating framework for settling the deadlocked dispute between Bulgaria and North Macedonia in the last days of its presidency, which caused politi-

cal turmoil in Skopje (Bieber and Dimitrov 2022). Overall, the footprint of the French presidency in the Western Balkans' EU integration will be probably characterized by unfulfilled expectations and unconcern in light of the war in Ukraine.

This brief historical record shows that, despite their limited formalized powers, EU presidencies can play an active role in the politics of enlargement through active agenda-setting and mediation. However, the legacy of the Slovenian presidency and the course of the recent French presidency show that this potential is limited in sensitive issues with a lack of consensus among the member states and under political circumstances dominated by other major geopolitical developments.

Post-Yugoslav Space in the Post-1990 Czech Foreign Policy: An Elusive Priority?

After the fall of the Iron Curtain and the subsequent dissolution of the Czechoslovak federation in 1992, the newly established Czech Republic faced the major challenge of formulating its new independent foreign policy from scratch (Cabada and Waisová 2011; Kříž, Chovančík, and Krpec 2021). Even though the Czech Republic is a small landlocked state located in the geopolitically fragile Central European space, the new political elite that arose from the 1989 Velvet revolution opted for an ambitious foreign policy agenda. The newly articulated foreign policy premises reached far beyond the country's direct neighborhood and were grounded in both normative and strategic considerations (Hloušek and Kaniok 2021). Besides the vital strategic and security interests of Euro-Atlantic integration and good relations with direct neighbors, the Czech Republic has also in the long run intended to be actively involved in more distant regions, particularly those going through their own transformative processes,

with the ambition to support democratization. One of such areas of declared special attention of Czech foreign policy has been the region of Southeast Europe. As an area that went through a turbulent conflict period in the 1990s and opted for European integration in the post-2000 decades, the region has attracted, at least rhetorically, permanent attention within the Czech foreign policy agenda.

The geopolitical space of former Yugoslavia, more recently labeled as the Western Balkans, has been an area of ambitious, but mostly unfulfilled interests and goals of the evolving Czech foreign policy over the last three decades. The Czech Republic has been repeatedly declaring its ambitions to take over an active role in the stabilization of the Southeast European space. In line with the general Czech foreign policy principles, the interest was motivated both by strategic and normative considerations (Hronešová 2015). Strategically, the Czech Republic perceived the region as a latent source of instability that could potentially spill into its own neighborhood and threaten the security of the European space. Normatively, the special interest in Southeast Europe was based on a combination of perception of historical ties with the South Slavic nations and a newly formulated universal emphasis on democracy promotion and development assistance (Tulmets 2014).

Through the 1990s, this emerging policy was mainly manifested in the active Czech involvement in conflict resolution attempts across the region, where Czech mediators and peacekeepers participated in stabilization efforts in all ethnic conflicts from Croatia to Macedonia. However, the potential created by the extensive presence on the ground during the unstable war period was not fully translated into political presence in the post-2000 era when conflict resolution was replaced by European integration as the driving stabilizing strategy for the region (Tesař 2010; Tesař 2013). Based on its own experience of political and economic transition, the Czech Republic had the ambition to assist the region on its path to the EU (Hronešová 2015). However, while the Czech political representation declaratory held stabilization of the Western Balkans and support of its European perspective high on its foreign policy agenda, its actual impact on regional processes has remained very limited.

At a declaratory level, European integration of the Western Balkans has been a constant priority of Czech foreign policy over the last two decades. An explicit commitment to the progress of the South-eastern enlargement was reaffirmed in program declarations of almost all Czech governments after 2004 when the country itself joined the EU. Czech diplomacy has been supportive of the European ambitions of the Western Balkan states both bilaterally and through multilateral channels including the Visegrad Group (Euractiv 2021; Visegrad Group 2019). None of the governments had, however, made a significant footprint in the process. Czech policymakers have been largely reluctant in taking clear positions over the problematic issues of the region that mostly remained on the margins of their agenda as it lacked political relevance on the domestic scene (Tesař 2010; Dopita, Heler, and Tamchynová 2017). The political elite never truly considered the Western Balkans as a top priority of the foreign policy that has been dominated by more crucial issues related to the country's geopolitical orientation within the Euro-Atlantic space and its relations with Russia (Šabič and Freyberg-Inan 2012).

In the atmosphere of general lack of political interest in the Western Balkan region, there has been one issue that has constantly attracted the attention of Czech officials and repeatedly caused domestic polarization: the question of Kosovo statehood. The 'Kosovo issue' since the 1990s developed into a symbolical matter in which different political actors and approaches repeatedly clashed over the country's international position. In landmark moments of the Kosovo-Serbia dispute, the Czech political scene and the broader public reacted to the issue generally divided into two different approaches, one supporting the Western engagement and later Kosovo independence, and the other one insisting on a diplomatic solution and advocating the Serbian position. The domestic clash first culminated during the 1999 NATO intervention when the interventionist approach represented by president Václav Havel prevailed over a restrained position held by then Prime Minister Miloš Zeman and leader of the opposition Václav Klaus (Znoj 1999). Political rift reemerged with Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in 2008 which revived the division rooted in the political clash from 1999. Again, the disagreement was most manifested in the opposite opinions of the President and some

parliamentary forces, yet with intermingled roles as Václav Klaus now held the position of the president while the pro-Kosovo position was advocated by the government (Dopita 2020). Through the post-independence period, the polarizing potential of the Kosovo issue persisted and mainly reappeared in domestic politics because of the offensive pro-Serbian agenda articulated by Miloš Zeman, who replaced Klaus in the presidential function in 2013. Zeman repeatedly expressed openly pro-Serbian statements that were in direct contradiction with the official government's policy of Kosovo recognition, causing political and institutional tension between his office and the executive (Sejdija 2019; Kundra 2019).

Overall, the polarized domestic debate on Kosovo recognition had long-term consequences for the internal consistency of Czech foreign policy towards the Western Balkans and its international credibility. Domestically, it deepened the political divisions over Kosovo's statehood. As Tesař (2010, 234) pointed out, the debate brought into conflict the government and president, government and parliament, government and opposition, and even the governmental parties themselves. Externally, it reaffirmed the ambiguity of the Czech policy towards the region that has been widely perceived in terms of an internal dispute over the Kosovo-Serbia dispute, thus putting the whole Western Balkan priority of Czech foreign policy into question.

Political Actors of the Czech EU Presidency

Czech foreign policy has been in the long term characterized by inconsistency resulting from double-tracking between multiple institutional actors. In particular, Czech governments and presidents have followed diverging positions defined by different geopolitical and ideological foundations (Kořan 2007; Baun and Marek 2010; Drulák 2010). According to the loosely defined Czech constitutional order, the government is primarily responsible for the coun-

try's foreign policy formulation and execution which is scrutinized by the two chambers of the Parliament (Kořan 2013). However, the President as another actor of the executive branch is also allocated rather symbolical powers in the foreign policy sphere by the constitution as s/he formally represents the country in international politics. Beyond its formal authority, the Office of the President can effectively apply its informal yet extensive political power to the foreign policy-making process (Dostál and Borčány 2018). Importantly for the practice of the foreign policy, all three Czech post-1993 presidents (Václav Havel, Václav Klaus, and Miloš Zeman) used extensively their powers and pushed forward their own ambitious foreign policy agendas, which were repeatedly in contradiction with the governmental policy (Hloušek 2014; Weiss 2021)

At the level of the government, the foreign policy powers are effectively shared by the Office of the Government headed by the Prime Minister, who represents the country in intergovernmental platforms mainly at the EU level, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs responsible for articulation and execution of the foreign policy as such. Furthermore, a specific institution responsible for EU-related affairs has been commonly established within the governmental framework, either in form of a State Secretary or as an individual Minister without a portfolio responsible for the European policy (Palounek 2022). In light of the expected voluminous agenda related to the Presidency, the new government formed after the 2021 elections re-established the position of the Minister for European Affairs, who is supposed to share the burden of the Presidency agenda with the Office of the Government and the MFA (ČTK 2021a).

The complex configuration of the foreign policy-making process is directly reflected in the institutional framework of the upcoming Czech EU Presidency. The political complexity of the policy-making process highlighted by the coalition arrangement of the new government. In the October 2021 elections, seven political parties in total entered the Chamber of Deputies. While the new executive was formed by five parties organized within the conservative and center-right coalitions, two populist parties ended up in opposition (Gos-

ling 2021). As a result of the complex coalition setting of the new government formed after the October 2021 elections, the foreign policy issues are tackled in multiple governmental structures politically controlled by ideologically different parties. While the strongest conservative ODS party nominated Prime Minister Petr Fiala and controls the central Office of the Government, two minor coalition partners hold the key foreign policy ministries: the liberal Pirate Party the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the center-right STAN movement the newly established Office of the Minister for European Affairs (Hutt 2021b). The three parties holding the key foreign policy positions are not uniform in their foreign policy orientation, particularly in regard to European affairs (Pehe 2021; Šídlová 2021). While Fiala, a scholar and professor of European Politics, and his party have been profiled as moderately Euro-sceptic in the long term, Pirate Party and STAN, together with other two minor coalition partners, hold openly pro-European positions (Bigot 2022; Nerad and Kabrhelová 2021).

Initially, it was uncertain how the distribution of powers between the three offices responsible for the European policy controlled by different parties will play out prior to the Presidency and who will be setting and driving its political agenda (Pehe 2022). However, the first six months of the government mandate revealed unforeseen unity of the administration both generally and specifically regarding the foreign policy issues (Tvrdoň 2022a). Particularly the firm Czech response to the Russian aggression against Ukraine both bilaterally and at the EU level showed that the ruling coalition is less heterogenous in critical foreign issues than it might seem from the ideological background of its individual parties. The course of the foreign policy regarding the Ukrainian crisis also revealed that PM Fiala is the central actor in this field who deals with the strategic issues, while Ministers of Foreign and European Affairs play a rather supportive role. While the complex foreign policy structure of the coalition government has so far remained unified, it needs to be considered that more ambitious attempts in European policy, including in the Western Balkan agenda, would first need to be debated on the platform of the ruling coalition.

The Changing Role of the Western Balkans in the Presidency Agenda

EU Integration of the Region as an Announced Priority

In general, the priorities of the Czech EU Presidency have been fuzzy in the months prior to the start of the Presidency, first as a result of the change in government and more recently because of the radically changed international situation. The previous Czech government was restrained in defining the political agenda of the Presidency, as its mandate ended with the October 2021 elections and also because of the critical stance of Prime Minister Babiš on the Presidency institution as such (Ly 2021; ČTK 2021b). In contrast to that, the new executive proclaimed the EU Presidency se its foreign policy priority. However, since the formation of the new coalition government in December 2021, the officials responsible for the foreign and European policy have been hesitant to publicly discuss the planned priorities of the Czech EU Presidency in much detail (Kozáková 2022). Their early restraint was probably a result of a combination of internal delimiting of powers within the government, and a need for coordination with France and Sweden, the other two members of the Presidency trio (Bek 2021b). More recently, the debate over the Presidency agenda was completely seized by the unexpected escalation of instability on the Eastern EU border after the Russian aggression against Ukraine (Matoška 2022).

Under this general uncertainty, the special focus on the Western Balkans and its EU integration has been one of few constants within the discourse on the tentative Presidency agenda, at least at the rhetorical level. The previous government, specifically its Minister of Foreign Affairs Kulhánek, announced the 'Balkan priority' for the Czech EU Presidency already back in mid-2021 (Zachová 2021). Kulhánek also specified that the Czech Republic should organize a high-level EU-WB summit as one of the main outcomes of the Presidency with a very ambitious goal: to set the EU accession date for Serbia or Montenegro (ČTK 2021c).

It is important to note that the previous government operated in a different political context regarding European Affairs. Czech oligarch Babiš, as the head of the previous government, had problematic relations with the European institutions due to his conflict of interests and misuse of EU funds (Mortkowitz 2021; European Parliament 2021). At the EU level, his government frequently led aggressive nationalist policy on sensitive issues such as migration and sought allies among other regional populist leaders including controversial Viktor Orbán and Janez Janša. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was controlled by Social Democrats, the minor coalition partner of Babiš's populist movement. Former pro-European minister Tomáš Petříček, who persistently balanced the nationalist positions of Babiš and Zeman, was sacked in early 2021 and replaced by Jakub Kulhánek who took a more conformist stance towards president Zeman (Hutt 2021a; Míková 2021).

Regarding the Western Balkans, the previous government pursued an active bilateral policy that was mainly driven by economic diplomacy and had Serbia as its special focus. In 2021, there was a spike in mutual visits on the top political level when Babiš visited Belgrade in February, and Serbian President Vučić and President of the National Assembly Dačić came to Prague several months later (RTS 2021; RSE 2021; B92 2021). The special regional focus on Serbia suited well the pro-Serbian agenda of president Zeman who used Vučić's visit to express an apology for the Czech participation in the 1999 NATO intervention, which ironically had been approved by Zeman himself as the then Prime Minister (Telegraf 2021). Meanwhile, both MFA Kulhánek and PM Babiš rhetorically stuck to the support of European ambitions of the region as a whole, while admitting the stalemate of the accession process (MFA 2021; ČTK 2021d). Babiš also repeatedly emphasized the importance of the Western Balkans in regard to the (anti)migration policy, which was a central component of his populist rhetoric (ČTK 2021e).

In contrast to Babiš's controversial administration, the new government took office unburdened by negative reputation at the European level, and thus it has been able to approach the EU politics from a more credible negotiating position. However, the new ministers also inherited the agenda already defined by the outgoing government, including the 'Western Balkan priority' of the Presidency.

With the change in power after the October elections, the newly formed government reaffirmed the rhetorical commitment to the Western Balkan agenda in rather vague terms without stating any explicit goals and ambitions (Bek 2021a). According to unofficial information, the government also considered the option of inviting regional leaders to the top-level EU summit in Prague (Kabrhelová and Daněk 2022). However, from the early days in power, it has been unclear to what extent the declaratory support truly reflected the actual intentions, ambitions, and capabilities of the new administration. The uncertainty was further amplified by the lack of time for preparations for the Presidency. New officials accused Babiš's government of under-prioritizing the Presidency and both policy-makers and experts admitted that the Czech ambition is to not fail and organize a formally smooth Presidency, rather than bring significant progress in any particular area (ČTK 2021g; Houska 2022; Hančl 2022; Šafaříková 2022). Nevertheless, the agenda-setting of the previous government already positioned the Czech Republic as an prospective active player in the Western Balkans during the 2022 Presidency.

Impact of the War in Ukraine: Western Balkans Disappearing from the Agenda

The uncertainty regarding the role of the Western Balkans in the agenda of the Czech Presidency substantially increased as a direct consequence of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Since late February 2022, the escalation of the unprecedented crisis in Eastern Europe has shaken global, European as well as Czech domestic politics. The newly appointed Czech government responded to the crisis from its first days with a proactive policy based on a combination of direct bilateral support to Ukraine and calls for coordinated multilateral action against Russia. Prime Minister Fiala positioned himself as one of the most vocal advocates of Ukraine on the European level. He repeatedly called for direct European military support to Ukraine and tough sanctions against Russia (Reuters 2022). Fiala was among the first European leaders who traveled to besieged Kyiv to meet Ukrainian president Zelensky in mid-March and Czech Republic was the first country transferring heavy weap-

ons to Ukraine (Gijs 2022; Lopatka 2022). The Czech political debate became fully dominated by international issues related to the war in Ukraine and its impact on the Czech society that has been facing the challenge of the mass influx of refugees, rapid increase in prices, and imminent energy insecurity because of its dependence on import of Russian fuels.

Reasonably, the Russian aggression against Ukraine completely diverted the ongoing debate on the upcoming Czech presidency and its emerging agenda. As the key policymakers have been continuously overburdened by the pressing issues related to the war, the discourse on the Presidency went in the same direction. Politicians openly admitted that the priorities defined prior to the Ukrainian crisis need to be reconsidered in light of the new situation and its impact on the EU and the Czech Republic (Matoška 2022; Rakušan 2022). The suggested priority agenda has thus mainly concentrated on issues of energy security, management of migration flows as well as accelerated European integration of Ukraine and other post-Soviet states (Řežňáková 2022; Palata 2022; ČTK 2022c). Particularly the last topic is closely interlinked with the earlier declared priority of Western Balkans' European integration (Hájek 2022). On one hand, it returns the enlargement agenda to the top political agenda on the EU level, but on the other hand, it diverts the focus of the enlargement debate in another direction from the Western Balkans (Chrzová and Čermák 2022; Sybera 2022).

Despite its even increased geopolitical relevance after the Russian aggression, the Western Balkan region has almost vanished from the discourse on the Czech Presidency agenda after the Ukrainian crisis started. The key policymakers, busy enough with the urgent challenges in the East, only rarely mentioned what used to seem like one of the major priorities for the Presidency. Once the Western Balkans was mentioned in their public statements, it was usually related to the Ukrainian crisis. In March, MFA Lipavský said without adding many details that 'the EU needs a clear vision for the Balkans otherwise it may lose influence in the region to Russia' (Ponikelska 2022). In line with that, Minister for European Affairs Bek also said that in light of the war in Ukraine the Czech Presidency will advocate the EU integration

of the Western Balkan states, but it will also scrutinize their own progress and watch carefully their pro-Western orientation. He expressed clearly that "[o]nly states that share our foreign policy orientation deserve our support" (Plevák 2022).

Disagreement within the Government?

As a consequence of the rapid change of priority agenda, a disagreement on the importance of the Western Balkans appeared between the Office of the Government and the MFA. The differing views have been primarily manifested in the issue of the summit with the Western Balkan states, which the Czech Republic committed to organizing last year in Brdo, and which has remained open even after the region as such disappeared from the Presidency priorities (Trachtová 2022). While the MFA has been continuously pushing the summit into the Presidency program, the Office of the Government led by the Prime Minister together with the Minister for European Affairs have been skeptical of its potential political impact and prefer to organize a summit related to Ukraine (Boubínová 2022b). The Western Balkan summit was only perceived as an exit-strategy in case high-level meeting with Ukraine would not be feasible (Nerad 2022).

According to Minister for European Affairs Bek, his cautious stance towards the Western Balkan summit results from the uncertainty over the potential political success of such a flagship event in the Presidency, in light of the recent Slovenian experience and general impasse in the Western Balkans. As he explained in Czech media (Trachtová 2022),

> "[the r]eason for such an informal Summit in Prague depends on some progress in that region. Both the Prime Minister and I are very cautious in this regard, we don't want to reproduce the situation from Slovenian Brdo where the Summit did not result in any success. It would not be a good step for the Czech Republic to be a host of another unsuccessful summit in just one year".

The Chief advisor to Prime Minister Pojar openly admitted that the ambition of organizing the high-level EU-WB summit during the Czech Presidency depends on the course of action of the French Presidency which was planning its own Western Balkans conference for June (Křížová 2022). "We will see who comes with what, and we will respond to that accordingly," suggested Pojar in indistinct terms, implicitly confirming the low priority given to the issue by the Office of the Government (ibid).

In contrast to that, the MFA seems to feel obliged by the commitment to the annual frequency of a Western Balkan Summit announced last year in Brdo as well as by the long-term declaratory priority of the Czech foreign policy towards the region. Apparently, there is a clash within the government between the political demand to deliver an impactful Presidency and the long-term efforts of the MFA to keep the credibility of the EU enlargement through regular political attention devoted to the region at the highest political level. While a summit without a high political impact would still make sense for the MFA to keep the regional agenda in focus, in the view of the government such an initiative would in the current circumstances only distract the limited political capacities of the Czech Presidency.

Western Balkans and the (Un)declared Presidency Priorities

Contrary to the earlier proclamations, in May 2022 it became almost clear that the Western Balkans is disappearing from the priority agenda of the Czech Presidency. While the Presidency's priorities are always officially announced only shortly prior to the start of the term, the key policymakers made quite explicit statements in regard to the priorities, and Western Balkans was no longer mentioned among them. Instead, the focus was unsurprisingly directed to urgent issues related to the war in Ukraine and its consequences, primarily in the field of energy security and migration (Boubínová 2022a).

This lack of political interest in the Western Balkans was confirmed in early June when the priorities first leaked to media and later were officially an-

nounced by the government (Bertuzzi 2022; Vláda ČR 2022b). The five political priorities include managing the refugee crisis and Ukraine's post-war recovery, energy security, Europe's defence capabilities, economic resilience, and resilience of democratic institutions. While being formulated in general terms, most of the priorities are implicitly related to the conflict in Ukraine and its economic and political consequences. Meanwhile, the Western Balkans was not even mentioned in the official governmental presentation of priorities. Even the MFA, the only political advocate of the Western Balkan agenda, only mentioned the region on the margins of its declared territorial priorities for the Presidency, equally to Eastern Europe, Indo-Pacific and Sahel regions (MFA 2022e).

Overall, it has become obvious that the interest of the new administration in the Western Balkan agenda has been shrinking since the war in Ukraine started. What seemed to be a firm priority for the Czech EU Presidency has been taken over by the course of the events in Eastern Europe and only reappeared rarely and almost exclusively within the context of the Ukrainian crisis.

However, the Czech officials were forced by external pressure to tackle the Western Balkan agenda in the days just prior to taking over the Presidency because of the French last-minute initiative. When leaving for the summit in Paris in late June, Fiala was openly skeptical regarding the prospects for a breakthrough in region's European integration (ČT 2022). Just a day after, he stated that "EU leaders asked [him] to prepare [...] a framework for an informal summit on wider European cooperation with non-member States that could be held in Prague" (Fiala 2022). While Fiala emphasized that Ukraine should be one of the guests, it was clear that the aim behind the idea was to bring together all countries aspiring for EU accession and materialize the French vision of broader political community. After formally taking over the Presidency on the joint meeting between the Czech government and European Commission, Fiala, in an apparent contradiction to his previous reserved approach, reaffirmed that progress in the Western Balkan enlargement will be the aim of Czech Republic (ČTK 2022e). Apparently, the external incentives from the political center of the EU were strong enough to change the narrative set by Czech politicians from reluctance to at least declaratory engagement.

Standpoints of key foreign policy actors towards the Western Balkan agenda within the Czech EU Presidency

Office of the Prime Minister: Western Balkans Out of the Sight

Institutionally as well as politically, the Office of the Government headed by the Prime Minister is the chief actor politically steering the agenda and course of the Czech EU Presidency. Its strong institutional position has been further reinforced by the recent turbulent geopolitical developments. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Prime Minister Fiala together with his closest team of advisors took the opportunity to position themselves as the main representatives of the Czech Republic on the European level. Determinedly, they profiled as one of the most vocal supporters of Ukrainian defence. After his early visit to Kyiv, Fiala has been calling for fast EU integration of Ukraine (Šídlová 2022b). The proactive approach toward the crisis and advocacy of the Ukrainian cause paid off and Prime Minister Fiala, just a few months after his government was formed, became an active stakeholder in high European politics.

This positioning had a direct positive effect on the international credibility of the Czech Republic which had been previously known rather as a passive and unpredictable actor on the EU level. However, the accent put on the war in Ukraine inevitably led to the loosening of interest in other unrelated foreign policy areas on the top governmental level. Western Balkans is probably the most prominent of the issues that almost disappeared from the top political agenda articulated by the head of the government regarding the Czech EU Presidency. Fiala himself only rarely mentioned Western Balkans in his recent public statements and mainly referred to the region in very general terms of

'supporting its EU integration' (Vláda ČR 2022a; ČTK 2022d). Fiala's chief security advisor Tomáš Pojar was more specific in his statements and implicitly lessened the importance of the Western Balkan agenda in his public statements (Křížová 2022).

Apparently, the Western Balkans was largely overshadowed by the more urgent developments in Ukraine in the eyes of the government's top leadership. As Prime Minister Fiala decided to highlight the Czech support of Ukraine in its war with Russia in the short term and advocate its European integration in the long term, it was not expected they will invest some of their limited political capital to other areas. Unless they are forced to deal with the region by external factors, the top of the Czech government would prefer to avoid engagement in the Western Balkans at the high level of the EU politics. However, as the dynamic change of the Fiala's narrative in the days just prior to the start of the Presidency shows, the government is ready to meet the demand on the EU side for inclusion of the Western Balkans into the broader enlargement agenda.

Minister for European Affairs: Procedural Support to Prime Minister

The office of the Minister for European Affairs Mikuláš Bek is institutionally a part of the Office of the government and lacks the massive bureaucratic apparatus of standard Ministries. The first months of the new government also proved that the subordinated institutional position corresponds with the political role of the Minister for European Affairs. Minister Bek has been mainly playing a significant supportive role to the Prime Minister in the European agenda. The close interlink between the two offices was confirmed by appointment of Fiala's chief advisor Pojar to position of Bek's Deputy Minister (Šídlová 2022a), a move interpreted as a way to keep the Minister under the Prime Minister's direct political control. While PM Fiala has been focusing on the critical strategic issues negotiated politically at the EU level, Bek has been dealing with the voluminous agenda on lower levels of political impor-

tance and the formal legislative dimension of the preparations for the Presidency (Křížová 2021; Nalejvačová 2022).

From this position, the Minister for European Affairs unavoidably had to reflect on the previous commitments to the Western Balkans as a priority of the Czech Presidency. After its initial cautious affirmation, Minister Bek also changed his narrative in the aftermath of the war in Ukraine. Generally, he pronounced the need for progress in the reform process within the region (Trachtová 2022). While he announced a continuation of Czech support for European aspirations of the Western Balkan states, he also explicitly mentioned the need for alignment in foreign policy orientation in an allusion to Serbia's current geopolitical dilemmas (Plevák 2022).

The Ministry for European Affairs is certainly an important, yet rather a procedural actor of the Czech Presidency as it deals with the massive legislative procedures. From this position, it will inescapably have to deal with the Western Balkan issues that will appear on the agenda. While it will presumably stick to the long-term priorities of the Czech Republic in its declaratory support of EU enlargement, no major proactive political initiative can be expected from the tiny office subordinated to the head of the government. As noted off the record by a member of the Minister's cabinet, the Western Balkans is understood as an agenda of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs: A powerless advocate of the Western Balkans?

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should supposedly play a crucial role in the EU Presidency in tandem with the Prime Minister. However, its position has been politically limited by the delicate balance of powers within the coalition government. Foreign Minister Lipavský nominated by the Pirate party recently faced criticism from media that labeled him as a passive minister with low visibility in foreign policy issues compared to Prime Minister (Kundra 2022a). The political position of Lipavský within the government has been since his

appointment weakened by his party affiliation as well as his personal background. First, Lipavský is nominated by the Pirate Party which is with only 4 deputies in the 200-member assembly by far the weakest partner in the coalition government, and the political position of three ministers appointed by the party is thus limited (Bastlová 2022; Procházková 2022). Second, during the government formation, Lipavský's appointment became a source of an institutional conflict between designated PM Fiala and President Zeman who openly criticized Lipavský for his alleged lack of professional experience and some of his foreign policy stances (Kottová 2022). While Zeman initially threatened to refuse Lipavský's appointment as foreign minister, Fiala managed to negotiate an agreement with Zeman that allowed the government with Lipavský to be formed (Koutník 2021; Jelínek 2021). However, their non-transparent deal implied that Zeman will only discuss foreign policy issues with Prime Minister and this rule has been applied since (Fendrych 2022; Kundra 2022b). The political position of MFA under Lipavský is thus significantly limited and the high-level foreign policy agenda was rather taken over by the Prime Minister supported by his own office and the Ministry for European Affairs.

Under these unfavorable circumstances, the MFA has been the only political actor consistently advocating the Western Balkan agenda and lobbying for its inclusion in the top political priorities of the Czech EU Presidency. In contrast to the reluctant narrative used by the Office of the Government, the high officials of the MFA have been consistently emphasizing the importance of the EU enlargement to the Western Balkans and claimed that its urgency only increased with the Russian invasion of Ukraine (MFA 2022a; MFA 2022d). After the EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting in mid-May, Lipavský even claimed, in an apparent contradiction with the recent announcements of Minister for European Affairs Bek, that "the Western Balkans and EU enlargement are without any doubt of top priorities of the upcoming Czech EU Presidency" (MFA 2022b). The same strong statements resonated during the Pre-Presidency conference organized at the MFA in late May (Šnaidauf 2022).

Declaratory statements of the MFA officials have been recently also supported by more concrete political steps. After discussing the Western

Balkan agenda at the Foreign Affairs Council, Lipavský met bilaterally with the Foreign Minister of Serbia Selaković and used this opportunity to express Czech support for Serbia's European integration while also stressing the need for Serbia's geopolitical alignment with the EU's policy on Russia (MFA 2022b; MFA RS 2022). Meanwhile, Lipavský's Deputy Minister Dvořák made an official visit to the region where he met with high officials of Montenegro and Kosovo. In both countries, he openly supported the 'pro-European' political actors and declared Czech support for their EU integration (MFA 2022c). These practical steps, combined with the messages spread through public statements, show clearly that the political leadership of the MFA has remained largely committed to the prioritization of the Western Balkans within the Czech Presidency agendas despite the unfavorable geopolitical circumstances.

However, the MFA seems to be also aware of its weaker political position vis-à-vis the Prime Minister who is currently setting the top political agenda of the Presidency. The limited power of the MFA to put across the Western Balkan agenda is well illustrated by the above-mentioned issue of the high-level EU summit with the Western Balkan leaders that was earlier proclaimed as an intended political highlight of the Presidency. While the Office of the Prime Minister together with the Minister for European Affairs was already openly speaking about their plan to organize a summit focused on Ukraine, representatives of the MFA were still officially proclaiming that they are working on the Western Balkan summit (Trachtová 2022). Unofficially, however, officials from the MFA admitted that prospects for organizing the summit with Western Balkan states are uncertain and that the MFA cannot really compete with the Prime Minister's agenda in regard to the political priorities of the Presidency. After PM Fiala announced that Czech Republic might host a broader summit with all countries aspiring to EU membership, possibility of participation of the Western Balkan states returned to the table. However, it was not a result of MFA's active agenda setting, yet rather an outcome of Fiala's own political calculation based on the external pressure from the EU capitals.

President Zeman's Las Opportunity to Assert Pro-Serbian Policy?

Besides the political interplay within the government, president Zeman is another political actor who might have the ambition and capacity to intervene in the agenda-setting of the Czech Presidency. However, the political position of President Zeman was recently substantially weakened by a combination of health and political factors. First, Zeman has been suffering from serious health problems that required longer hospitalization in the autumn of 2021 and have in the long-term limited his political activities (Lopatka and Hovet 2021). Zeman substantially reduced his public appearances and completely avoided international travels (ČTK 2021f). Politically, the domestic and international position of Zeman was shaken by the Russian aggression on Ukraine as he had been for long grounding his foreign policy orientation on a pro-Russian position. In the aftermath of the Russian aggression, Zeman, after previously relativising information about the upcoming invasion, formally condemned the Russian attack and cautiously admitted that he might be wrong in his previous assessments of the Kremlin's intentions (ČTK 2022a; ČTK 2022b). Consequently, Zeman's domestic popularity significantly dropped, and his political position vis-à-vis the government consisting of Zeman's political opponents weakened (Tvrdoň 2022b). President's opportunities to actively enter the agenda-setting of the Czech Presidency on the EU level will be thus rather limited.

On the other hand, Zeman recently entered the last year of his mandate, after which his long political career is expected to end. The Czech EU Presidency might be one of his last opportunities to make a high-level footprint in the foreign policy area even without a need to travel abroad. If his health condition allows, he could try to to maximize his influence on the main political agendas of the EU Presidency. As his past sympathies to Putin's Russia cost him credibility in all issues related to the war in Ukraine, he might be seeking other areas where he could push his agenda and the Western Balkans would presumably be among the most preferred. The region in general and specifically the Kosovo-Serbia dispute have been Zeman's prominent issues throughout his political career

and he might thus try to assert his aggressively pro-Serbian stance against the moderate agenda of the MFA and the cautious stance of MEA. Zeman already indicated such intentions in his congratulation letter to Aleksandar Vučić after his reelection in April 2022 when he reaffirmed his inclination to Serbia and claimed that the Czech Presidency will be a great opportunity for further integration of Serbia into the EU (Zeman 2022).

While his weakened political position will probably not allow Zeman to substantially sidetrack the governmental policy during the Presidency, he might still be capable of at least rhetorically entering the agenda-setting process and challenging the Czech position on issues where he disagrees with the government. Based on his past extensive record and recent statements, the approach toward Serbia in light of the current geopolitical developments might become a critical point of disagreement where the President would clash primarily with the MFA and with the governmental agenda in general.

Conclusion: Possible Trajectories of the Czech EU Presidency's Approach toward the Western Balkans

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 unsettled the post-Cold war political order of Europe. The outburst of the war and its far-reaching consequences have shaken politics on all levels and in all fields. The conflict in Eastern Europe has also substantially impacted the politics of EU enlargement and the prospects for the stalled process of Western Balkans' European integration. However, it has been unclear in what direction will the effect of Ukraine work in the long term for the Western Balkans' European aspirations. Experts and policymakers agree that the war in Ukraine confirmed and increased the perceived geopolitical relevance of stability in the volatile Western

Balkan region (Marušić 2022a; Džihić and Schmidt 2022; Sybera 2022). However, it is unclear whether the increased importance will gain the region more attention from relevant stakeholders who are now preoccupied with Ukraine, or it will be overshadowed by the turbulent developments in Eastern Europe.

The dilemma of the contradictory effects of the war in Ukraine on the Western Balkan European agenda has determined the course of the Czech political debate on the position of the Western Balkans in the agenda of the Czech EU Presidency. Presumably, both perspectives will be also reflected during the Presidency itself when the Czech decision-makers will be unavoidably confronted with challenging political tasks related to the Western Balkans at the EU level.

On the one hand, it became clear over the last few months that, contrary to previous political commitments, the Czech Presidency will not consider the Western Balkans a priority area that would deserve special focus. The key political actors decided to invest the limited political capital provided by the Presidency in issues directly related to the conflict in Ukraine and its consequences. Those actors still calling for prioritization of the Western Balkans are in a weaker political position as the political agenda is currently set by people who want to maximize the political credit for the country on the issue of Ukraine. The Czech Presidency is thus unlikely to come up with any high-level political initiative for the Western Balkans and its European integration. On the other hand, Czech policymakers will not be able to completely avoid the Western Balkan agenda during the six-month Presidency term. Even if the key political actors will focus primarily on the East, they will still be faced by challenges coming from the Southeast. However, their responses to Western Balkan challenges are likely to be reactive and pulled by external incentives.

At the EU level, the Czech Presidency will be required to tackle the stalled process of the Western Balkans's European integration at least formally. In this field, Czechs inevitably have to follow the path set by the previous French Presidency, whose real intentions in the region remained fuzzy through the six-month term. Macron's vague calls for a European 'political community', unpro-

ductive meeting with Western Balkan leaders in June as well as controversial proposal for setting the dispute between Bulgaria and North Macedonia all confirmed the complex stalemate of the Western Balkans' European integration. Czech Presidency took over the Western Balkan agenda in delicate situation when hopes of speeded progress are high in the region, but prospects for real steps forward are much lower. After Macron's last-minute gestures that amplified the expectations on both sides, Czechs do not have an option to escape the difficult agenda.

Since the Czech Presidency announced to push hard for the speedy integration of Ukraine into the EU, it will have to engage in the politics of enlargement that is not possible without reflecting the stalled enlargement in the Western Balkans. If the Czech policy-makers would overlook the Western Balkan dimension of enlargement, their support for Ukrainian EU aspiration would probably backfire and meet resistance not only within the Western Balkan Six, but also among some EU members. In May 2022, the Austrian chancellor already told PM Fiala explicitly that the Czech EU Presidency must not ignore the Western Balkans' integration into the EU (ČTK 2022d).

Within the Western Balkans, the Czech Presidency might face multiple crises enduring or even escalating in the regional political hotspots. With the general elections scheduled for October 2022, the institutional crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina is expected to deepen as all sides will intensify their nationalist rhetoric and will attempt to pull external actors into the stage on their behalf. In Montenegro, the protracted political crisis might also have destabilizing consequences reaching beyond its borders as it is interconnected with the geopolitical orientation of the country and interplays with the regional ambitions of Serbia. Lastly, the Kosovo-Serbia dispute will continue to be a major source of regional instability that will not only effectively block the European integration of both states, but also prevent a comprehensive post-conflict settlement for the whole region.

The recent Russian escalation of the war in the Eastern Europe only fueled the spiral of instability in all these hotspots, as there have been political forces close to Moscow playing their part in them, and Kremlin can possibly use them to

destabilize another region on the EU border. If the Czech government is forced by the course of the events on the ground to deal with some of these regional hotspots, it will likely apply its perspective of the conflict with Russia on the Western Balkan agenda too. As the Czech policymakers are preoccupied with the war in Ukraine, they will look cautiously at all signs of Russian presence in the Western Balkans and deal with suspicion with actors linked to Kremlin. Regarding the enlargement policy, this approach will probably translate into a strong accent put on the need for full alignment of the candidate countries in the foreign policy field and specific scrutiny put over the Serbia's integration process.

While the Czech political leadership under the current geopolitical situation made a rational decision not to invest its limited political capital in the Western Balkan agenda, it would be naïve to expect that it will entirely avoid dealing with the region during the Czech EU Presidency. Quite the contrary, regardless of its currently favored agendas, the Czech Republic will find itself in the delicate position of an assumably active player advocating the region's EU integration. However, the Czech response to potential regional challenges is expected to be reactive rather than grounded in any profound political strategy for the region. Unfortunately for the Western Balkan states and their aspirations, such an approach is unlikely to bring any breakthrough in the stalled process of the region's European integration and will only prolong the enlargement fatigue on both sides.

References

Armakolas, I., and G. Triantafyllou. 2017. Greece and EU Enlargement to the Western Balkans: Understanding an Ambivalent Relationship. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 17, no. 4: 611–629.

B92. 2021. Vučić iz Praga: Počelo je da se odmotava klupko VIDEO. *B92.net*, May 18. https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2021&mm=05&dd=18&nav_category=11&nav_id=1859887.

Basso, D. 2022. Challenges Already Loom after Macron's Reelection. *Www.Euractiv.Com*. https://www.euractiv.com/section/elections/news/challenges-already-loom-after-macrons-reelection/.

Bastlová, M. 2022. Tweet od ministryně byl poslední kapka. Piráti mají dost vládních ústrků , May 20. https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-politika-naoko-klidni-pirati-uz-maji-dost-vla-dnich-ustrku-budeme-zase-drzi-planuji-202843.

Batory, A., and U. Puetter. 2013. Consistency and Diversity? The EU's Rotating Trio Council Presidency after the Lisbon Treaty. *Journal of European Public Policy* 20, no. 1: 95–112.

Baun, M.J., and D. Marek. 2010. Czech Foreign Policy and EU Integration: European and Domestic Sources. *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 11, no. 1: 2–21.

Bayer, L. 2021. Inside Slovenia's War on the Media. *POLITICO*, February 16. https://www.politico.eu/article/slovenia-war-on-the-media-janez-jansa/.

Bek, M. 2021a. Na Visegrádu nechci nic měnit. Ale je škoda, že takové vztahy nemáme se starými zeměmi EU, říká *BekČRo Plus*. https://plus.rozhlas.cz/na-visegradu-nechci-nic-menit-ale-je--skoda-ze-takove-vztahy-nemame-se-starymi-8626117.

Bek, M. 2021b. Volba priorit předsednictví je omezená. V zásadě půjde o covid, klima a bezpeč-nost, avizuje ministr *BekRadiožurnál*. https://radiozurnal.rozhlas.cz/volba-priorit-predsednictvi--je-omezena-v-zasade-pujde-o-covid-klima-a-bezpecnost-8644680.

Bengtsson, R., O. Elgström, and J. Tallberg. 2004. Silencer or Amplifier? The European Union Presidency and the Nordic Countries. *Scandinavian Political Studies* 27, no. 3: 311–334.

Bertuzzi, L. 2022. LEAK: The Five Political Priorities of the Upcoming Czech Presidency. *Www.Euractiv.Com*. https://www.euractiv.com/section/eu-council-presidency/news/leak-the-five-po-litical-priorities-of-the-upcoming-czech-presidency/.

Bieber, F., and N. Dimitrov. 2022. North Macedonia's EU Accession Talks — a "Rotten Deal." *EUobserver*. https://euobserver.com/opinion/155491.

Bigot, J. 2022. The Upcoming Czech Presidency of Council of the EU and Czech Political Unity. *The New Federalist*. https://www.thenewfederalist.eu/the-upcoming-czech-presidency-of-council-of-the-eu-and-czech-political.

Boubínová, M. 2022a. Závislost na „nepřátelských režimech" i Ukrajina do EU. Popisujeme pět priorit českého předsednictví. *Deník N*. https://denikn.cz/870769/zavislost-na-nepra-telskych-rezimech-i-ukrajina-do-eu-popisujeme-pet-priorit-ceskeho-predsednictvi/.

Boubínová, M. 2022b. Prezident jako hostitel summitu na Hradě? To je delikátní pole, říká Bek o českém předsednictví. *Deník N*. https://denikn.cz/888479/prezident-jako-hostitel-summitu-na-hrade-to-je-delikatni-pole-rika-bek-o-ceskem-predsednictvi/.

Bunse, S., and C. Klein. 2014. What's Left of the Rotating Presiency? The Future of 'National' Presidencies,[in:] The European Council and European Governance. The Commanding Heights of the EU, Eds. F. Foret, Y. *S. Rittelmeyer, London–New York*.

Cabada, L., and Š. Waisová. 2011. *Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic in World Politics*. Lexington Books.

Chrzová, B., and P. Čermák. 2022. The Integration of the Western Balkans Into the EU Is Also Blocked Because of the War in Ukraine. *Visegrad Insight*, May 27. https://visegradinsight.eu/the-integration-of-the-western-balkans-into-the-eu-is-also-blocked-because-of-the-war-in-ukraine/.

Cipek, T. 2020. Croatia's Presidency of the European Union and the Western Balkans . A New Momentum or a Missed Opportunity? *Comparative Southeast European Studies* 68, no. 4 (December 1): 554–568.

ČT. 2022. *Premiér Fiala před odletem na summit EU - 23. červen - Studio 6 | Česká televize*. https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/1096902795-studio-6/222411010100623/cast/920436/.

ČTK. 2021a. Kompetence nového ministra pro EU by měly být finálně vymezeny do pondělí, March 11. https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/kompetence-noveho-ministra-pro-eu-by-mely-byt-finalne-vymezeny-do-pondeli/2112564.

ČTK. 2021b. Opozice kritizuje přípravy na předsednictví v EU. Koordinátor příprav nesouhlasí. *iROZHLAS*, June 27. https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/rozpocet-eu-opozice-vlada-babis-kohout-srsen-predsednictvi-koordinator_2106270933_voj.

ČTK. 2021c. České předsednictví EU by mohlo pomoci Srbsku a Černé Hoře, řekl Kulhánek. Ve volbách kandidovat nechce | Domov. *Lidovky.cz*, June 27. https://www.lidovky.cz/domov/kulhanek-ma-za-jednu-z-priorit-predsednictvi-v-eu-rozsireni-o-zapadni-balkan.A210627_072030_ln_domov_lihem.

ČTK. 2021d. Premiéři zemí V4 a Slovinska se shodli na potřebě rozšíření EU o balkánské země. *České noviny*, July 9. https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/premieri-zemi-v4-a-slovinska-se-shodli-na-potrebe-rozsireni-eu-o-balkanske-zeme/2061927.

ČTK. 2021e. Před integrací západního Balkánu do EU je potřeba rozšířit Schengen, řekl Babiš. *České noviny*, September 1. https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/pred-integraci-zapadniho-balkanu-do-eu-je-potreba-rozsirit-schengen-rekl-babis/2084115.

ČTK. 2021f. Prezident Zeman Nebude Létat Na Zahraniční Cesty, Se Státníky Bude Jednat v Česku. *Aktuálně.Cz*, December 29. https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/zeman-bude-pristi-rok-jednat-hlavne-s-jinymi-statniky-v-cesk/r~354b65d068a711ec9106ac1f6b220ee8/.

ČTK. 2021g. Za půl roku bude ČR předsedat EU, nová vláda chce revidovat přípravy i rozpočet. *České noviny*, December 30. https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/za-pul-roku-bude-cr-predsedat-eu-nova-vlada-chce-revidovat-pripravy-i-rozpocet/2139040.

ČTK. 2022a. Zeman: Válka nebude. Informace o ruské invazi na Ukrajinu jsou opět blamáž tajných služeb USA. *iROZHLAS*, February 17. https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/milos-zeman-prezident-rozhovor-ukrajina-rusko-konflikt-valka-hospitalizace_2202170725_ako.

ČTK. 2022b. Rusko se dopouští zločinu proti míru, odsoudil Zeman útok na Ukrajinu. *České noviny*, February 24. https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/rusko-se-dopousti-zlocinu-proti-miru-odsoudil-zeman-utok-na-ukrajinu/2166489.

ČTK. 2022c. Návrh priorit předsednictví čítá uprchlickou krizi nebo energetickou bezpečnost | ČeskéNoviny.cz. *České noviny*, May 11. https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/navrh-priorit-predsednictvi-cita-uprchlickou-krizi-nebo-energetickou-bezpecnost/2204802.

ČTK. 2022d. Balkán se kvůli Ukrajině nesmí cítit odstrčený, řekl Fialovi rakouský kancléř. https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/petr-fiala-karl-nehammer-jednani-kancler-premier-spoluprace-eu-valka-ukrajina-rusko-plyn-ropa.A220517_134107_domaci_hend.

ČTK. 2022e. Fiala: Česko má zájem posunout kupředu otázku rozšíření EU o západní Balkán. *Euroskop*, July 1. https://euroskop.cz/2022/07/01/fiala-cesko-ma-zajem-posunout-kupredu-o-tazku-rozsireni-eu-o-zapadni-balkan/.

Dinan, D. 2013. The Post-Lisbon European Council Presidency: An Interim Assessment. *West European Politics* 36, no. 6: 1256–1273.

Dopita, T. 2020. The Czech Republic: Kosovo's Reluctant and Disengaged Recogniser. In *The Politics of Recognition and Engagement*, 83–102. Springer.

Dopita, T., D. Heler, and K. Tamchynová. 2017. The Czech Foreign Policy Towards the Balkans and Turkey.

Dostál, V., and V. Borčány. 2018. *Role prezidenta v zahraniční politice po zavedení přímé volby*. Asociace pro mezinárodní otázky. https://www.amo.cz/cs/agenda-pro-ceskou-zahranicni-politiku/role-prezidenta-v-zahranicni-politice-po-zavedeni-prime-volby/.

Dovžan, G. 2021. Future EU: Slovenia Advocates Western Balkans Enlargement. *Www.Euractiv.Com*. https://www.euractiv.com/section/eu-council-presidency/opinion/future-eu-slovenia-advocates-western-balkans-enlargement/.

Drulák, P. 2010. Czech Foreign Policy: Ideologies, Prejudices and Co-Ordination. *Czech Foreign Policy in 2007-2009: Analysis*: 371.

Drulák, P., and Z. Šabič. 2010. *The Czech and Slovenian EU Presidencies in a Comparative Perspective*. Republic of Letters Dordrecht.

Džihić, V., and P. Schmidt. 2022. Ukraine War Is Europe's Wake-up Call to Revive Enlargement. *Balkan Insight*. https://balkaninsight.com/2022/05/20/ukraine-war-is-europes-wake-up-call-to-revive-enlargement/.

Euractiv. 2021. Letter to HRVP Borrell on Western Balkans. *Www.Euractiv.Com*. https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/letter-to-hrvp-borrell-on-western-balkans/.

European Parliament. 2021. *Conflict of Interest and Misuse of EU Funds: The Case of Czech PM Babiš | News | European Parliament*. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-

room/20210517IPR04145/conflict-of-interest-and-misuse-of-eu-funds-the-case-of-czech-pm-babis.

EWB. 2022. Macron Calls for Clear Accession Perspective of Western Balkans and Reform of the EU. *European Western Balkans*. https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2022/01/19/macron-calls-for-clear-accession-perspective-of-western-balkans-and-reform-of-the-eu/.

Fendrych, M. 2022. Proč Fiala nebojuje za to, aby Zeman zval do Lán i Lipavského. *Aktuálně.cz*, May 23, sec. Komentáře. https://nazory.aktualne.cz/komentare/proc-fiala-nebojuje-za-lipavske-ho-v-lanech/r~89618332d9e711ec8b4e0cc47ab5f122/.

Fiala, P. 2022. User Petr Fiala on Twitter. *Twitter*. https://twitter.com/P_Fiala/status/1540259072422846465.

Gijs, C. 2022. Leaders of Poland, Czech Republic, Slovenia to Visit Kyiv on Tuesday. *POLITICO*, March 15. https://www.politico.eu/article/leader-poland-czech-republic-slovenia-visit-kyiv/.

Gosling, T. 2021. New Czech Government Awaits Presidential Nod; Then What? *Balkan Insight*. https://balkaninsight.com/2021/11/25/new-czech-government-awaits-presidential-nod-then-what/.

Häge, F.M. 2017. The Scheduling Power of the EU Council Presidency. *Journal of European Public Policy* 24, no. 5: 695–713.

Hájek, A. 2022. Česko hází Ukrajině laso do EU. Kandidátský status? Ideálně do konce roku. *iDNES.cz*, April 10. https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/zahranicni/ukrajina-eu-ceske-predsednictvi-ja-roslav-kurfurst.A220407_134458_zahranicni_aha.

Hančl, M. 2022. Naše místo v Evropě: Bek a Lipavský versus Fiala. *Deník Referendum*, January 17, sec. Domov. https://denikreferendum.cz/clanek/33567-nase-misto-v-evrope-bek-a-lipavsky--versus-fiala.

Hloušek, V. 2014. Is the Czech Republic on Its Way to Semi-Presidentialism? 7, no. 2. https://www.muni.cz/en/research/publications/1229950.

Hloušek, V., and P. Kaniok. 2021. Europe Forever? Czech Political Parties on the Orientation of Czech Foreign Policy. *East European Politics* 37, no. 4: 702–721.

Houska, O. 2022. Češi se při předsednictví EU těsně vyhnou průšvihu, na víc nemáme, tvrdí politolog. Vinu dává Babišovi. *Hospodářské noviny*, February 17, sec. HN. https://hn.cz/c1-67011920-cesi-se-pri-predsednictvi-eu-tesne-vyhnou-prusvihu-na-vic-nemame-tvrdi-politolog-vinu-dava-babisovi.

Hronešová, J. 2015. Subtle Europeanisers: Czech and Slovak Advocacy and Assistance Strategy in the Western Balkans. In *Democratization in EU Foreign Policy*, 175–194. Routledge.

Hübner, C., J. Eichhorn, L. Molthof, and S. Cvijić. 2022. *It's the EU, Not Western Balkan Enlargement... French Public Opinion on the EU Membership of the Western Balkans*. Accessed June 6.

https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/publications/its-the-eu-not-western-balkan-enlargement.

Hutt, D. 2021a. Was the Czech Foreign Minister Fired Due to His Pro-Western Views? *Euronews.* https://www.euronews.com/2021/04/14/was-the-czech-foreign-minister-fired-due-to-his-pro-western-views.

Hutt, D. 2021b. Who Is Petr Fiala, the Czech Republic's Likely New Prime Minister? *Euronews.* https://www.euronews.com/2021/11/17/petr-fiala-who-is-the-czech-republic-s-likely-new-prime-minister.

Ivković, A. 2022. Macron's European Political Community: What Would It Mean for the Western Balkans? *European Western Balkans*, May 16. https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2022/05/16/macrons-european-political-community-what-would-it-mean-for-the-western-balkans/.

Jelínek, L. 2021. Fiala prokázal, že na sobě dříví štípat nenechá. *iROZHLAS.* https://www.irozhlas.cz/komentare/petr-fiala-jmenovani-lipavsky-milos-zeman-prezident-dohoda-komentar_2112141636_btk.

Juzová, J., A. Ilková, and O. Pešek. 2022. *EU-Western Balkans Summit - The Morning After.* Accessed June 6. https://europeum.org/domains/europeum.org/www/articles/detail/4524/report-eu-western-balkans-summit-the-morning-after.

Kabrhelová, L., and V. Daněk. 2022. Předsednictví EU je pro Česko šance se ukázat, ale také poevropštit, říká zpravodaj ČRo v Bruselu. Accessed June 7. https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/podcast-vinohradska-12-viktor-danek-predsednictvi-eu-cesko_2201050600_mpa.

Kočan, F., and M. Lovec. 2021. What Can the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union Do for the Western Balkans? *Österreichische Gesellschaft Für Europapolitik.* https://www.oegfe.at/policy-briefs/what-can-the-slovenian-presidency-of-the-council-of-the-european-union-do-for-the-western-balkans/?lang=en.

Koktsidis, P., I. Armakolas, M. Maksimovic, and B. Feta. 2014. The Western Balkan EU Accession Process and the Greek Presidency 2014. *Policy Report, Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP), Athens, Av. at: Http://Bit. Ly/28IVcw2 ISSN* 5484.

Kollman, K. 2003. The Rotating Presidency of the European Council as a Search for Good Policies. *European Union Politics* 4, no. 1: 51–74.

Kořan, M. 2007. Domestic Politics in Czech Foreign Policy: Between Consensus and Clash. *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs* 16, no. 02: 23–45.

Kořan, M. 2013. Coloring It Europe? The Europeanization of Czech Foreign Policy. In *The New Member States and the European Union.* Routledge.

Kottová, A. 2022. Zeman řekl čtyři důvody, proč odmítá jmenovat Lipavského. Vadí mu vzdělání či postoj k Visegrádu. *iROZHLAS*, December 10. https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/jan-lipavsky-milos-zeman-ministr-zahranici_2112101228_ako.

Koutník, O. 2021. Pozadí dohody Fialy a Zemana o vládě: prezident nechtěl prohrát úplně, December 15. https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-politika-pozadi-dohody-fialy-a-zemana-o-vlade-prezident-nechtel-prohrat-uplne-183412.

Kozáková, I. 2022. Nepanikařím, řekl ministr Bek o chystání českého předsednictví. Podle Vondry bude vláda připravena. *Deník N*, February 9, sec. Česko. https://denikn.cz/805005/nepanikarim-rekl-ministr-bek-o-chystani-ceskeho-predsednictvi-podle-vondry-bude-vlada-priprav-ena/.

Kříž, Z., M. Chovančík, and O. Krpec. 2021. Czech Foreign Policy After the Velvet Revolution. In *Foreign Policy Change in Europe Since 1991*, 49–72. Springer.

Křížová, I. 2021. Personální revoluci nechystám, významné slovo musí mít i premiér Fiala, říká kandidát na ‚pana Evropu' | Domov. *Lidovky.cz*, November 30. https://www.lidovky.cz/domov/personalni-revoluci-nechystam-vyznamne-slovo-musi-mit-i-premier-fiala-rika-kandidat-na-pa-na-evropu-m.A211130_074300_ln_domov_vag.

Křížová, I. 2022. Biden na Hrad nezavítá. Proč odzvonilo velkolepému summitu, který měl být ozdobou českého předsednictví? | Domov. *Lidovky.cz*, April 2. https://www.lidovky.cz/domov/buden-hrad-ceske-predsednictvi-summit-eu-usa-odzvonilo.A220402_170759_ln_domov_lros.

Kundra, O. 2019. Co chce Zeman po Babišovi za Kosovo? *Respekt*, September 18. https://www.respekt.cz/politika/co-chce-zeman-po-babisovi-za-kosovo.

Kundra, O. 2022a. Lipavský: Vím, co je v sázce. *Týdeník Respekt*, May 15. https://www.respekt.cz/tydenik/2022/20/vim-co-je-v-sazce.

Kundra, O. 2022b. Fiala měl odmítnout Nejedlého účast na jednání se Zemanem. *Týdeník Respekt*, May 23. https://www.respekt.cz/komentare/fiala-mel-odmitnout-nejedleho-ucast-na--jednani-se-zemanem.

Leutloff-Grandits, C. 2019. Carolin Leutloff-Grandits: Croatia's Presidency of the Council of the European Union: New Impetus for the Balkans. https://www.zois-berlin.de/en/publications/zois-spotlight/archiv-2019/croatias-presidency-of-the-council-of-the-european-union-new-impetus-for-the-balkans.

Lewis, J. 2014. The Council of the European Union and the European Council. In *Routledge Handbook of European Politics*, 263–278. Routledge.

Lopatka, J. 2022. Czechs Ship Tanks, Rocket Launchers, Artillery to Ukraine. *Reuters*, April 8, sec. Europe. https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/czechs-ship-tanks-rocket-launchers-artillery-ukraine-2022-04-08/.

Lopatka, J., and J. Hovet. 2021. Czech President Zeman Returns to Hospital after Positive COVID Test. *Reuters*, November 25, sec. Europe. https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/czech-president-zeman-released-hospital-2021-11-25/.

Ly, N.T. 2021. Češi se v čele EU musí vypořádat s dekarbonizací i migrací. Své priority vláda stále hledá. *E15*, August 25. https://www.e15.cz/volby/volby-do-snemovny/cesi-se-v-cele-eu-musi--vyporadat-s-dekarbonizaci-i-migraci-sve-priority-vlada-stale-hleda-1383037.

Lynch, S., and J.H. Vela. 2021. Brussels Playbook: Western Balkans' Pipe Dreams — No Decisions on Strategic Autonomy — COVID Pass Troubles in Strasbourg. *POLITICO*, October 6. https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/brussels-playbook/western-balkans-pipe-dreams-no-decisions-on-strategic-autonomy-covid-pass-troubles-in-strasbourg/.

Marušić, S.J. 2019. France Sinks EU Hopes of North Macedonia, Albania. *Balkan Insight*, October 18. https://balkaninsight.com/2019/10/18/france-sinks-eu-hopes-of-north-macedonia-albania/.

Marušić, S.J. 2022a. Western Balkans' EU Hopes Rise Amid Clamour of War. *Balkan Insight*. https://balkaninsight.com/2022/03/07/western-balkans-eu-hopes-rise-amid-clamour-of-war/.

Marušić, S.J. 2022b. Western Balkans Leaders Voice Frustration over EU Summit Failure. *Balkan Insight*. https://balkaninsight.com/2022/06/23/western-balkans-leaders-voice-frustration-over-eu-summit-failure/.

Matias, B. 2018. What the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU Meant for the Western Balkans. *Group for Legal and Political Studies*. http://www.legalpoliticalstudies.org/bulgarian-presidency-council-eu-meant-western-balkans/.

Matoška, L. 2022. Ukrajina členem Evropské unie? Nedělejme si iluze, nejdříve za deset let, upozorňuje ministr Bek. *iROZHLAS*, January 4. https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/plyn-energie-evropska-unie-valka-na-ukrajine_2204012216_gut.

van Meurs, W. 2003. The next Europe: South-Eastern Europe after Thessaloniki. *SEER: Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe* 6, no. 3: 9–16.

MFA. 2021. *Minister Kulhánek on Visit to Tirana: The Countries of the Western Balkans Have Our Support for Joining the EU*. https://www.mzv.cz/tirana/en/bilateral_relations/minister_kulhanek_on_visit_to_tirana_the.html.

MFA. 2022a. Ministr Lipavský s řeckým ministrem Dendiasem projevili jednotnou podporu Ukrajině. https://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/udalosti_a_media/tiskove_zpravy/ministr_lipavsky_s_reckym_ministrem.html.

MFA. 2022b. Ministr Jan Lipavský jednal v Bruselu o západním Balkánu a Ukrajině. https://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/udalosti_a_media/tiskove_zpravy/ministr_jan_lipavsky_jednal_v_bruselu_o.html.

MFA. 2022c. Pracovní návštěva náměstka ministra zahraničí ČR Martina Dvořáka. https://www.mzv.cz/podgorica/cz/pracovni_navsteva_namestka_ministra.html.

MFA. 2022d. Ministr Lipavský jednal se svým chorvatským protějškem o nadcházející turistické sezoně. https://www.mzv.cz/zagreb/cz/zpravy_a_udalosti/ministr_lipavsky_jednal_se_svym.html.

MFA. 2022e. Ministr Jan Lipavský představil priority MZV pro předsednictví v Radě EU. https://

www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/udalosti_a_media/tiskove_zpravy/ministr_jan_lipavsky_predstavil_priority.html.

MFA RS. 2022. Selaković and Lipavský on the Situation in the Region and Geopolitical Topics. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. https://www.mfa.gov.rs/en/press-service/statements/selakovic-and-lipavsky-situation-region-and-geopolitical-topics.

Míková, E. 2021. Zeman je zkušený politik. Rád si k němu budu chodit pro rady, řekl ministr Kulhánek, April 21. https://cnn.iprima.cz/ministr-kulhanek-zemana-povazuji-za-zkuseneho-politika-chci-si-chodit-pro-rady-23731.

Missiroli, A. 2010. The New EU 'Foreign Policy' System after Lisbon: A Work in Progress. *European Foreign Affairs Review* 15, no. 4.

Mortkowitz, S. 2021. European Parliament Condemns Czech PM over Conflicts of Interest. *POLITICO*, June 10. https://www.politico.eu/article/european-parliament-andrej-babis-subsidies-agrofert/.

Nalejvačová, L. 2022. Věcně o Evropě: Mikuláš Bek o předsednictví ČR v Radě EU a válce na Ukrajině. *Euroskop*, April 11. https://euroskop.cz/2022/04/11/vecne-o-evrope-mikulas-bek-o-predsednictvi-cr-v-rade-eu-a-valce-na-ukrajine/.

Nerad, F. 2022. Šéfové Evropy? Reklamu na předsednictví vláda nedělá i kvůli Mafře, upozorňuje analytik. *iROZHLAS*. https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-svet/podcast-vinohradska-12-evropska-unie-predsednictvi-mafra-filip-nerad_2206130600_mkl.

Nerad, F., and L. Kabrhelová. 2021. Konzervativci z ODS, proevropský ministr Bek a nečitelná poradkyně. Bude ladit unijní politika budoucí vlády? *Vinohradská 12 Podcast*, December 16. https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-svet/podcast-vinohradska-12-cesko-evropska-unie-predsednictvi-eu-petr-fiala-andrej_2112160600_miz.

Oxford Analytica. 2022. *France Will Do Little to Advance Balkan EU Accession*. https://daily-brief.oxan.com/Analysis/DB267037/France-will-do-little-to-advance-Balkan-EU-accession.

Palata, L. 2022. České předsednictví EU začne v Litomyšli. Priority se mění. *Deník.cz*, May 30. https://www.denik.cz/cesko-a-eu/ceske-predsednictvi-eu-20220529.html.

Palounek, J. 2022. Ministr pro evropské záležitosti: Nutnost pro předsednictví, nebo budoucnost struktury české zahraniční politiky? | Ústav mezinárodních vztahů - Expertise to impact. *Mezinárodní politika* 2022, no. 1: 19–20.

Pehe, J. 2021. Zahraniční politika může být zdrojem sporů v nové vládě. *Plus*. https://plus.rozhlas.cz/jiri-pehe-zahranicni-politika-muze-byt-zdrojem-sporu-v-nove-vlade-8617276.

2022. České předsednictví EU bude narážet na spoustu překážek. Mnohé mu zanechala Babišova vláda. Další si nastražila ta nová. *Deník N*, February 7, sec. Audio. https://denikn.cz/802096/

ceske-predsednictvi-eu-bude-narazet-na-spousty-prekazek-mnohe-mu-zanechala-babiso-va-vlada-dalsi-si-nastrazila-ta-nova/.

Plevák, O. 2022. Podcast: Vlajkovou lodí předsednictví můžou být čipy, je to příležitost pro české firmy, říká ministr Bek. *euractiv.cz*. https://euractiv.cz/section/ceske-predsednictvi-eu-2022/interview/pod-cast-vlajkovou-lodi-predsednictvi-muzou-byt-cipy-je-to-prilezitost-pro-ceske-firmy-rika-ministr-bek/.

Pollet, M., and N. Moussu. 2021. Macron Presents France's EU Council Presidency Priorities. *Www.Euractiv.Com*. https://www.euractiv.com/section/future-eu/news/macron-presents-fran-ces-eu-council-presidency-priorities/.

Ponikelska, L. 2022. EU Needs Plan to Fend Off Russia in Balkans, Czech Diplomat Says. *Bloomberg.Com*, March 22. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-22/eu-needs-plan-to-fend-off-russia-in-balkans-czech-diplomat-says.

Procházková, A. 2022. Přikrčení Piráti. *Týdeník Respekt*, June 5. https://www.respekt.cz/tydenik/2022/23/prikrceni-pirati.

Puetter, U. 2014. The Rotating Council Presidency and the New Intergovernmentalism. *The International Spectator* 49, no. 4: 18–32.

Pusić, V., and S. Biserko. 2022. [Opinion] The "non-Paper" Carving up Balkans and Undermining Europe. *EUobserver*. Accessed June 6. https://euobserver.com/opinion/151741.

Quaglia, L., and E. Moxon-Browne. 2006. What Makes a Good EU Presidency? Italy and Ireland Compared. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 44, no. 2: 349–368.

Raik, E. 2015. The 'Trio Presidency'of the Council of the European Union: Towards More Continuity? *TalTech Journal of European Studies* 5, no. 1: 19–35.

Rakušan, V. 2022. Vít Rakušan on Twitter. *Twitter*. https://twitter.com/Vit_Rakusan/sta-tus/1512407286072979467.

Rettman, A. 2021. [Exclusive] EU Sweetens Tone of Western Balkans Summit. *EUobserver*, May 10. https://euobserver.com/world/153117.

Reuters. 2022. Czech Leader after Kyiv Visit: Ukraine above All Needs More Weapons. *Reuters*, March 16, sec. Europe. https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/czech-prime-minister-ukraine-above-all-needs-more-weapons-2022-03-16/.

Řežňáková, L. 2022. Vláda řeší, co s předsednictvím Rady EU. Válka na Ukrajině změnila priority. *iDNES.cz*, March 24. https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/predsednictvi-cesko-ukrajina-priori-ty-zmena-bezpecnost.A220314_162228_domaci_lre.

RSE. 2021. Babiš sa Vučićem: Srbija dala primer Evropi u borbi sa pandemijom. *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, February 10, sec. Vesti. https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/babiš-iz-beograda-potreb-no-napustiti-politiku-eu-želi-da-proizvodi-rusku-vakcinu-u-austriji-i-slovačkoj/31096132.html.

RTS. 2021. Dačić u poseti Češkoj: Zeman ima mnogo razumevanja u vezi sa kosovskim problemom, August 31. http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/9/politika/4495996/ivica-dacic-ceska-poseta-srbija-milos-zeman.html.

Šabič, Z., and A. Freyberg-Inan. 2012. Central Europe and the Balkans: So Close and Yet So Far. In *Regional and International Relations of Central Europe*, ed. Z. Šabič and P. Drulák, 261–285. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137283450_14.

Šafaříková, K. 2022. Blíží se evropský reparát Česka. Předsednictví je "žvanírna s chlebíčky", říkal Babiš | Aktuálně.cz. *Aktuálně.cz*, January 3, sec. Evropský parlament. https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/zahranici/evropsky-parlament/jake-bude-ceske-predsednictvi-eu-v-roce-2022/r~9a-455028617611ec94d2ac1f6b220ee8/.

Sandford, A. 2019. North Macedonia President Meets Macron after French EU Accession Veto. *Euronews*. https://www.euronews.com/2019/11/12/north-macedonia-president-meets-macron-after-french-veto-on-eu-accession-talks.

Schalk, J., R. Torenvlied, J. Weesie, and F. Stokman. 2007. The Power of the Presidency in EU Council Decision-Making. *European Union Politics* 8, no. 2: 229–250.

Sejdija, B. 2019. Could the Czech Republic Really Withdraw Kosovo Recognition? *Kosovo 2.0*. https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/could-the-czech-republic-really-withdraw-kosovo-recognition/.

Šídlová, T. 2021. Kvůli Evropě chceme dohodu s Babišem, říká ministr budoucí vlády https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-politika-kvuli-evrope-chceme-pakt-s-babisem-rika-ministr-budouci-vlady-181409.

———. 2022a. Klíčový muž Fialy pro rusko-ukrajinskou válku míří na post náměstka pro EU. https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-politika-klicovy-muz-fialy-pro-rusko-ukrajinskou-valku-miri-na-post-namestka-pro-eu-191287.

———. 2022b. Fiala chce Ukrajině otevřít dveře do EU. Potřebuje naději, řekl v Bruselu https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-politika-fiala-chce-ukrajine-otevrit-dvere-do-eu-potrebuje-nadeji-rekl-v-bruselu-195356.

Simić, J. 2018. Bulgaria's EU Presidency Offers Western Balkans Unique Opportunity. *Www.Euractiv.Com*. https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/bulgarias-eu-presidency-offers-western-balkans-unique-opportunity/.

Šnaidauf, J. 2022. Speech on the Priorities of the Czech EU Presidency during the 'Czech Pre-Presidency Conference Organised by TEPSA and IIR May 23, Prague.

Stratulat, C. 2021. EU Enlargement to the Western Balkans – Three Observations. https://www.epc.eu/en/publications/EU-enlargement-to-the-Western-Balkans-Three-observations~4392d4.

Sybera, A. 2022. Western Balkans as Another Friction Point. *Visegrad Insight*, May 6. https://visegradinsight.eu/western-balkans-as-another-friction-point/.

Tallberg, J. 2003. The Agenda-Shaping Powers of the EU Council Presidency. *Journal of European Public Policy* 10, no. 1: 1–19.

Telegraf. 2021. Zeman apologized for 1999 NATO bombing of Serbia, Vucic thanks him: No one has said that yet. *Telegraf.rs*, May 18, sec. English. https://www.telegraf.rs/english/3340448-zeman-apologized-for-1999-nato-bombing-of-serbia-vucic-thanks-him-no-one-has-said-that-yet.

Tesař, F. 2010. The Balkan Dimension of the Czech Foreign Policy. In *Czech Foreign Policy in 2007–2009*, 231.

———. 2013. *Můžeme, chceme, dokážeme?: Česká ekonomická, veřejná a kulturní diplomacie a Balkán*. Ústav mezinárodních vztahů, v. v. i.

Thomson, R. 2008. The Council Presidency in the European Union: Responsibility with Power. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 46, no. 3: 593–617.

Trachtová, Z. 2022. Česko by mohlo uspořádat summit EU s Ukrajinou. Heslem předsednictví bude ‚Evropa jako úkol'. *iROZHLAS*, April 16. https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/summit-ceske-predsednictvi-eu-evropska-unie-valka-na-ukrajine-rada-evropske-unie_2204161252_gut.

Tuhina, G. 2021. Janez Janša odbija da se izjasni o "non-paper" dokumentu za Zapadni Balkan. *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, April 15, sec. Regija. https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/slovenija-janez-jansa-zapadni-balkan-non-paper/31205572.html.

Tulmets, E. 2014. East Central European Foreign Policy Identity in Perspective. *New York*.

Tvrdoň, J. 2022a. Nezvykle harmonické vztahy i zlepšení pověsti Česka. Fialova vláda oslavila 100 dní ve funkci. *Deník N*, March 27, sec. Česko. https://denikn.cz/845719/nezvykle-harmonicke-vztahy-i-zlepseni-povesti-ceska-fialova-vlada-oslavila-100-dni-ve-funkci/.

———. 2022b. Zemanovi zbývají poslední měsíce na Hradě. Vysvětlujeme, s jakými trumfy může ještě hrát. *Deník N*. https://denikn.cz/883041/zemanovi-zbyvaji-posledni-mesice-na-hrade-vysvetlujeme-s-jakymi-trumfy-muze-jeste-hrat/.

Vaznonytė, A. 2020. The Rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU–Still an Agenda-Setter? *European Union Politics* 21, no. 3: 497–518.

Visegrad Group. 2019. V4 Statement on the Western Balkans. Text. (C) 2006-2010, International Visegrad Fund. https://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements/v4-statement-on-the-190912.

Vláda ČR. 2022a. Premiér Petr Fiala přijal v Kramářově vile bulharského prezidenta Rumena Radeva. http://www.vlada.cz/cz/media-centrum/aktualne/premier-petr-fiala-prijal-v-kramarove-vile-bulharskeho-prezidenta-rumena-radeva-196215/.

Vláda ČR. 2022b. Vláda představila logo, motto a priority českého předsednictví v Radě EU. http://www.vlada.cz/cz/media-centrum/aktualne/vlada-predstavila-logo--motto-a-priority-ceskeho-predsednictvi-v-rade-eu-197157/.

Vladisavljević, A. 2021. Slovenia's Jansa Unplugs From Debate on Media, Alleging Censorship. *Balkan Insight*, March 26. https://balkaninsight.com/2021/03/26/slovenias-jansa-unplugs-from-debate-on-media-alleging-censorship/.

Warntjen, A. 2013. The Elusive Goal of Continuity? Legislative Decision-Making and the Council Presidency before and after Lisbon. *West European Politics* 36, no. 6: 1239–1255.

Weiss, T. 2021. De-Europeanisation of Czech Policy towards Eastern Partnership Countries under Populist Leaders. *Journal of European Integration* 43, no. 5: 587–602.

Xhambazi, V. 2022. French EU Presidency Could Be Enlargement Policy's Last Chance. *Balkan Insight*. https://balkaninsight.com/2022/01/12/french-eu-presidency-could-be-enlargement-policys-last-chance/.

Zachová, A. 2021. Western Balkans to Be a Priority of Czech 2022 Council Presidency. *Www.Euractiv.Com*. https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/western-balkans-to-be--a-priority-of-czech-2022-council-presidency/.

Zeman, M. 2022. Prezident republiky zaslal gratulaci srbskému prezidentovi. *Pražský hrad*. https://www.hrad.cz/cs/pro-media/tiskove-zpravy/aktualni-tiskove-zpravy/prezident-republiky--zaslal-gratulaci-srbskemu-prezidentovi-16358.

Znoj, M. 1999. Czech Attitudes Toward the War. *East European Constitutional Review.* 8: 47.

ALEJANDRO ESTESO PÉREZ

Revising EU Conditionality in Kosovo: The Rule of Law and Corruption in the Context of the New Enlargement Methodology

— ALEJANDRO ESTESO PÉREZ

Alejandro Esteso Pérez holds a MA in Political Science
from Malmö University in Sweden, and a BA in International
Relations from Rey Juan Carlos University in Madrid. He
gathers significant experience in and around the Western
Balkans, having worked as a research fellow at the Kosovo-
based think-tank Group for Legal and Political Studies
(GLPS) and at the European Commission's Directorate-
General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
(DG NEAR). Having also held research positions at the
universities of Gothenburg and Umeå in Sweden, Alejandro's
research interests include the European Union enlargement
policy, elections and party politics in the Western Balkans.
He occasionally contributes to several media outlets, both in
Spain and in Kosovo, through written analyses and opinion
pieces.

Introduction

In February 2020, the European Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Olivér Várhelyi, presented a new enlargement methodology (hereinafter, 'NEM') that would, from then on, underlie and steer the European Union (EU) enlargement process. A set of newly-revised principles, devised for a "more predictable, more dynamic and more political" (European Commission 2020) integration, was bound to involve—to a greater or lesser extent—the six countries of the Western Balkans. Less than three years into its establishment, the NEM remains a new and unexplored policy scheme, stoking many doubts regarding its embodiment, instruments and implementation. This is particularly the case in regard to the rule of law, a fundamental criteria underpinning the EU's membership conditionality mechanisms and a growing concern when it comes to the Western Balkan countries' accession processes. In this light, the NEM partly holds the key to understand how the EU wants to develop its rule of law and anti-corruption strategy vis-à-vis the Western Balkans.

Kosovo, as a potential candidate for EU membership, lags substantively behind the other countries in terms of political, administrative and economic alignment with the EU standards. Kosovo's reform checklist is still linked to its Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) and to the renewed European Reform Agenda (ERA II).[1] Visa liberalisation for the Schengen area is waiting for approval from Member States, and matters regarding the country's international recognition remain a critical issue. In both the policy and the academic realms, the extent to which the NEM would apply to Kosovo has failed to be under serious scrutiny. As such, Kosovo presents a key case to analyse the potential implications of the NEM, inasmuch as the country is subject to international and EU efforts of promotion of rule of law enhancement—but is arguably an underachiever in terms of implementation.

---

1 The European Reform Agenda (ERA) II is the continuation to a process of high-level dialogue between the Government of Kosovo and the European Commission that started in 2016 with the purpose of guiding reforms under the implementation of the SAA. The first of three action pillars in ERA II focuses on good governance and the rule of law.

This paper explores how the NEM contributes to the development of EU conditionality in the rule of law and anti-corruption realms. It builds upon a range of secondary sources—including press releases, news articles, communications and reports—issued between the years 2003 and 2022, which lay the groundwork for an in-depth analysis of the EU's process of revision of its conditionality instruments. The sources used pertain to a large extent to EU institutions, including the European Commission (EC) and the Council (EUCO). Primary sources consist of eight semi-structured interviews conducted between March and May 2022. The interviewees were selected on the basis of their position and expertise regarding the implications of the NEM from both the EU's and Kosovo's perspectives. The interviewees included an official from the EC's Directorate-General for European Neighbourhood and Policy Enlargement (DG NEAR), three officials (plus one former official) from the Government of Kosovo, one member of the Kosovo Assembly, one representative from the Embassy of the Netherlands in Kosovo, and one policy expert on EU and Western Balkans affairs. All the interviewees asked to be quoted anonymously.

The argument proceeds in three sections. The first section reviews the EU's conditionality mechanisms towards candidate and potential candidate countries in the fields of rule of law and anti-corruption, focusing on how conditionality has been revised, to then take stock of their effects and impact in the Western Balkans. The second section introduces the NEM and explores its innovative components: the monitoring process and the involvement of Member States. The paper will attempt to define the extent to which the NEM is contributing to a development—or to a potential strengthening—of the EU's conditionality mechanisms, as part of their years-long trend of revision and improvement. The last section will focus on the case of Kosovo and on how the innovations enshrined in the NEM could potentially impact Kosovo.

Conditionality, Rule of Law and Corruption

The principle of conditionality has traditionally stood out as the foremost instrument through which the EU has strived to promote democratic reforms in candidate countries. Within the framework of the EU's enlargement conditionality, the upholding and enhancement of certain rule of law standards has stood as a key pillar of what the EU seeks to promote in candidate and potential candidate countries. In addition to democracy, human rights, and the protection of minorities, the rule of law is an integral part to the political component of the Copenhagen criteria (European Council 1993), which map out the prerequisites that countries need to meet before accession.

As enshrined in the political dimension of the Copenhagen framework, the fight against corruption stands as a fundamentally overarching element in regard to the rule of law, whereby applicant countries have to engage in a series of reforms "designed to increase the overall capacity of their legal systems" (Mungiu -Pippidi 2011, 145). Marktler (2006, 351), in her study of the 1993 criteria, concludes that the widespread nature of corruption was a common element among the erstwhile applicant countries: "it can be found in diverse areas like municipal government, medical services, the police, the tax authorities, and courts." The EU has awarded high importance to the fight against corrupt practices, which u   misuse of public party funding, among others (De Vries & Solaz 2017; Nye 1967). Besides being a threat to the financial interests of the EU, corruption can put the Union's very political legitimacy at risk (Benito 2019).

Throughout the years, the EU's anti-corruption conditionality in candidate countries has insisted on a strategy of "reinforcement by reward" (Szarek-Mason 2010). The EU did not take supranational ownership over the fight against corruption until 1997, when the EC released its first policy document focusing on this issue (Hoxhaj 2020a; Rogowski 2010). This was partly motivated by the accession process in Central and Eastern Europe, as many Member States called

for stronger conditionality ahead of the upcoming enlargement wave—the first with former socialist countries—for which no clear benchmarks existed. During the pre-accession stages of the 2004 enlargement wave, the EU's influence remained limited and the conditionality encountered various obstacles (Mungiu-Pippidi 2011). A speedy and bureaucratic reform process that did not allow for thorough evaluation and a well-thought feedback, the mistaken implementation of a one-size-fits-all model of rule of law reform, and the lack of reliable monitoring instruments together with a lack of political will in candidate countries all led to an unpolished transition process that prompted a wave of democratic backsliding in the target countries soon after their accession. As a reaction, the EU sought to fine-tune the conditionality ahead of the 2007 enlargement wave—resulting in an enhanced framework of tracking and monitoring required reforms for both Romania and Bulgaria (Vassileva 2020). The process resulted in a generation of (post-accession) conditionality instruments in the anti-corruption policy field (Hoxhaj 2020a).

Around the same time, the EU made one of its first moves towards promoting anti-corruption policies in the Western Balkans through the adoption of ten principles calling for the establishment of national strategies against corruption (European Commission 2003; Rogowski 2010). Furthermore, the start of EU support for an anti-corruption policy field in the region was officially enshrined in the bilateral SAAs signed with the candidate and potential candidate countries. As the SAAs came into force, the countries of the Western Balkans were now subject to closer EU monitoring in the anti-corruption realm. Conditionality was further promoted and strengthened through the EU's assistance mechanisms (Szarek-Mason 2010); as Hoxhaj (2020a, 172-3) explains, in the case of Albania, "the EU [developed] the grounds for an anti-corruption policy […] by giving assistance for further training, supporting legislation, facilitating peer review to learn from best practice and co-financing with the Albanian government strategies for the next five years."

The impact of the EU's conditionality instruments towards the implementation of rule of law and anti-corruption standards in the Western Balkans, however, has been subject to fervent scholarly debate for many years. Arguably, the

success of the EU's toolbox is rather mixed. Mendelski (2015, 319), for instance, claims that the EU-driven reforms in the rule of law field failed to be transformative "and even have pathological power, that is, a negatively reinforcing effect. Thus, rather than strengthening the rule of law, the EU and domestic reformers (change agents) contribute paradoxically to its overall weakening." Along the same vein, Richter and Wunsch (2020, 2) have identified state capture, a symptom of informal domestic politics that reflects a weak rule of law, as the key explanatory factor for the—albeit unintended— negative effects of conditionality. But not only that: conditionality has gone on to entrench "informal networks [...] and enabled them to strengthen their grip on power". Furthermore, according to Kochenov (2004, 2), this overall backfiring might be due to a poor operationalisation of the concepts and benchmarks, which are "not clear and precise enough in order to serve as a real measurement tool."

In the Western Balkans, the limitations of the conditionality instruments have been accounted for on several occasions, pointing towards factors like national identity (Freyburg & Richter 2010) and EU-bred politicisation (Mendelski 2016) as major causes that can potentially curtail their effect. Moreover, comparative accounts have traced noticeable differences between former candidate countries (now Member States) and Western Balkan countries (Anastasakis 2008), revealing an impact gap—as well as a need to revise conditionality on an ongoing basis. Glüpker (2013), for instance, argues that conditionality had more effect on political competitiveness— the compliance of national governments with EU demands against their own advantages—in the post-socialist countries that entered the Union in 2004, than it did in Croatia and North Macedonia. Particularly, in the light of Romania's experience, the shortcomings of the EU's approach "allowed for reflection and policy discussion" on the Union's effectiveness in influencing the anti-corruption agenda in the Western Balkans (Hoxhaj 2020a, 3). The poor state of the rule of law in the region further urged the EU to seek innovative avenues to its anti-corruption policy in particular and to the conditionality framework vis-à-vis the candidate and potential candidate countries in general.

Specifically, the overall weak prevalence of rule of law standards in the Western Balkans pushed the EU to launch what Elbasani and Šelo Šabić (2017, 6) term a 'second generation' conditionality strategy, which "highlights the implementation and irreversibility of reforms". Time-sensitive targets, an enhanced clarity of benchmarks, strengthened monitoring actions, and the need for a cumulative record of traceable progress all build up a renewed format to the rule of law conditionality. In close alignment with this view, Anastasakis (2008, 368) points at the rule of law as one of the EU's focal areas—strengthened by "multiple thresholds, intermediate rewards, regional instruments, regular assessments, and a communication strategy to convince for the benefits of conditionality" present in the EC's 2008 Communication on the Western Balkans (European Commission 2008).

Eventually, conditionality went on to expand and develop as part of the EU's enlargement approach vis-à-vis the Western Balkans (Elbasani 2019), transforming and toughening as the Union itself grew (Ognjanoska 2021). In its 2018 Communication on enlargement, the EC outlined six flagship initiatives as part of its Action Plan in Support of the Transformation of the Western Balkans, where a plan "to strengthen the rule of law" (European Commission, 2018) features as its first area of interest. The EC pledged "detailed action plans […] new advisory missions in all countries [and] greater use […] of leverage provided in the negotiating frameworks with Serbia and Montenegro." Although Hoxhaj (2020b, 150) claims that the EU failed to develop "a joint action plan" or strategy to fighting corruption and organized crime as part of this initiative, he argues that the EC envisioned its future implementation "based upon the [Open Method of Coordination] (OMC) model" featuring guidelines, indicators and targets underpinned by "periodic evaluations and peer review." Conditionality, as such, has transformed in form and substance and it has introduced new aspects, broadening its span while evidencing the EU's internal concerns and balances (Anastasakis 2008).

An Exploration of the NEM: The Birth of a New Conditionality?

As the previous section illustrates, the EU conditionality in the fields of the rule of law and corruption has evolved substantively throughout the years. On many occasions, this transformation was a response to emerging challenges and dilemmas, both internally within the EU and also vis-à-vis external actors and events. Arguably, the NEM can be interpreted as yet a new stage in the ongoing process of transformation and refinement of the EU's rule of law and anti-corruption strategy towards candidate and potential candidate countries. This section will first provide a historical and political context to the establishment of the NEM, followed by an analysis of its two main new dimensions, namely the monitoring framework and the involvement of Member States.

From Inception to Implementation

At the EUCO summit in October 2019, no unanimity was reached for opening accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia mainly because of the opposition of France, the Netherlands and Denmark (Peel and Hopkins 2019). It became the second time in less than half a year that the EU governments failed to reach an agreement around the EC's recommendation to move forward with Tirana's and Skopje's membership bids.

Not long after the summit, however, this standstill seemed to break with the release of a non-paper drafted by the French authorities and circulated among the Member States (Politico 2019) in which Paris requested a renewed approach to the enlargement process. The document featured a defined set of guidelines—including more stringent conditions on the rule of law for "sustained [and] irreversible progress" and a cross-cutting status for all reforms in this area—alongside a petition to the EC that it restructure the current meth-

odology on the basis of those demands within three months. France's prerequisite was a new roadmap for negotiations with Tirana and Skopje.

At a press conference held in Brussels on February 5th 2020, European Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Olivér Várhelyi, presented the revised principles that would steer the EU's enlargement strategy from that stage on, upon approval from Member States. Within the new framework, the Commissioner argued, the enlargement process would be endowed with a "more predictable, more dynamic and more political" character (European Commission 2020b). Notwithstanding the fact that the plan was structured along three parallel lines of action—namely, the launching of accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, the establishment of an economic development program for the Western Balkans, and the implementation of a new methodology—Várhelyi focused the content of his remarks on the latter element. He spelled out the four principles that would lay the foundations of the NEM, majorly inspired from the French non-paper: credibility, predictability, dynamism, and a stronger political steer (European Commission 2020a). An overarching fundament of all four principles, moreover, was that the NEM would be underpinned by a strong reversibility clause. Based on this safeguard, Member States could have negotiations put on hold or suspended if a candidate country shows stagnation or backsliding, or if it simply does not comply with the policy lines around fundamental reforms (European Commission 2020a).

When presented, the feature that arguably received the most attention was the re-organisation of the hitherto 35 negotiating chapters of the *acquis communautaire* into six thematic clusters: the fundamentals; internal market; competitiveness and inclusive growth; green agenda and sustainable connectivity; resources, agriculture and cohesion; and external relations. As per this design, each cluster would contain between two and nine chapters. Whereas the previous strategy provided for all 35 chapters to be opened and closed independently, the NEM established the opening of each cluster as a whole—and, thus, simultaneously launching all the chapters that fall within it. More importantly, the cluster on the fundamentals, which encompasses

the chapters on justice, freedom and security, judiciary and fundamental rights, functioning of democratic institutions, public administration reform, public procurement and financial control, among others, would always be opened first and closed last. In practical terms, this implied the cross-cutting and overarching nature of all rule of law related chapters. Still, what makes the NEM a potentially new stage in the process of transformation of the EU's rule of law and anti-corruption conditionality is its focus on the monitoring dimension; and an increased involvement of Member States.

Strengthening the Monitoring Process

The monitoring of reforms in candidate and potential candidate countries constitutes a major part of the EC's work, on whose behalf DG NEAR spearheads and coordinates these efforts. Monitoring is an essential tool to inform the yearly Enlargement Package, the set of reports that lay out the state of play and the progress made by candidate and potential candidate countries in all areas of reform (European Commission 2021c). These files are commonly used by the EC, as well as by Member States, to frame their policy towards the applicants, as well as to set new areas of priority ahead of the ensuing monitoring and reporting periods.

In the EC's 2020 Communication on the NEM (hereinafter, 'the Communication'), monitoring emerges as a crucial element through which the EC keeps track of progress in candidate and potential candidate countries, and which contributes to increasing the predictability and conditionality of the process (European Commission 2020a). The more effective the monitoring and tracking, the less arbitrary and more predictable the process becomes (European Commission 2020a).

The EC's ambition to bolster applicant countries' sustainability of the rule of law reforms is clear in the explicit inclusion in the fundamentals cluster—which candidates ought to open first and close last (European Commission 2020a). As such, compliance with the fundamentals throughout the process

will be systematically tracked by the EU's monitoring instruments. As a DG NEAR official explained, "anti-corruption practices are mainstreamed into transport, environment, and other fields".[2] While already an inherent part of the fundamentals cluster, corruption is already understood as a cross-cutting issue that has to be tackled from a diversity of angles (European Commission 2020a).

The reversibility clause, too, feeds into the process of long-term systematic and credible monitoring. The clause allows the EC to halt or reverse the accession process at any stage "if countries fail to deliver or go back on reforms" (European Commission 2020b). The application of this tool will be highly conditional on "the extent to which fundamental reforms, in particular on the rule of law, are being implemented" (European Commission 2020a), a clear sign that the EC is rendering the monitoring of the rule of law more salient and consistent. The role of monitoring tools is all the more praised and enhanced in this regard, as any decision to activate the clause "should be informed by the annual assessment of the Commission", hence its tracking and monitoring instruments.

As part of the NEM's intensified focus on tracking of fundamental reforms, more financial resources would be allotted to their monitoring. Commissioner Várhelyi announced in late 2021 that the EC would dedicate 5 percent more in Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) III funding to the rule of law area, thus directly linking monetary allocations to systematic progress around the fundamentals (European Commission 2021b).[3] In terms of strengthening its monitoring activities, the EC is also expecting to engage in closer scrutiny as the €9-billion Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) for the Western Balkans begins its disbursements: "it is a big fund, and the EC is ensuring that a process of due diligence and all appropriate procedures are being undertaken. There are very strict procedures on transactions that are being carried out

---

2   Interview with a Policy Officer, European Commission DG NEAR. 28 March 2022.
3   Also, Ibid.

to prevent corruption".[4] In this regard, the official also added that the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) plays a key role in investigating and dismantling misuse of the EU budget in candidate and potential candidate countries.

The Communication acknowledges the inclusion of a diversity of actors in these activities, including the Stabilisation and Association Councils, Committees and Sub-committees as key bodies of monitoring. These bodies consist of representatives of both the EU and the applicant country, and are in charge of supervising the application and implementation of the countries' SAAs. Against this backdrop, the NEM visibly strengthens the convergence of these bodies for a more effective tracking of reforms: "the clusters will be aligned with Sub-committees, so that progress in the cluster can be monitored and specific measures of accelerated alignment taken under the SAA structures" (European Commission 2020a).

The Involvement of Member States

The NEM also awards important agency and scope in the process of monitoring to Member States, in order to endow the process with a "stronger political steer" (European Commission 2020a). The EC is open about its narrow relationship with Member States in the framework of accession, stressing that the 27 "are very much involved in the whole enlargement process".[5] In this sense, the Communication draws attention to the idea that Member States "will be invited to contribute more systematically to the accession process, including via monitoring on the ground through their experts, through direct contributions to the annual reports and through sectoral expertise" and that "Members States will also have the opportunity to review and monitor overall progress more regularly" (European Commission 2020a). The NEM's narrative leaves no place to doubt that the role of Member States, especially in terms of their monitoring-based inputs, is being deliberately enhanced—well in

4   Ibid.
5   Ibid.

line with the pledge that the process was to become increasingly political (European Commission 2020b).

The enhanced link between strengthened monitoring and the role of Member States responds to the increasingly challenging political environment, which the Communication takes stock of openly (European Commission 2020a). Arguably, the NEM has been regarded by some as a sign that the power and influence of some Member States might not only shine through via the EUCO, but also via the EC. Troncotă and Elbasani393, for example, note that the move represents "a shift away from the Commission as the major and, often, the decisive actor of enlargement, towards a diversified forum of actors involved in [...] ultimately deciding about the conduct of required reforms" (2021, 17).

As the Communication sets out, Member States are invited to contribute more systematically to the annual Enlargement Package reports, especially given some of their exclusive knowledge and resources. A high degree of cross-fertilisation is achieved between the EC and, particularly, Member States with a larger deployment on the field.[6] The Member States, usually through their embassies and missions on the ground, are routinely invited by DG NEAR to deliver contributions for the yearly reports, either directly to the EC or through the EU mission in the applicant country.[7] All Member States are equally targeted and encouraged to submit their remarks via the same email address and online drive. "Some Member States send their inputs, while some others do not," the DG NEAR official said. "Usually, those that are more eager to submit content are the most skeptical about the countries' accession prospects."[8]

This strengthened approach to monitoring is, however, not only reserved for the EC's interest—as Member States themselves can also make use of their monitoring capabilities for their own needs. The government of the Netherlands, for instance, established in 2014 a 'Regional Rule of Law Network' to

---

6   Ibid.
7   Ibid.; Also, Interview with an Officer at the Embassy of the Netherlands in Kosovo. 24 May 2022
8   Interview with a Policy Officer, European Commission DG NEAR. 28 March 2022.

develop "a broader and more in-depth view on the rule of law situation" in the Western Balkans through monitoring (Government of the Netherlands 2022), and to exchange views among monitoring and advisory staff posted across the region's embassies.[9]

As far as the involvement of the Member States—in this case, the Netherlands—is concerned, two main highlights stem from the Communication's open invitation to the capitals to "contribute more systematically [...] via monitoring on the ground". First, at an external level, the Netherlands gains a stronger legitimacy to push its recommendations into the yearly Enlargement Package reports—which, on occasions, the Dutch had called into question for considering them incomplete or inaccurate[10]—and can therefore contribute to influence the assessments. Its independently gathered information endows the EC's reports with external credibility and sends out a message of increased transparency. Second, at an internal level, and in parallel, the Netherlands' use of in-house monitoring contributes to the acquirement of an independent insight into the state of play in applicant countries, enabling it to exercise a more informed leverage over accession-related decisions—which the NEM is encouraging. Thus, for Member States with high stakes in the enlargement process and where infrastructure is plentiful, the NEM would be likely beneficial—both externally and internally—should they engage in independent monitoring.

As explored in the first dimension, the factor of reversibility in cases of backsliding or stagnation also plays a crucial role in the extent to which Member States are involved as per the NEM. Commissioner Várhelyi was frank in his remarks: "one of the most difficult issues when we were putting together the [NEM] package was that it is clear that [...] in our Member States there is a very strong call that we need to be able to also reverse the negotiations" (European Commission 2020b). As such, the Communication provides for a reversibility clause which, far from being exclusive to the EC, can also be triggered by the Member States: "in serious cases, the Commission can

9   Interview with an Officer at the Embassy of the Netherlands in Kosovo. 24 May 2022.
10   Interview with a Policy expert on EU and Western Balkans affairs. 4 May 2022.

make proposals at any time on its own or at the duly motivated request of a Member State in order to ensure a quick response to the situation" (European Commission 2020a).

The EC's ambition to enhance the contribution of Member States to the decision-making process does thus enable a more predictable and objective performance evaluation of the applicant countries. The Communication also states that conditions and benchmarks are to be complemented by the usage of "third party indicators [...] to provide Member States with the broadest possible base for their decisions" (European Commission 2020a). Such indicators did appear in the EC's Communication on Enlargement Policy of 2021, which includes a short sample of external indexes "related to the status of democracy, good governance and the rule of law" (European Commission 2021a).

Tracing the Policy Link Between Kosovo and the NEM

Kosovo has traditionally shown predisposition to compliance and alignment with EU standards, including in the rule of law, albeit faltering when it comes to implementation (European Commission 2021d). As a country that will be abiding by the NEM upon receiving candidate status, but also as part of the wider enlargement strategy, Kosovo provides a case to assess how the innovations enshrined in the NEM could potentially impact the country.

Waking Up the Same: Kosovo's Rule of Law Dilemma

The opening of the most recent stage in Kosovo's EU integration process came about in 2016, when two major events converged: on the one hand, the signing of the SAA between Kosovo and the EU; on the other hand, the EC's green light to visa liberalisation. Progress, however, seemed to reach a

standstill since. "If one had fallen in a comma in 2016 and woken up today, one would find that everything around Kosovo's accession to the EU looks exactly the same, as nothing has changed since then", said a former Kosovo government official at the (now dissolved) Ministry for European Integration.[11] While one of the interviewees highlighted the lack of political maturity and will showcased by Kosovo's governments throughout the years as the major factor hindering the country's overall progress, others were harsher on the EU as the key actor responsible for the current stalemate: "Kosovo has continuously worked to achieve the objectives within its integration process, as was the case with the fulfillment of the criteria on the roadmap for visa liberalisation—but the EU has not delivered."[12]

The current state of affairs in the area of the rule of law and anti-corruption in Kosovo reveals an array of shortcomings, including an inefficient judicial system and a lack of transparency and accountability from public institutions (Group for Legal and Political Studies 2021). Above all, reform implementation seems to remain as the utmost pending subject. As a government official at the Office of the Prime Minister put it, "the legal framework is good, as the EU keeps endorsing, but implementation is lacking".[13]

Kosovo has successfully established new laws in alignment with the EU standards, but frequent amendments to these laws tend to limit their effectiveness, and challenges still remain: "the judiciary is still not impartial, and we keep learning about cases of petty corruption involving doctors and police officers".[14] A large share of the government's initiatives are enshrined in its 'Strategy on Rule of Law 2021-2026', which maps out a set of objectives that span from expanding the judicial and prosecutorial system, fostering the access to justice, and strengthening the fight against corruption. Its relevance, the Strategy reads, "is particularly evident in relation to the EU accession process, which requires undertaking significant reforms in the implementation of

---

11 Interview with a Former official at the Ministry for European Integration of Kosovo. 21 March 2022.
12 Interview with a Member of the Kosovo Assembly. 13 April 2022.
13 Interview with an Official at the Office of the Prime Minister of Kosovo. 19 April 2022.
14 Ibid.

EU standards, in particular Chapters 23 and 24 of the *acquis*" (Government of Kosovo 2021).

Between Indifference and Oblivion

In the light of both Kosovo's overall progress along the EU integration road and the state of play in regard to the country's rule of law and corruption fields, the establishment of the NEM in early 2020 appeared as a trivial, rather unimportant event. Early accounts hinted at the high likelihood that, given its status as a potential candidate country, Kosovo's involvement vis-à-vis the NEM would be marginal or even non-existent (Esteso Pérez 2020). The NEM's innovations seemed to be intended for countries that were ready to start—or had started—accession negotiations (European Commission 2020b). This assumption resonates with insights from several interviewees. As per one account, "the EC presented the NEM to the government, and that was it. Nothing was made of it".[15] Another official stated: "there are no specific memories of the NEM being established and [...] the NEM has not affected the work of our office—nor that of the EU integration offices in the line ministries—in any particular way".[16] A third account regretted the unfortunate timing for the establishment of the NEM, right before the first days of the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe, leading to "a failure in its communication and in the way it was conveyed."[17]

The extent to which Kosovo has integrated the NEM into its process of alignment with EU standards is, in itself, a question worth exploring—not least taking into account the apparent disinterest and the overall indifference that generated its entry into force. The assumed focus of the NEM on candidate countries, rather than on potential candidates, added to the health emergency nation-wide, seemed to dilute any potential ownership of the new strategy by Kosovo's institutions.[18] When asked about any substantive transformations

15   Interview with a Former official at the Ministry for European Integration of Kosovo. 21 March 2022.
16   Interview with an Official at the Office of the Prime Minister of Kosovo. 19 April 2022.
17   Interview with an Advisor to the Government of Kosovo. 16 March 2022.
18   Ibid.

resulting from the NEM either recently or in the near future, there was a poor awareness overall among representatives of Kosovo's executive and legislative authorities. On the other hand, there is some evidence on the gradual mainstreaming of the NEM into the new EU-led policy frameworks in Kosovo. For instance, in ERA II, the first action pillar gathers the elements present in the NEM's cluster on the fundamentals; the IPA III framework, too, intends to be "closely linked to the revised enlargement methodology" through the thematic articulation of five programmatic windows which "mirror the clusters of negotiating chapters as per the revised enlargement methodology" (European Commission 2022).

How Does the NEM Develop Conditionality Towards Kosovo?

The NEM lays strong focus on the fundamentals, largely through the overarching and cross-cutting nature of the rule of law components. There is a certain convergence between, on the one hand, the NEM's enhancement of these criteria and, on the other hand, the policy awareness of Kosovo in the elaboration of its rule of law strategy (Government of Kosovo 2021). In it, as highlighted before, Kosovo shows an understanding that reforms in the Chapters 23 and 24 of the *acquis*, which belong to the cluster on fundamentals, must be granted significant prevalence. Therefore, in spite of the seemingly unchanged policy approach following the establishment of the NEM and the general unawareness among the authorities, Kosovo's rule of law strategy does ultimately enable the integration of the NEM's main area of focus into the policy-making process.

The enhanced monitoring framework that the NEM establishes can impact Kosovo in several fronts. Intuitively, a more effective monitoring process will reflect on the yearly Enlargement Package reports, which will include a better definition of the conditions set for Kosovo to progress. The potential activation of the reversibility clause, which could happen even before candidacy status, will also be contingent on consistent monitoring. As per the NEM, part of this monitoring will be conducted by the Stabilisation and Association Committee

and its Sub-committees. In particular, the Sub-committee on justice, freedom and security, which encompasses the work on the fundamentals and for which the government reports once a year,[19] could potentially see a request for enhanced reporting twice a year, or even quarterly, as a way to take better stock of the application and implementation of Kosovo's SAA in regard to the rule of law.

The bolstered role of Member States in the monitoring process, which strives to become more systematic, can lead to skeptical views being overrepresented in the reporting to the EC. It is likely that the more critical Member States will be more eager to call out the perceived shortcomings and limitations, especially in the rule of law and anti-corruption fields.[20] One interviewee drew particular attention to the higher risk of politicisation of Kosovo's EU accession bid, whereby certain Member States could enjoy an enhanced leverage via the withholding or suspension of IPA III funds in the case of perceived backsliding or stagnation.[21]

Conclusions

The EU's conditionality mechanisms for the strengthening of the rule of law and the fight against corruption have evolved almost on an *ad hoc* basis throughout the years, after the Union's first anti-corruption agenda made its appearance within its membership conditionality framework more than two decades ago. Since then, these mechanisms have been amended throughout the EU's history of relations with the candidate and potential candidate countries of the Western Balkans. Conditionality in the rule of law field has transformed in form and substance, keeping its merit-based "reinforcement by reward" approach but introducing new elements: benchmarks and thresholds, monitoring tools, and assistance packages, among

---

19 Interview with an Official at the Office of the Prime Minister of Kosovo. 19 April 2022.
20   Interview with a Policy Officer, European Commission DG NEAR. 28 March 2022.
21 Interview with an Official at the Office of the Prime Minister of Kosovo. 9 April 2022.

others. Throughout this years-long process, the irreversibility of reforms has become imperative for tangible progress, while the rule of law has been given an increasing role.

This paper has attempted to contribute to the literature on conditionality through the analysis of the NEM, framing it as a new (though subtle) phase of EU conditionality inherent to its constantly evolving nature. In the analysis, the paper has identified a set of relevant elements established in the framework of the NEM, which ultimately contribute to enhance the monitoring process and the involvement of Member States throughout the course of enlargement. In particular, it has noted the emphasis on the rule of law and the fight against corruption through the overarching cluster on the fundamentals and the increased reliance of the reversibility clause upon these criteria, the alignment of the clusters with EU bodies for a better tracking of reforms, the allocation of increased funding for the rule of law area, and the strengthening of measurable conditions through the inclusion of third party indicators in the Enlargement Package. In addition, the NEM has endowed Member States with strengthened capacities through enhanced monitoring and agenda-setting functions.

Kosovo's current status as a potential candidate for EU membership may not exempt the country from being approached through the lens of the NEM across its many available dimensions. In strong contrast to this idea, however, the local authorities that were interviewed showed an overall low awareness around the potential implications of the NEM in Kosovo. This can be due to a series of factors. First, to the somehow abstract nature of the NEM, which—quite deceptively—might not seem to provide any substantive change to the accession process. Furthermore, the establishment of the NEM right before the eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe pulverised the chances for any political momentum that could have been generated. In addition to this, the political controversy amid which the NEM was developed—namely the French ultimatum following the publication of the non-paper in 2019—could have affected the legitimacy underpinning its launch in early 2020.

The evolving nature of conditionality leaves Kosovo, as well as the other Western Balkan countries, before an open and uncertain road to the future. The advancements brought about by the NEM, while clear in reach and focus, will most likely be used to further put the current enlargement framework into question. The increased indulgence towards Member States, particularly at a time when the risk for politicisation remains high, paints a bleak picture. The EC, for its part, will be expected to strike a better balance between its relations with applicant countries, where EU membership prospects are sinking, and its allegiance to Member States, who will now have the upper hand and a broader playing field.

List of interviews

1. Advisor to the Government of Kosovo. 16 March 2022, Prishtina.

2. Former official at the Ministry for European Integration of Kosovo. 21 March 2022, online.

3. Policy Officer, European Commission DG NEAR. 28 March 2022, online.

4. Official at the Office of the Prime Minister of Kosovo. 9 April 2022, online.

5. Member of the Kosovo Assembly. 13 April 2022, online.

6. Official at the Office of the Prime Minister of Kosovo. 19 April 2022, online.

7. Policy expert on EU and Western Balkans affairs. 4 May 2022, online.

8. Officer at the Embassy of the Netherlands in Kosovo. 24 May 2022, online.

References

Anastasakis, O. 2008. The EU's political conditionality in the Western Balkans: towards a more pragmatic approach. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 8, no. 4, 365–377.

Benito, D. 2019. The European Union Criminal Policy against Corruption: Two Decades of Efforts. *Política Criminal*, 15, 520–548.

De Vries, C. and H. Solaz. 2017. The Electoral Consequences of Corruption. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 20, no. 1, 391–408.

Elbasani, A. 2019. Untangling Europeanization, Compliance and Reform: The Missing Link of Domestic Resistance and Accountability. In V. Vučković and V. Đorđević. Eds. *Balkanizing Europeanization: Fight against Corruption and Regional Relations in the Western Balkans*. Peter Lang.

Elbasani, A. and S. Šelo Šabić. 2017. Rule of law, corruption and democratic accountability in the course of EU enlargement, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 1–19.

Esteso Pérez, A. 2020. *Renewing hope? An analysis of the new EU enlargement methodology and its implications for Kosovo*. Group for Legal and Political Studies, Policy Analysis 1. Prishtina.

European Commission. 2003. *Communication on a comprehensive EU policy against corruption*. Brussels. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM: 2003:0317:FIN:EN:PDF [Accessed 25 May 2022].

European Commission. 2008. *Western Balkans: Enhancing the European perspective*. Brussels. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri= CELEX:52008DC0127&from=EN [Accessed 25 May 2022].

European Commission. 2018. *A credible enlargement perspective for an enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans*. Strasbourg. Available at https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites /default/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf [Accessed 24 May 2022].

European Commission. 2020a. *Enhancing the accession process - A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans*. Brussels. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/ enhancing-accession-process-credible-eu-perspective-western-balkans_en [Accessed 30 December 2021].

European Commission. 2020b. Remarks by Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi at the press conference on the revised enlargement methodology [online] 5 February. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/ commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_20_208 [Accessed 29 December 2021].

European Commission. 2021a. *2021 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy*. Strasbourg. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/2021-communication-eu-enlargement-policy_en [Accessed 5 June 2022].

European Commission. 2021b. Remarks by Commissioner Várhelyi in AFET to present the 2021 Enlargement Package [online] 19 October. Available at https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news/remarks-commissioner-varhelyi-afet-present-2021-enlargement-package-2021-10-19_en [Accessed 5 June 2022].

European Commission. 2021c. Strategy and Reports. [online] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/ neighbourhood-enlargement/enlargement-policy/strategy-and-reports_en [Accessed 5 June 2022].

European Commission. 2021d. Key findings of the 2021 Report on Kosovo. [online] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_21_5278 [Accessed 14 July 2022].

European Commission. 2022. *Working Programme Statements: Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III)*. Brussels. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/about_the_european_commission/eu_budget/programme_statement_-_ipa.pdf [Accessed 4 May 2022].

European Council. 1993. *European Council in Copenhagen, 21-22 June 1993. Conclusions of the Presidency*. Copenhagen: 1-46.

Freyburg, T. and S. Richter. 2010. National identity matters: the limited impact of EU political conditionality in the Western Balkans. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 17, no. 2, 263–281.

Glüpker, G. 2013. Effectiveness of EU Conditionality in the Western Balkans: Minority Rights and the Fight Against Corruption in Croatia and Macedonia. *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, 9, no. 2, 223–241.

Government of Kosovo. 2021. *Strategy on Rule of Law 2021-2026*. Available at: https://md.rks-gov.net/desk/inc/media/8EF86336-E250-4EA2-9780-D4B8F7E853B 5.pdf [Accessed 6 June 2022].

Government of the Netherlands. 2022. Regional Rule of Law Network. [online] Available at https://www.netherlandsworldwide.nl/countries/bosnia-and-herzegovina/about-us/regional-rule-of-law-network [Accessed 5 June 2022].

Group for Legal and Political Studies. 2021. *RoL Checklist for Kosovo: New Report, Old Crisis? First edition*. Group for Legal and Political Studies. Prishtina.

Hoxhaj, A. 2020a. *The EU Anti-Corruption Report: A Reflexive Governance Approach*. Abingdon, Routledge.

Hoxhaj, A. 2020b. The EU Rule of Law Initiative towards the Western Balkans. *Hague Journal on the Rule of Law*, 13, 143–172.

Kochenov, D. 2004. Behind the Copenhagen Façade. The Meaning and Structure of the Copenhagen Political Criterion of Democracy and the Rule of Law. *European Integration Online Papers*, 8, no. 10, 1–24.

Marktler, T. 2006. The Power of the Copenhagen criteria. *Croatian Yearbook of European Law & Policy*, 2, 343–363.

Mendelski, M. 2015. The EU's Pathological Power: The Failure of External Rule of Law Promotion in South Eastern Europe. *Southeastern Europe*, 39, 318–346.

Mendelski, M. 2016. Europeanization and the rule of law: towards a pathological turn. *Southeastern Europe*, 40, no. 3, 346–384.

Mungiu-Pippidi, A. 2011. A house of cards? Building the rule of law in the Balkans. In M. Abramowitz et al. *The Western Balkans and the EU: The Hour of Europe*. European Union Institute for Security Studies.

Nye, J. 1967. Corruption and Political Development: A Cost-Benefit Analysis. *The American Political Science Review*, 61, no. 2, 417–427.

Ognjanoska, L. 2021. Promoting the Rule of Law in the EU Enlargement Policy: A Twofold Challenge. *Croatian Yearbook of European Law & Policy*, 17, 237–277.

Peel, M. and V. Hopkins. 2019. France objects to North Macedonia and Albania EU accession talks. *Financial Times*, [online] 15 October. Available at: https://www.ft.com/content/fce9e9a0-ef36-11e9-ad1e-4367d8281195 [Accessed 27 February 2022].

Politico, 2019. Reforming the European Union accession process. [online] November. Available at: https://www.politico.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Enlargement-nonpaper.pdf [Accessed 27 February 2022].

Richter, S. and N. Wunsch. 2020. Money, power, glory: the linkages between EU conditionality and state capture in the Western Balkans, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 27, no. 1, 41–62.

Rogowski, R. 2010. *ALACs and the Concept of Citizen Participation in the Light of European Law*. Warwick School of Law Research Paper, 25.

Szarek-Mason, P. 2010. *The European Union's Fight against Corruption. The Evolving Policy Towards Member States and Candidate Countries*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Troncotă, M. B. and A. Elbasani. 2021. *The New Methodology of Enlargement and its Potential Effects on Kosovo: A Difficult Balance Between Politicization and Credibility?* Kosovo Foundation for Open Society, Policy Paper. Prishtina.

Vassileva, R. 2020. Threats to the Rule of Law: The Pitfalls of the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism. *European Public Law*, 26, no. 3, 741–768.

KOSOVO'S FOREIGN RELATIONS IN A VOLATILE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

ANA KRSTINOVSKA

China's Role on the Kosovo Issue: Between an Inactive Past and Indistinct Future

— ANA KRSTINOVSKA

Ana Krstinovska is the President of ESTIMA, North
Macedonia-based think tank and consultancy focusing
on China, the EU and the Western Balkans. Formerly
State Secretary for EU Affairs in the Government of North
Macedonia, First Secretary in the Macedonian Mission to the
EU in Brussels and Advisor for international cooperation to
the Prime Minister, she has extensive experience in public
policy, European and international affairs. Alumna from the
College of Europe in Bruges and Beijing Foreign Studies
University, she wrote her doctoral dissertation on China's
development assistance in the Western Balkans. Krstinovska
has authored over a dozen China-related publications
and received several international awards, including the
Civil Society Scholar Award 2021 by the Open Society
Foundations and the InBev-Baillet Latour Foundation's
Award for best Master thesis on China-EU relations in 2013.
She is also a member of the Permanent Strategic Foreign
Policy Council in the Macedonian Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

Abstract

The paper at hand aims to shed light on China's role in the issue of Kosovo's international recognition, by analysing Beijing's current position and the likelihood for China to become more active in the future in obstructing Kosovo's recognition efforts. To that effect, it adopts the neoclassical realist lens and examines the external and internal factors in foreign policy making which could shape China's future role. Due to the scarcity of scholarship in this direction, primary sources were mostly used to collect data (official documents and statements, media articles, semi-structured interviews) which was then analysed using qualitative research methods, namely the grounded theory.

According to the findings, under Xi Jinping's leadership, China has the power capabilities and willingness to be more engaged in global issues. It also has specific experience in using "transactional diplomacy" tools for the derecognition of Taiwan, which could be replicated to support Serbia. Moreover, China's domestic opinion is largely supportive of Serbia and negative towards Kosovo, one of the reasons being the perceived similarity of the situation with that of Taiwan. Nevertheless, to date there is no hard evidence that China has directly helped Serbia's derecognition efforts. Hence, with all the conditions being fulfilled according to neoclassical realism, a potential increase in China's engagement on the Kosovo issue will depend on the global landscape and China's relations with the West, notably the USA.

Keywords: PR China, Kosovo, derecognition, statehood, neoclassical realism

Introduction

In the past decade, especially since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Cooperation platform between China and Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC), the People's Republic of China's (hereafter PR China, PRC or China) presence in the Western Balkan (WB) region has been on the rise. While most countries have been targeted with various Chinese initiatives aimed to boost trade, investments, infrastructure projects and development cooperation, Kosovo has been left outside all the formal cooperation with China. The two sides never established diplomatic relations due to the fact that China, one of Serbia's staunchest allies, does not recognize Kosovo's independence. There is, however, a liaison office in Prishtina which officially operates under the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade.

While there has been some research on Russia's support to Serbia on the Kosovo issue, especially during the intensive derecognition campaign in the period 2017-2019 (Foley 2021, 16), to date there are few scholarly insights on whether China has undertaken any concrete efforts to block Kosovo's international recognition. Yet, in addition to being a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China has become one of the most powerful countries in the world and arguably possesses the means to exert influence on the Kosovo issue as well, should it choose to do so. In that context, this paper aims to shed light on PR China's opposition to Kosovo's recognition and acceptance in international organizations. It strives to examine the external and internal factors which could potentially drive a change in China's position and enhance its opposition against Kosovo among third countries on bilateral and multilateral basis.

While China's position on the Kosovo issue has largely been constant throughout the years, the changing geopolitical landscape and polarization between the "East" and the "West", alongside China's economic ascent and increased global clout, the interest in a number of complex issues, more assertive foreign policy, as well as the issue of Taiwan could arguably motivate China into engaging more on

the Kosovo issue in future. On the other hand, due to the war in Ukraine, Russia is likely to have less resources and diplomatic capital to devote to the protection of Serbia's national interest. Given the ever-closer Sino-Serbian relations, that could propel China into becoming Serbia's champion and main supporter in its opposition to Kosovo's statehood. Kosovo's bilateral (de)recognition process and its membership in international organizations are closely interlinked and mutually reinforcing: securing allies through the establishment of diplomatic relations could help Kosovo obtain the necessary votes to join various international organizations, while membership in them not only enhances legitimacy, but provides an opportunity and a setting for Kosovo's diplomats to persuade other countries' representatives and secure recognition. Hence, potential Chinese radicalization on the Kosovo issue could have detrimental impact on the country's ambition to strengthen its international recognition.

The duality of factors influencing a potential change in China's foreign policy towards Kosovo could be explained in line with the basic assumptions of neoclassical realism, a theory which builds upon Waltz's structural realism and attempts to address the related criticism (Ripsman, Taliaferro & Lobell 2016, 14). The behavior of individual states is shaped by both external and internal factors (Waltz 1979, 122). The scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and its relative power capabilities (Wohlforth 1995, 97). As their relative power rises, states will seek more influence abroad by using all the tools at their disposal to gain control and shape their external environment (Gilpin 1981, 10). Foreign policy choices are made by political leaders and elites, so it is their perceptions of material power capabilities that matter (Rose 1998). Specifically, under Xi's leadership, China instead of keeping a low profile, "strives for achievement" (Yan 2014, 154). But, leaders do not always have the freedom to extract national resources as they might wish, hence the analysis needs to take into account the link between the states and their societies, because it affects the proportion of resources to be allocated to foreign policy (Zakaria 1999, 23). In this context, China's domestic issues, such as Taiwan, as well as the overall Chinese public perception on Kosovo and Serbia should be factored in as well.

In the scarcity of previous scholarship on China's role in the Kosovo issue, data was collected mostly through a review of primary sources, including: official statements, conclusions and minutes from various international organizations meetings, focusing particularly on those where PR China plays a key role, such as the UN Security Council and those where Kosovo has attempted or has particular interest to join, such as UNESCO and Interpol; media articles; relevant official statements, strategic and policy documents issued by China, Serbia and Kosovo. In addition, nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of Kosovo's institutions, diplomats and scholars. In order to detect the pulse of China's public opinion on Kosovo, discourse analysis was conducted on the Chinese language websites of three leading state media outlets and two Chinese social media platforms. The grounded theory was used as the main research method to detect patterns in the collected data, leading to the main findings.

The next section elaborates on China's position on the Kosovo issue and the main arguments that China puts forward against Kosovo's statehood. Chapters 3 and 4 examine the external and internal factors which could potentially lead to a change towards a more "hawkish" China. Chapter 5 adopts a predictive analytical approach and attempts to assess different scenarios determining the likelihood for China's increased interference in the Kosovo issue. On the basis of the findings, the last chapter draws conclusions.

China's Position on the Kosovo Issue

On May 7, 1999, during NATO's Operation Allied Force which aimed to put an end to the Kosovo war, the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade was hit by a missile and three Chinese journalists were killed. The US Government described the incident as a mistake, conducted an internal investigation, apologized and paid compensation to the Chinese side (Pickering 1999).

However, Chinese authorities and people never accepted this explanation, nor overcame the tragic incident. Instead, the bombing has fueled China's anti-US sentiment, strengthened its support for Serbia on the Kosovo issue and contributed to rising Chinese nationalism (Xiao 2001). Beijing viewed the NATO operation as paving the way for "gunboat diplomacy" which could threaten China's immediate security environment and a potential precedent for US interference in the Taiwan issue (Gong 1999, 42). More than twenty years later, the unfortunate event continues to shape China's perceptions and to further strain the already tense Sino-American relations (Liu, Meng 2021).

Upon Kosovo's unilateral declaration of dependence China "expressed serious concerns" and ever since it has been advocating for a "mutually acceptable solution through negotiations" (Liu Jianchao 2008). According to China, this means that any solution should be developed in the framework of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 whose goal is to enable Kosovo "to enjoy substantial autonomy within the Federal Republic of Serbia" unless a new resolution is adopted (Zhang Jun 2009). In the same resolution, the UN Security Council establishes international civilian presence with a task, inter alia, to facilitate "a political process designed to determine Kosovo's future status" (UNSC Res.1244, 4).

Ever since, "China respects Serbia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, understands Serbia's legitimate concerns on the Kosovo issue, and appreciates Serbia's efforts to seek a political solution to the Kosovo issue" (People's Daily 2019). Chinese state media still describe Kosovo as "an autonomous province" over which Serbia has always maintained sovereignty (Xinhua 2015). However, beyond the official political rhetoric, the informed part of the Chinese intellectual elite is aware that "Kosovo's independence as a 'state' has become an irreversible fact" (Kong 2014).

External Factors Which May Lead to a Change in China's Position

China's Increased Global Power and Foreign Policy Ambitions

China's global rise has been first and foremost driven by its economic ascent. Since 1978 and in a period of four decades, the Chinese economy increased 37 times, at an average annual growth rate of 9,44%, while its share in the global economy rose from 2% to 16% (Yang 2020, 6). The economic opening to the world was based on a two-pronged strategy: China opened itself for foreign companies to invest and export in selected areas, while at the same time encouraged its own companies and banks to do business abroad, creating a high degree of interdependence with other countries.

Its global strategy has been implemented through specific regional and thematic strategies aimed to enhance the cooperation with targeted regions and countries, the best known being the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Launched in 2013 as a personal initiative of the then newly appointed Chinese president Xi Jinping, today the BRI includes around 150 countries on four continents and planned projects amounting to several trillion US dollars (Zhang Jizhong et al. 2020). The BRI has been generating radically different opinions in different countries: while some consider it an excellent opportunity to achieve their economic interests through the cooperation with China (Garcia-Herrero, Xu 2016), others see it as a source of power which China skillfully uses to push for changes in the world order and the already established spheres of influence (Chatzky, McBride 2020).

In line with neoclassical realist premises, alongside its global rise, China has been showing increasing interest to be included in issues and decision-making processes in all areas and geographic regions, including those seemingly outside its immediate (regional) zone of interest. Particularly under the lead-

ership of Xi Jinping, China has engaged in more active and sometimes even assertive foreign policy labelled "wolf warrior diplomacy", breaking away with the Chinese traditional philosophy of Deng Xiaoping's time to keep low profile, hide its ability and bide its time (Landale 2020).

Until recently, China perceived Kosovo as a "European issue" allowing for the mediation to be conducted by the EU and declaring its readiness to accept a solution which would be acceptable for both sides. According to a former high-ranking official in Kosovo's Government, Prishtina had established a certain "modus operandi" with Beijing and China's position in various fora was not perceived as inimical. Unlike Russia, it refrained from overtly providing specific backing to Serbia by lobbying third countries into derecognizing Kosovo. Today, however, Kosovo seems to have become a bargaining chip for Beijing on the Taiwan issue[1] and it may become a bargaining chip in future Chinese relations with the USA or the EU more broadly.[2] At the same time, Kosovo has not made any specific attempts to approach China and establish informal exchange which, over time and on the long run, could potentially influence its position. One explanation could be that Kosovo's government considered it extremely difficult to achieve any meaningful progress on this front. Moreover, it has never built the expertise, nor has it devoted any particular resources or strategic thinking to understand and deal with China.[3]

"Transactional Diplomacy" Toolkit

China undoubtedly has the means to convince other countries to do as told in the spirit of 'transactional diplomacy', in order to control and shape its external environment. It has furthermore extensive experience in using such tactics which contributed to Beijing taking over Taipei's seat as official Chinese representative in the UN in 1971, and more recently to the successful derecog-

---

1   Muhamet Brajshori. Diplomat and former ambassador of Kosovo to Thailand. Personal interview, March 14, 2022, Prishtina.
2   Anastas Vangeli. University of Ljubljana Business School. Personal interview. May 25, 2022, Skopje.
3   Muhamet Brajshori, personal interview.

nition campaign against Taiwan since 2016, when 9 countries switched their allegiance from the Republic of China (Taiwan) to the People's Republic of China (Beijing). In addition to the outright 'checkbook diplomacy', the 'carrots"' used by Beijing are mostly economic and include development aid in the form of preferential loans and donations, direct investments, project funding through different modalities, especially in the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, as well as market access. Moreover, for many of these countries it also made logical sense to establish closer ties with the PRC as a more powerful political and economic partner (Shattuck 2020, 347).

In addition to the 'carrots', although more rarely, China has not shied away to use 'sticks'. The most notable case was China's veto in the UN Security Council on the extension of the UN Preventative Deployment Mission (UN-PREDEP) in the Republic of Macedonia (today North Macedonia) in February 1999, one month after Skopje established diplomatic ties with Taiwan (Lewis 1999), which partially contributed to an internal armed conflict in 2001. China also vetoed a peacekeeping mission in Guatemala, Taiwan's ally, in 1997 and allowed the deployment only after Guatemala sent a written assurance that it will not support Taiwan's bid to join the UN (Feltman 2020, 3). More recently, following the opening of a representative office under the name of Taiwan (instead of Taipei, as is the usual practice) in Vilnius, Lithuania faced a broad range of punitive economic measures imposed by Beijing (Macikenaite 2021).

Small countries and those in need of foreign investment, aid or trade partners "are known to rent their ability to recognize to the highest bidder" (Foley 2021, 17). Most of the countries that proved to be susceptible to the Chinese tactics with regard to Taiwan's derecognition display the same characteristics of those that revoked their recognition of Kosovo since 2013.[4] They are all African, Pacific, Latin American or Caribbean countries with very limited trade

---

4   Countries derecognizing Taiwan since 2016: Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Dominican Republic, Burkina Faso, El Salvador, Panama, Sao Tome and Principe, Nicaragua, the Gambia; countries derecognizing Kosovo since 2013: Sao Tome and Principe, Solomon Islands, Surinam, Burundi, Liberia, Papua New Guinea, Lesotho, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Comoros, Madagascar, Palau, CAR, Togo, Ghana, Nauru, Sierra Leone, according to Serbian government sources. http://www.kim.gov.rs/lat/np101.php

or other interests in the cooperation with Kosovo or Taiwan. Most of them are small and poor, in need of development and investment capital and with slim chances of obtaining access to finance on the open market. Many of them also display autocratic tendencies and are governed by authoritarian leaders. Some of them were also sanctioned by the West and in search of new economic partners and opportunities (Daniel, Jorgić 2021). In such a context, the PRC with its policy of non-interference in other countries internal affairs, business-driven attitude and drive to satisfy those countries needs in exchange for their support towards its One-China policy would seem a logical choice.

Serbia counts on China's help

Serbia is considered to be one of China's closest allies in Europe and their friendship is often described as 'iron-clad' (Chinese Foreign Ministry 2021). Since 2009, when the two countries signed a strategic partnership agreement and as Serbia had declared military neutrality, China has become one of the four pillars in Serbia's foreign policy (Tanjug 2009). The ever-closer relationship has gradually transformed into a 'comprehensive strategic partnership' in 2016 during President Xi Jinping visit to Belgrade, the only visit of a Chinese president to the broader Western Balkan region in the past 30 years or since the end of the Cold War. The Kosovo issue constitutes a separate point in the partnership statement where the Chinese side reaffirms its respect for Serbia's sovereignty and territorial integrity (Joint Statement 2009).

In all international fora where the Kosovo issue has been discussed, China has always voted in Serbia's favor and supported its position. It has used its status of a permanent member of the UN Security Council to help Serbia build a stronger position in the negotiations with Kosovo (Dimitrijević 2018, 56). Some of the specific examples include the written advisory opinion in relation to the case of the legality of Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence before the International Court of Justice, as well as the support for the initiative to launch an international investigation into the alleged organ trafficking during and after the Kosovo war (Stojadinović, Rašković-Talović 2018, 5).

In return, Serbia has been demonstrating its allegiance to China by becoming its 'strategic hub' in Europe (Čačić 2021), including through promoting and facilitating China's increased presence in the region. It has been supporting China's positions in international organizations (for instance on the situation in Xinjiang) and privileging the cooperation with Chinese banks and contractors for the implementation of large infrastructure projects and purchasing Chinese weapons, all of which has raised concerns among Serbia's Western partners, namely the EU and the US. The price that Serbian citizens pay in the cooperation with China often comes in the form of exuberant costs of infrastructure projects, corruptive practices and environmental damage.[5]

According to a former high-level official in Kosovo's government, with the unprecedented increase in the number and value of Chinese projects and investments in Serbia, renewed radicalization in China's discourse vis-à-vis Kosovo could be noticed. At the same time, the Western allies have been wary not to put too much pressure on Serbia out of fear not to alienate it from the Western camp and push it further under Russia's and China's influence.[6] In such a context, given that Kosovo's fate is not of any direct strategic interest for China, China's leverage on the Kosovo issue could be also perceived as a tool for China to maintain influence over Serbia and its relationship with the West.[7]

As Sino-Serbian bilateral relations became more intensive and the cooperation spilled over in all areas, President Vučić started to appeal more openly to Chinese authorities requesting their help on the Kosovo issue (Ozturk 2018). Kosovo's former Prime Minister Haradinaj even quoted China's lack of support as the main reason for withdrawing the application to join Interpol in 2019 (Ahmeti 2019). According to former Yugoslav foreign minister, Živadin Jovanović, China's behavior clearly demonstrates its increasing willingness to engage in issues which cannot be resolved by the USA, such as Republika Srpska or the protection of Serbia's territorial integrity (Spalović 2021).

---

5   Naim Leo Beširi. Executive Director of the Institute for European Affairs in Belgrade. Online interview, May 31, 2022.
6   Leon Malazogu. Former Ambassador of Kosovo to Japan. Online interview, April 22, 2022.
7   Ibid.

Belgrade expresses deep satisfaction to see China's diplomatic ascent and expects it to join hands with Russia and adopt a more proactive attitude in the UN Security Council, but also to specifically support the derecognition campaign against Kosovo (Spalović 2021).

Moreover, China's support may be necessary to Serbia more than ever since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The ongoing war may use up most of Russia's resources and attention and severely undermines its diplomatic capital. Moreover, recent comparisons of possible future scenarios for the Crimea and Kosovo have additionally rung an alarm in Belgrade (Lieven 2022).

But, according to some China experts, the 'steel friendship' argument should not be overplayed as there are clear limitations to how committed the two sides are to each other, one example being the Washington Agreement signed by President Vučić in the White House, which included a provision on the exclusion of Chinese vendors from the 5G connectivity network in Serbia.[8] To China it may also appear that the Serbian position itself is not fully clear, as Serbia does not treat Kosovo like China treats Taiwan. Thus, it is questionable to which extent China can invest itself in the Kosovo issue, knowing that Belgrade may make various compromises. In fact, the way Belgrade has treated the Kosovo issue so far has been hurting the Chinese normative claim.[9]

Moreover, China's increased engagement on bilateral basis to support Serbia secure further derecognitions would mean that China tries to influence third countries' foreign policy and would be in contradiction of its non-interference principle. Increased involvement through the UN would also mean breaking away with its traditional policies and practices where it has thus far adopted a neutral stance towards resolutions that it does not essentially agree with, preferred abstention over veto and adopted a rather passive approach in drafting and sponsoring resolutions which do not concern China directly (Shichor 2006).

---

8 Anastas Vangeli, personal interview.
9 Ibid.

But, further establishing a closer link between the issue of Kosovo and China's actual concerns, President Vučić's recent statements in the context of Kosovo's potential bid to join NATO advance the narrative that it is not Kosovo itself, but the USA which plans and pushes forward this agenda (Novosti 2022). His statements imply a plea for China to stand up to the USA and open a new front in order to support Serbia, according to his words, "in the protection of international law and the UN Charter".

Chinese Internal Factors

Perceptions and Domestic Public Opinion

In light of the increasing Sino-American tensions, appeals for China to be more active on the Kosovo issue resonate well with the Chinese audience, both the political elites and the general public. One of the leading Chinese foreign policy think tanks points out that "on major international issues such as Kosovo, China and Russia have conducted good cooperation and maintained close consultations in order to strengthen the global anti-hegemony forces, maintain world peace and security" (Liu Chang 2018). In recent years, Chinese political commentators have also started to flirt with the idea that China should play a more prominent role in the Kosovo issue. Their reasoning is also driven by the ideas that China should stand up to the West, namely the USA and support Serbia as its "natural ally" (Long 2021). They advocate for a proactive approach, beyond China's role in the UN Security Council, targeting those countries which allegedly recognized Kosovo because of the American lobbying, but received nothing from the USA in return. This approach with derecognition as the ultimate goal should be based on the attractiveness of China's market and China's potential to help those countries' post-pandemic economic recovery (Yuan 2021).

In comparison to Serbia and the overwhelmingly positive perception it enjoys in China, the portrayal of Kosovo in Chinese official media is scarce in terms of frequency and neutral to negative in terms of tone.[10] In addition to official statements and positions on the Kosovo issue in the UN and sports news which dominate the media space, there are occasional references to Kosovo being an American ally (in the context of the 5G issue, the boycott of the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing and the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade); news pieces on Kosovo's "unlawful detention of Russian citizens"; Kosovo's harmful actions against Serbia (licence plates, tariffs); the indictment of Hashim Thaçi by the International Court of Justice; the attack of a Dusseldorf train by a Kosovo national (making a link with extremism and terrorism); emigration, Kosovo's occasional internal protests and the creation of Kosovo's armed forces. Chinese social media and platforms allowing for user-generated content display an even more negative perception of Kosovo and establish a direct equation with the Taiwan issue.[11]

This situation is a direct outcome of the nexus between Chinese authorities, media and public perception. In the highly controlled Chinese information space, the circulation of information into and within the country is allowed and shaped by Chinese state censors. The main information channels are state owned media outlets which disseminate the Chinese Government / Chinese Communist Party official positions, thus limiting the scope of information received by the Chinese citizens and shaping their perceptions which, in turn influence policy priorities and actions. Hence, the Chinese citizens have very limited options to receive complete and unbiased information on Kosovo and the public support goes largely in favor of strengthening the relationship with Serbia.

---

10   The data on the media portrayal was collected by the author using a media discourse analysis of the three most popular media outlets in China – Xinhua, CCTV and the People's Daily. The analysis covered the Chinese versions of their websites during the period 2019-2022 (the period available through their search engines).
11   The two most widely used Chinese social media networks were analysed: Baidu: http://g9.baidu.com/sf/vsearch?p-d=realtime_ugc&word=%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E4%B8%BA%E4%BD%95%E4%B8%8D%E6%89%BF%E8%AE%A4%E7%A7%91%E7%B4%A2%E6%B2%83&tn=vsearch&sa=vs_ala_ry_m&lid=9915252713620553196&ms=1&atn=list;
Weibo : https://s.weibo.com/weibo?q=%E7%A7%91%E7%B4%A2%E6%B2%83

The Issue of Taiwan

The internal factors behind China's opposition to Kosovo's recognition are related to its own, domestic issues, namely Chinese regions with secessionist movements and/or recurrent tensions, such as Tibet, Hong Kong, Xinjiang and especially Taiwan. For China, Taiwan has arguably been the most important and complicated strategic issue in the past several decades. Beijing has always maintained the One-China policy which considers Taiwan to be a part of the People's Republic and has put forward that there should and will be a reunification with the island, without however mentioning a specific time frame. On the other hand, depending on the political party in power, Taipei has been oscillating between the status-quo and the pro-independence voices, falling short to declare independence out of fear of China's retaliation and potential military invasion. Hence, for China, Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence and subsequent recognition by more than half of the UN members opened a Pandora box and raised concerns that Taiwan may follow down the same path, albeit the historical, cultural and (geo)political background in the two cases is largely different (Kasim 2017, 569).

While Taiwan recognized Kosovo's independence immediately after the unilateral declaration in February 2008, Kosovo was extremely wary and reluctant to maintain even informal relations with Taiwan. The advice that Kosovo authorities received from their Western partners and which they have respected ever since was to stick to Beijing's One-China policy.[12] According to some Kosovo diplomats, the country's attitude towards Taiwan was even too cautious in the sense that economic relations and other types of informal (not political) exchanges, which could have been beneficial to Kosovo and would not have raised eyebrows in Beijing, have been ruled out as well.[13] This can be ascribed to the fact that for Kosovo the stakes in relation to China's attitude are much higher and it did not want to risk provoking China to step into Russia's shoes. Nevertheless, the latest elections in Kosovo in 2021 and the victory of

12   Leon Malazogu, personal interview.
13   Leon Malazogu; Muhamet Brajshori, personal interviews.

a new parliamentary majority could signal potential changes in this policy. In December 2021, parliamentary friendship groups were established in both the Taiwanese and the Kosovo assembly with the goal "to increase parliamentary exchanges, improve mutual understanding between the people of Taiwan and Kosovo, and jointly expand the two countries' international space" (Su, Kao 2021).

Is it Possible to Keep a Dragon on a Leash?

Thus far there is no hard evidence that China has gone out of its way to lobby, encourage or pressure third countries to support Serbia on the Kosovo issue. Recent domestic voices for China to adopt a more proactive stance have not reflected anti-Kosovo or pro-Serbia sentiments as much as they have reflected anti-Western and especially anti-US sentiments. Hence, scenarios for China's future role on the Kosovo issue should be examined under the light of the broader geopolitical developments and not merely in the framework of China – Serbia – Kosovo relations.

China's role on the Kosovo issue will largely depend on the relations between Beijing and Washington. If the two sides manage to set boundaries to their disagreements and start looking for ways to overcome them, it is possible that at some point they may discuss the Kosovo issue and strike a bargain in relation to other open issues of mutual and global interest. Should the Sino-American tensions continue to spill over on seemingly unrelated issues (the war in Ukraine being the most notable example), and as Kosovo will certainly remain one of the closest US supporters in Europe, at some point it may find itself as 'collateral damage' of China's hostility.

Admittedly, Kosovo's fate will depend on Serbia's relationship both with China and the West. As long as Serbia maintains its policy of courting China,

it will be able to receive China's good will and continue to exploit China's leverage on the Kosovo issue for domestic political reasons. This is further enhanced by Serbia's skillful balancing with the West, which has made over the years Kosovo's allies increasingly wary not to severe their relations with Serbia if they push too hard on the Kosovo issue. Thus, only Serbia's firmer anchoring in the Western camp could possibly deprive it of China's support on the Kosovo issue and lead to a solution to the bilateral dispute.

As China faces increasing challenges on Taiwan, it may become even more assertive on Kosovo as a matter of principle. The mere establishment of official relations between Kosovo and Taiwan could suffice to significantly tip the balance and make China support Serbia with deeds and not only words. Hence, this way forward could signal that Kosovo's authorities have completely abandoned the hope that China may allow its further international recognition, opt for the more achievable benefits in the cooperation with Taiwan and accept the related risks stemming from China's retaliation.

The other direction would be to try and engage informally with China, bilaterally through its liaison office in Prishtina, multilaterally in organizations where both countries are members and through intermediaries – first and foremost Albania. However, given the ever-dwindling Chinese FDI in Albania and the low public support for increased engagement with China, especially among the political elites, at present the feasibility of this engagement by proxy may look bleak.[14] Given its very close relationship with Kosovo, Turkey could also play a role, although its position on the Uyghur issue is often frowned upon by China (Akcay 2021).

Moreover, additional efforts would be needed in terms of alternative diplomatic strategies, such as strengthened people-to-people ties, cultural and sports diplomacy as means to start changing the Chinese domestic perception on Kosovo and build public support for a foreign policy change on

---

14   Ardian Hackaj. Head of research at the Cooperation and Development Institute, Tirana. Online interview. May 30, 2022

the long run. Given China's preference for economic diplomacy, it would be certainly interested in finding a way to economically engage in Kosovo.[15] Nevertheless, given Kosovo's strong pro-Western stance, it is unclear to which extent it would be willing to accept China's involvement as potential bidder in areas such as public procurements or investments. Hence, one possible avenue could be to identify out-of-the-box regional cooperation opportunities where Serbia, Albania and Kosovo (and other Western Balkan countries) would have a joint interest to work together and where China may have agency.[16]

Should Kosovo choose Taiwan instead of China, it will certainly strengthen the ties with the like-minded liberal democracies, as Taiwan is on a spree to renew and refresh its relationship with a number of countries in Europe and across the world. However, as seen in the Lithuanian example, being outside the EU, NATO and other similar alliances, Kosovo will not be able to count on other countries to appease the tensions with China and help it to mitigate the potentially negative consequences of violating the One-China policy. In such a scenario, it is likely that many of its allies will also not be willing to further deteriorate their relationship with China (or Serbia) to "save" Kosovo.

On the other hand, a scenario where Kosovo would be the victim of an "unprovoked" China could lead to further escalation in the relations between China and the West, namely the USA. That is likely to be considered by Kosovo's allies as a Chinese provocation and may encourage them to think of a joint response. Namely, similarly to the US "recognition shield" for Taiwan in the form of the TAIPEI Act from 2019, Kosovo's allies could institute a practice of deteriorating the relationship with countries that will derecognize Kosovo and offering incentives to those that will recognize its independence.

---

15 Anastas Vangeli, personal interview.
16 Ardian Hackaj, personal interview.

Conclusions

All the premises of the neoclassical realism suggest that China is likely to strive for a greater role on the Kosovo issue. First, following several decades of constant economic ascent, at present China possesses the means and ability to influence third countries. To that effect, it has at its disposal a number of tools, the most prominent being economic incentives, such as market access, development assistance, investments, funding for infrastructure projects etc. Second, under Xi Jinping's leadership and with the launch of the BRI it has also a clear ambition to engage in more complex global issues and be more present outside its immediate sphere of influence. Third, Serbia is seen by the Chinese people and political elites as one of China's closest allies, hence there is strong public support for the government to back Serbia's cause in relation to the Kosovo issue. Fourth, there is an immediate and two-fold link between Kosovo and the Taiwan issue. On one hand, China believes that Kosovo's recognition could give wind in the back to Taiwan's pro-independence forces. On the other hand, it closely monitors other countries', including Kosovo's, relations with Taiwan as a factor which shapes China's foreign policy towards those countries.

Hence, should China decide to engage more vigorously in Serbia's support, it could have even more significant negative ramifications for Kosovo compared to previous Russian involvement. China's global clout and demonstrated influence in a number of developing and least developed countries, given its ability to satisfy their governments' needs, could be detrimental to the number of countries recognizing Kosovo and to its prospects to join international organizations. However, to date China has not overtly pushed for Kosovo's derecognition or lobbied third countries in Serbia's favor. This could be explained with the fact that Kosovo does not have any strategic significance for China. Instead, China's position is shaped by Kosovo's proximity to the USA, China's anti-US sentiments and its internal issues (first and foremost Taiwan). China's role on the Kosovo issue, and potential changes thereof, will not only depend on Kosovo or Serbia, but are largely contingent upon

the global geopolitical landscape. Its potentially hawkish attitude on Kosovo would have the effect of further antagonizing the West, namely the US and would need to be driven by more significant motivations than by the desire to do Serbia a favor. Thus, in a number of scenarios with a chess-like complexity, Kosovar authorities would need to examine all the options at the table and make informed foreign policy choices.

List of Interviews

The author wishes to express her sincere gratitude to all the interviewees for their time and invaluable insights.

- Beshiri, Naim Leo. Executive Director of the Institute for European Affairs in Belgrade. Online interview, May 31, 2022.

- Brajshori, Muhamet. Diplomat and former ambassador of Kosovo to Thailand. Personal interview, March 14, 2022, Prishtina.

- Former high-level official in Kosovo's government. Written interview, March 7, 2022.

- Hackaj, Ardian. Head of research at the Cooperation and Development Institute, Tirana. Online interview. May 30, 2022

- High-level official in Kosovo's Government. Personal interview. March 14, 2022, Prishtina.

- Ilazi, Ramadan. Head of research at the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies, Prishtina. Personal interview. March 14, 2022, Prishtina.

- Malazogu, Leon. Former Ambassador of Kosovo to Japan. Online interview, April 22, 2022.

- Pula, Shqiprim. Political analyst. Personal interview. March 11, 2022, Prishtina.

- Vangeli, Anastas. University of Ljubljana Business School. Personal interview. May 25, 2022, Skopje.

References

Ahmeti, A. 2019. Kosovo Withdraws Application to Join Interpol. *Balkan Insight.* October 15. https://balkaninsight.com/2019/10/15/kosovo-withdraws-application-to-join-interpol/

Akcay, N. 2021. Amid tensions with Turkey, China is putting the Kurdish issue in play. *The Diplomat*. December 4. https://thediplomat.com/2021/12/amid-tensions-with-turkey-china-is-putting-the-kurdish-issue-in-play/

Čačić, D. 2021. Serbia's emergence as China's new strategic hub. *Euractiv Bulgaria*. August 19. https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/opinion/serbias-emergence-as-chinas-new-strategic-hub/

Chatzky, A. and J. McBride. 2020. China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative. New York: Council on Foreign Relations. https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative

China, Serbia sign strategic cooperation deal. 2009. *Tanjug.* August 20. https://web.archive.org/web/20090822081808/http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics-article.php?yyyy=2009&mm=08&dd=20&nav_id=61263

Daniel, J.F. and D. Jorgić. 2021. After Nicaragua flips, U.S. sanctions seen pushing Central America towards China. *Reuters*. December 12. https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/after-nicaragua-flips-us-sanctions-seen-pushing-central-america-towards-china-2021-12-12/

Dimitrijević, D. 2018. The relations of Serbia and the People's Republic of China at the beginning of the 21st century [in Serbian]. *International problems*, LXX(1), 56. Belgrade: National library of Serbia. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324064440_ODNOSI_SRBIJE_I_KINE_NA_POCETKU_21_VEKA_THE_RELATIONS_OF_SERBIA_AND_THE_PEOPLE'S_REPUBLIC_OF_CHINA_AT_THE_BEGINNING_OF_THE_21ST_CENTURY

Feltman, J. 2020. China's Expanding Influence at the United Nations — and how the United States should react. Washington DC: Brookings publications. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/FP_20200914_china_united_nations_feltman.pdf

Fareed, Z. 1999. From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Foley, L. 2021. Successful Stalemate: How Serbia's derecognition campaign stymied Kosovo's march toward universal recognition. Prishtina: Democracy for Development Institute. https://d4d-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Succesful-Stalemate_ENG.pdf

Garcia-Herrero, A. and J. Xu. 2016. What does China's 'belt and road initiative' mean for EU trade? Brussels: Bruegel. https://www.bruegel.org/2016/09/what-does-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-mean-for-eu-trade/

Gilpin, R. 1981. War and Change in World Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/war-and-change-in-world-politics/3A41732AFF-3F08687A9FEDA2AF1E6A5D

Gong, G. 1999. China-Taiwan Relations: The Shadow of Kosovo Looms Large. In: *Comparative connections: East Asian bilateral relations.* Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). http://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/media/csis/pubs/9901qchina_taiwan.pdf

Jia, W. and H. Chang. 2019. The Chinese representative called on the international community to play a constructive role in promoting a proper settlement of the Kosovo issue [in Chinese]. *People's Daily Online.* February 10. http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2019/0210/c1002-30616276.html

Jie, L. 2021. Showdown time? China will intervene in the Kosovo issue! 10 countries to withdraw recognition of Kosovo's independence [in Chinese]. *Wireless Quanzhou.* August 7. https://www.163.com/dy/article/GGQLK6E80550B02J.html

Joint Statement between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Serbia on Establishing Strategic Partnership. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/t581207.shtml

Kasim, K. and E. Eren 2017. Taiwan-Cyprus-Kosovo Cases: Differences and Similarities. *Journal of Administrative Sciences,* vol.15. 553-572. http://ybd.dergi.comu.edu.tr/dosyalar/Ybd/taiwan-cyprus-kosovo-cases-differences-and-similarities.pdf

Kong, H. 2014. Torn Land - Impressions of Kosovo Expedition [in Chinese]. *People's Daily.* August 11. http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/0811/c68742-25444201.html

Landale, J. 2020. Coronavirus: China's new army of tough-talking diplomats. *BBC News.* May 13. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-52562549

Lewis, P. 1999. Continuation of U.N. force in Macedonia faces a Chinese veto. *New York Times.* February 25. https://www.nytimes.com/1999/02/25/world/continuation-of-un-force-in-macedonia-faces-a-chinese-veto.html

Lieven, A. 2022. It's time to ask: what would a Ukraine-Russia peace deal look like? *The Guardian.* March 4. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/04/what-would-ukraine-russia-peace-deal-look-like

Liu, C. 2018. Analysis of the Decision-making Mechanism and Process of China's Diplomatic Crisis - Taking the "Bombing of the Pavilion" in 1999 as an Example [in Chinese]. Beijing: China Institute of International Studies. https://www.ciis.org.cn/yjcg/xslw/202007/t20200710_1116.html

Liu, C. and Xiangjun Meng. 2021. Twenty-two years later, China has moved forward with determination, but it will never forget that day [in Chinese]. *China News.* May 8. https://www.chinanews.com.cn/gj/2021-05-08/9472543.shtml

Liu, J. 2008. Foreign Ministry Spokesperson's Remarks on Kosovo's Declaration of Independence and Darfur [in Chinese]. Chinese central government website. http://www.gov.cn.qing-cdn.com/xwfb/2008-02/19/content_893912.htm

Lu, Q. 2018. The Chinese representative hopes to resolve the Kosovo issue through dialogue and negotiation. *Xinhua News Agency*. May 15. http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2018-05/15/content_5291146.htm

Macikenaite, V. 2021. China Pulls the Economic Coercion Card Against Lithuania. China Observers in Central and Eastern Europe - CHOICE. Prague: Association for International Relations (AMO). https://chinaobservers.eu/china-pulls-the-economic-coercion-card-against-lithuania/

Ozturk, T. 2018. Serbia seeks help from China on Kosovo issue. *Anadolu Agency*. November 23. https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/serbia-seeks-help-from-china-on-kosovo-issue/1319537

Pickering, T. (US Under Secretary of State) 1999. Oral presentation to the Chinese Government regarding the accidental bombing of the P.R.C. Embassy in Belgrade. US State Department's archive. https://1997-2001.state.gov/policy_remarks/1999/990617_pickering_emb.html

Ripsman, N., Taliaferro, J. and S.E. Lobell 2016. Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rose, G. 1998. Review: Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy. In: *World Politics*, vol.51. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25054068

Shattuck, T. J. 2020. The Race to Zero: China's Poaching of Taiwan's Diplomatic Allies. Elsevier Public Health Emergency Collection. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7102519/

Shichor, Y. 2006. China's Voting Behavior in the UN Security Council. China Brief Volume 6 Issue 18. Washington DC: The Jamestown Foundation. https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-voting-behavior-in-the-un-security-council-3/?__cf_chl_f_tk=FCM8RB0zMNrK_Ct0KBCS-rAQFLIZpbfGm8ud345JuQh0-1642252824-0-gaNycGzNCL0

Spalović, D. 2021. Ten countries are ready to withdraw the recognition of Kosovo [in Serbian]. *Politika*. August 2. https://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/484714/Deset-zemalja-spremno-da-povuce-priznanje-Kosova

Stojadinović, M. and V. Rašković-Talović. 2018. Serbia and China: The Geopolitical and Economic Importance of Mutual Cooperation for Serbia. Budapest: China-CEE Institute. https://china-cee.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Work_paper-201839-Misa-Stojadinovic-Violeta-Raskovic-Talovic.pdf

Su, J. and E. Kao. 2021. Taiwan, Kosovo parliamentary groups formed to boost bilateral ties. *Focus Taiwan CNA English News*. December 21. https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202112210007

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244. June 10, 1999. https://unmik.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/old_dnn/Res1244ENG.pdf

Vučić disclosed the intentions of the Albanian lobbyists from Kosovo and Metohija: here's what's behind the request for immediate NATO membership. 2022. *Novosti*. February 28. https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/politika/1090802/najnovije-vesti-albanija-kosovo-metohija-na-to-aleksandar-vucic

Wohlforth C.W. 1995. Realism and the End of the Cold War. In: *International Security*, vol.19 No.3. Boston: MIT Press. https://edisciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/364799/mod_resource/content/1/wohlforth_1995.pdf

Xi Jinping Speaks with Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić on the Phone. 2021. Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Kingdom of Thailand. https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/ceth//eng/zgyw/t1886935.htm

Xiao, G. 2001. The Kosovo Crisis and Chinese Nationalism in the 21st Century [in Chinese]. In: *Contemporary Chinese Studies*. The Chinese University of Hong Kong. http://ww2.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/PaperCollection/Details.aspx?id=936

Yan, X. 2014. From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement. In: *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, vol 7:2. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 153-184. https://academic.oup.com/cjip/article/7/2/153/438673

Yang, Y. 2020, China's Economic Growth in Retrospect. In: *China 2049: Economic Challenges of a Rising Global Power*. Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/9780815738053_ch1.pdf

Zhang, J. 2009. Written Statement of the People's Republic of China to the International Court of Justice on the Issue of Kosovo. https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/141/15611.pdf

Zhang, J. et al. 2020. The Belt and Road Initiative 2020 Survey – A more sustainable road to growth? International Finance Forum and Central Banking. https://www.centralbanking.com/central-banks/economics/4737966/the-belt-and-road-initiative-2020-survey-a-more-sustainable-road-to-growth

Zhou, J. 2021. To "issue a certificate" to China? 10 countries changed course and refused to follow the United States to recognize "Kosovo" [in Chinese]. *NetEase*. August 4. https://www.163.com/dy/article/GGJ9GU3V05521C6G.html

ADRIANA CUPCEA

Religious Soft Power in Turkey's Kin State Policy in the Balkans: The role of the Diyanet and TIKA in the Muslim Communities in Kosovo and Dobruja Region in Romania

— ADRIANA CUPCEA

Adriana Cupcea is a researcher at the Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. She received her PhD in history from 'Babes-Bolyai' University of Cluj Napoca (Romania) in 2009. She focuses on Muslim communities in the Balkans, and particularly in Romania, and she analyses the construction of modern identities, the image of the Other and the relationship between self-image and Otherness. Since 2020 she is a contributor on Romania to the Yearbook of Muslims in Europe. She is co-author of the book The Image of the Ottoman in the Romanian History Textbooks from Romania and Bosnia Herzegovina in the post-communist period, published by at Isis Press, Istanbul, in 2015. Her most recent publications are: 'Turkey's Kin State Policy in the Balkans: The Muslim Community from Dobruja", Contemporary Southeastern Europe, 7(1), 2020, 49-72 and "Remembering and Being. The Memories of Communist Life in a Turkish Muslim Roma Community in Dobruja (Romania)", Balkanologie, Vol. 15 (1), 2020.

RELIGIOUS SOFT POWER IN TURKEY'S KIN STATE POLICY IN THE BALKANS: THE ROLE OF THE
DIYANET AND TIKA IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN KOSOVO AND DOBRUJA REGION IN ROMANIA

435

Abstract

The chapter analyses the role of religion in Turkey's kin state policy in the case of Muslims in Kosovo and of the Turkish and Tatar communities in the Dobruja region of Romania. More specifically, by focusing on the work of Turkish state institutions Diyanet and TIKA, the chapter investigates how Turkey accumulates religious *soft power* potential in Kosovo and the Dobruja region, by using its kin-state position to strengthen the Muslim communities in these states and how its kin-state religious policies are influencing and shaping the communities at the local level. The chapter also analyses the extent to which Turkey has the same purpose and the same level of influence in both Kosovo and Romania. The approach draws on Roger Brubaker's triangular relationship of the national minority, the nation state in which the minority lives, and the homeland to which the ethnic group belongs. This framework is complemented by an additional fourth element, which is the transnational Islam, defined by John R. Bowen as a public, global space for reference and normative debate, where the norms and practices of Islam are negotiated and redefined beyond national borders. The chapter finds that in a number of manifestations of public and religious life of Muslims in Kosovo and the Dobruja region the activity of Diyanet and TIKA has produced significant soft power potential for Turkey. The analysis also identifies the key differences between the way religious influence and presence of Turkey manifested itself in the two countries as well as the different goals of Turkish policy in the two cases, largely due to the different structural elements pertaining to issues of demography and ethnic and religious make up.

Introduction

The aim of the paper is to analyse the role of religion in Turkey's kin state policy in the case of Muslims in Kosovo and of the Turkish and Tatar communities in Dobruja region of Romania. I have taken into consideration the entire Muslim population in the case of Kosovo, while in Romania only the Turkish and Tatar communities. The argument for my approach is that while in Kosovo's case Turkey's religious kin-state policy is addressing the majority of the population, Muslim Albanians and Turks, in the case of Romania, Turkey's target audience is confined to the Muslim Turkish and Tatar minorities, concentrated in the region of Dobruja. I investigated whether Turkey's kin state policy is interdependent with Turkish foreign policy in the post-1990 period, which developed around the concept of *soft power* (Nye 2004),[1] especially after the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) came into power in 2002.

I approached this topic starting from the definition of religion in the way Joseph Nye perceives its potential within a soft power framework: as a persuasive power reserved for parties who share the same faith. After AKP came to power in 2002, Turkey utilised Islam as a power-element of foreign policy by making Sunni Islam more visible. Therefore, the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) appeared, a major tool in foreign policy ideology, later on being assisted in this field by the Turkish Coordination and Cooperation Agency (TIKA). Following the *modus operandi* of these two Turkish state actors which work in Dobruja region and in Kosovo I investigated if Islam can be considered a main field of interaction between the Turkish state and the Muslims in Kosovo and Romania and one of the main sources of Turkey's soft power. The research profiles the Turkish state actors acting in the religious field and offers an over-

---

1   The concept was defined by Nye as the ability of a state to attract, co-opt, and shape others' preferences without resorting to force or material stimuli as a means of persuasion. Nye believes that this is possible due to a state's capability to convince another party by rational policies. Credibility and power of persuasion are the main elements of soft power.

RELIGIOUS SOFT POWER IN TURKEY'S KIN STATE POLICY IN THE BALKANS: THE ROLE OF THE
DIYANET AND TIKA IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN KOSOVO AND DOBRUJA REGION IN ROMANIA

437

view of the presence, purposes, and activities of these actors at the level of the communities, while also providing an evaluation of the impact their action strategies have at the level of the analysed communities.

The research questions are the following:
- How does Turkey accumulate religious soft power potential in Kosovo and Romania, by using its kin-state position to strengthen the Muslim communities in these states?
- How are its kin-state religious policies influencing and shaping the communities at the local level?
- Does Turkey have the same purpose and the same level of influence in Kosovo and Romania?

My approach draws on Roger Brubaker's triangular relationship of the national minority, the nation state in which the minority lives, and the homeland to which the ethnic group belongs (Brubaker 1996, 4-6). Moreover, considering the post 9/11 context, when Turkey assumed the role of the moderate Islamic power in the region, I added a fourth element of relationship to the previous three: transnational Islam. John R. Bowen defines this as a public, global space for reference and normative debate, where the norms and practices of Islam are negotiated and redefined beyond national borders (Bowen 2004, 879-894).

The methodology is based on a qualitative approach. The data has been gathered through two different sources: desk research and semi-structured interviews. The latter were conducted with religious and political leaders of the communities in the two states, such as representatives of the main political parties, representatives of the Muftiate in Romania and in Kosovo, officials from the educational systems in the two countries, journalists from the two communities and also with regular members of the Muslim communities in Kosovo and Dobruja. The interviews have been conducted during two successive field research visits in Romania and Kosovo which took take place in February-March 2022.

Muslims in Kosovo and Romania: From Accidental Diasporas to Turkey's Kin-communities in the Balkans

I approached the Muslim kin-communities in the Balkans in the framework proposed by Rogers Brubaker as *accidental diaspora*s constituted from the movements of borders across peoples, which can occur against their will and thereupon they become citizens of the countries in which they reside. These communities crystallized suddenly following a dramatic- and often traumatic-reconfiguration of political space (Brubaker 2000, 2), in this case the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of the nation-states in region at the end of the 19th Century and beginning of the 20th Century. Antov (2017, 39) distinguishes between two types of Muslim communities in the Balkans which are overlapping in the Romanian and Kosovo cases. He identifies the Turkish speaking communities in the Eastern Balkan communities formed mainly based on the Turkish colonization, while in the case of the ones in Western Balkans, conversion to Islam was the dominant factor in the formation of Muslim communities and which retained their pre-Ottoman languages (Antov 2017, 39). On the one hand, the small Sunni Muslim community in Dobruja region in South-Eastern Romania falls in the first category. It's comprising speakers of Turkic languages: 27,698 Turks and 20,282 Tatars. The Muslim Turk and Tatar presence in this area goes back to the 13th century (Omer 2020, 40), with the communities becoming stronger in the context of Turkish colonization and of the Tatar migration under Ottoman rule of this region. The Turks came mainly from Anatolia whereas the Tatars came mainly from Crimea.

Kosovo, on the other hand, is falling in both categories, having a small Sunni Muslim Turkish community of about 18,000 people, formed through a process of Turkic colonization similar to the one in Romania. The majority (93%) of the total population of 1,820,631 people (Mehmeti 2022, 379) consists ethnically of Albanians who became Muslims through a mass conversion phe-

RELIGIOUS SOFT POWER IN TURKEY'S KIN STATE POLICY IN THE BALKANS: THE ROLE OF THE
DIYANET AND TIKA IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN KOSOVO AND DOBRUJA REGION IN ROMANIA

439

nomenon which is traditionally assumed to have taken place not before the
second half of the 17th and the 18th Centuries (Antov 2017, 39). Currently, both
Kosovo and Romania are secular constitutional republics with different reli-
gious structures. Kosovo is a state with a Muslim majority population of 95%,
according to the 2011 census (Mehmeti 2022, 379), while Romania is a state
with a 89.45% Christian-Orthodox majority, and with a small Muslim popula-
tion representing 0.32% of the entire population (Cupcea 2022, 550). At the
same time, the small Turkish communities in Kosovo and Romania have the
status of ethnic communities/minorities and of religious minority in the case
of Romania. In both cases they represent just a little around or less than 1%
of the total population of their countries.[2]

The symmetries and asymmetries between the two cases are relevant from
the perspective of Turkey's relationship to both Muslims in Kosovo and Ro-
mania. As stated above, while in Kosovo's case Turkey's religious kin-state
policy is addressing the entire Muslim population, in Romania, Turkey's target
audience is confined to the Muslim Turkish and Tatar minorities.

Religion and Kin State Policy in the Balkans in the AKP Era

After AKP came to power, Turkey developed a transnational state apparatus in
order to establish new structures outside the borders and accumulate influ-
ence and *soft power* potential. This transnational state apparatus started to
act in a wide range of fields, economic, cultural, development funds, includ-
ing the religious one which became one the major fields of interaction be-
tween the Turkish state and the Balkan Muslims, through Diyanet and TIKA.
As a party with religious-conservative roots based on the Islamist National
View (*Milli Görüş*) (Szerencsés 2021) AKP gave religion a central place both
in domestic and foreign policies. This shift was part of Turkey's new vision

2   The most recent Romanian census of 2011, indicates a population of 20.121.641 (National Institute of Statis-
tics 2011). For Kosovo, the census in 2011 indicated a population of 1.820.631 (Mehmeti 2021, 379)

in external relations, known as the doctrine of strategic depth, designed by Ahmet Davutoğlu. He served as foreign minister between 2009 and 2014 and as prime minister between 2014 and 2016. His foreign policy ideology legitimized and supported the positions and actions on the ground of these transnational Turkish actors.

Fusing Ottoman culture, nationalism and Islamic values (Oztürk 2021, 11) he proposed Turkey's transition from the status of middle power to that of pivot state, leader of the Sunni Muslim world (Oztürk 2021, 112). In practice, one of Davutoğlu,'s ideology outcomes was that Turkey, shifting its focus from its relations with the West to its role in the global Muslim community (*ummah*), applied Islam more actively in foreign policy. Therefore, its transnational state apparatuses, and primarily the Diyanet, started to occur more visibly in the countries where they maintained a presence, utilising religion with this newfound mobility (Oztürk 2021, 11).

Implicitly Davutoğlu's vision marked also changes in the perception of kin-communities, the Turkish policy in this regard becoming more inclusive towards all Sunni Muslims, (Szerencses 2021), regardless of ethnicity (Özgür Baklacloğlu 2015, 57). According to him, Muslims in the Balkans represented a priority of Turkish politics abroad. In his vision strengthening the position of these communities represented for Turkey the strengthening of its own influence in the region (Demirtaş 2015, 130), because Muslims in the Balkans have best preserved, from the whole Balkan landscape, the Ottoman heritage, found in the cultural patterns and religion (Davutoğlu 2008, 211). While Turkey has raised in the AKP era its diplomatic, cultural, and economic profile in the Balkans, some scholars are noticing that the pattern is that kin-groups receive particular attention and benefits. (Mitrovic et al. 2015, 111; Dursun-Özkanca 2019, 58).

Turkey consolidated these kin-communities by supporting their political and religious rights, as well as their socio-economic provisions (Aydın 2014, 17) through its transnational state apparatuses. The presence of these actors in the Balkan states influenced the relationship of the Turkish state with the Muslim communities in the Balkans, which went beyond the scope of

RELIGIOUS SOFT POWER IN TURKEY'S KIN STATE POLICY IN THE BALKANS: THE ROLE OF THE
DIYANET AND TIKA IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN KOSOVO AND DOBRUJA REGION IN ROMANIA

441

high-level diplomacy and transformed into a direct one. In general, in the Balkan region it was about the contact between the Turkish actors and the Muslim communities, represented by their local political parties organized on ethnic basis and by their religious institutions.

Moreover, Turkey's assumption of the role of moderate Muslim power after September 11, 2001, contributed to this. The Muslim minorities in the Balkans became for the Turkish state the social and cultural-religious field of countering from within the influences of radical Islam, which had become increasingly present in the region starting with the 1990s. It is no coincidence that religion constituted the field of restoring relations with the Muslims from the Balkans and remained one of the main fields of interaction, especially through the actions of the Diyanet. In line with the official policy, the Diyanet aimed at promoting an identity neither tied to the territory of the Turkish nation-state nor confined to ethnic Turks. Rather, it has promoted a diffuse ethno-religious identity in which religion is one marker of loyalty to the expanded ethno-national imagination of Muslim nationalism (Çitak 2018, 378; White 2013, 9).[3]

Later, in the 2008-2013 period, after the Arab Spring and Gezi Park protests, especially after the 2016 coup d'état that marked the aggravation of the conflict with the Gülen movement, the AKP deepened the foundation of governance on nationalist and religious discourse, initiated in the Davutoğlu, era, in order to justify and legitimize its internal and external decisions. The influence of the Diyanet in domestic and foreign policy undoubtedly increased in a manner incomparable to previous periods, augmented also by the transnational nature of the clash between the Gülen Movement and the AKP which meant new measures in the utilisation on religion and religious institutions outside Turkey (Oztürk 2021, 13).

---

3   In her book, Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks (2013), Jenny White states that AKP proposes a new Turkish identity, which she calls Muslim nationalism. She defines it as the identity of a pious Muslim Turk whose subjectivity and vision for the future is shaped by an imperial Ottoman past overlaid onto a republican state framework but divorced from the Kemalist state project. In other words, everything from lifestyle to public and foreign policy are up for reinterpretation, not necessarily according to Islamic principles (although Islamic ethics and imagery may play a role), much less Islamic law (in which few Turks have any expertise28), but according to a distinctively Turkish postimperial sensibility. In this vision, Ataturk's footprints are an anachronism (White 2013, 9).

The transformations towards religion that occurred in Turkey's domestic and foreign policy in recent years have taken their toll on Turkey's policy towards Muslims in the Balkans and on its direct relationship with them. Their reactions to these transformations and their implications have depended and depend on the dynamics of the respective communities, the international position of the host country, the membership or non-membership of these countries to the EU, the level of economic development and economic relations with Turkey, not least the demographic structure of each community.

Transnational Islamic Actors in Kosovo and Romania: The Context of Turkey's First Approaches

After the fall of the Romanian communist regime in 1989 and the break-up of Yugoslavia in 1991, Islam in the Balkans became a major field of reconnection between the local Muslim communities and Muslim communities abroad (global *ummah*). At the same time, it became a point of contention between traditional Islam – an Islam rooted in the unique, local condition of the Balkan Muslim communities past – and the growing foreign presence of what has been called orthodox Islam.[4] This refers specifically to forms of Islam that claim to be a purer version of the religion, based exclusively on sacred, original texts and supposedly not on culturally specific interpretation of those texts (Ghodsee 2010).

Orthodox Islam was particularly represented in the Balkans by Islamic non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – a generic name covering charitable organisations that were not necessarily non-governmental – originating in the Gulf Arab countries. The identity of those NGOs present in Dobruja immediately after 1990 is extremely hard to establish. Based on interviews and the

---

4 Following the example of Kristen Ghodsee, I use the terminology proposed by Talal Asad, with some reservation. Khodsee points out that the problem with this term, although it works well in an analytical opposition to traditional Islam, is that it implies a judgement that one form of Islam is more "correct" than others, and that there is some supranational authority that makes this claim. In fact, Islam is very diverse, and it is precisely this diversity that orthodox reformers want to eliminate by claiming that their interpretation is the only correct one. (See Ghodsee 2010, 521).

RELIGIOUS SOFT POWER IN TURKEY'S KIN STATE POLICY IN THE BALKANS: THE ROLE OF THE
DIYANET AND TIKA IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN KOSOVO AND DOBRUJA REGION IN ROMANIA

443

press, we can identify in the local area international organisations like the Muslim World League (al Rabita),[5] based in Saudi Arabia, along with *bahai* missionaries, followers of the Bahai Faith with their central location in Israel.

The presence of the Islamic NGOs in Kosovo was influenced by Albania's membership in 1992 in the Organization of the Islamic Conference a fact which facilitated the access (through visa granting) of various radical Islamist structures from the Arab world (Krasniqi 2018, 28). Immediately after the war in Kosovo was over, large numbers of Islamist relief organizations and NGOs from the Gulf states, some of them which had operated in Albania and Bosnia before, set up their branch offices in Kosovo (Krasniqi 2018, 35-41). Even though there is no Shiite tradition or religious minority in Kosovo, some Shiite organizations have or had also been operating here in a halfway legal manner to promote their version of Islam and to further the Iranian influence in the region (Krasniqi 2018, 35).

Parallel to these orthodox Islamic presences, which tried to impose themselves through the reconfiguring of local Islam, Turkey started counteracting their influences in order to maintain the character of the traditional Sunni Hanafi Islam. Turkey relied mostly on the Diyanet, which initiated its first projects in Romania in the early 1990s and in Kosovo, immediately after the war. In these early stages, these were focused mainly on the reconstruction of mosques, both in Romania and Kosovo. This way of approaching the community took the form of a close cooperation with the official Muslim leaderships in Kosovo and Romania, the Islamic Community in Kosovo (*Bashkësia Islame e Kosovës*, ICK) and the Muftiate of Romania respectively, which became the main local actors empowered by the religious presence of Turkey in the two countries. The historical ties with the Turkish state favoured the approach to the religious leadership towards Turkey. These links were based on a five-century-long shared history, language, culture and religion. Like the

---

5   In the centre of the globalisation device of Saudi Salafi is the World Islamic League, created on the 15 December 1962, in the middle of the Arab Cold War, at the initiative Saudi Arabia. While its staff comes from various Muslim countries, its leadership is mostly under Saudi control. Its official status is that of an NGO, but it can be considered a Saudi trans-state structure. See (Amghar 2011).

overwhelming majority of the Muslims in the Balkans, Muslims in Kosovo-Albanians, Turks and Bosniaks - and the Muslim Turks and Tatars in Dobruja region belong to the Ottoman-Turkish cultural zone, characterised by the Hanafi madhab school of law, which is part of the Ottoman legacy as it was the official madhab in the Ottoman Empire. This long-standing Ottoman cultural tradition became an important part of Turkish foreign policy discourse, accompanying the increasingly active presence of Turkey in the former Ottoman territories after 1990. In this period Turkey's moderate Islam also became an important soft power tool in Turkish foreign policy.

The conflict between the traditional local Islam, supported by Turkey and the Islamic NGOs was favoured by the post-Cold War situation of the region which was characterised by deep political and economic crises and dysfunction of state apparatuses. In Kosovo, immediately after the War in 1998-1999 the levels of poverty and corruption were very high, and the educational system was in disarray. All these general socio-economic conditions meant insufficient human and material resources for the reconstruction of the religious communities, both in Kosovo and Romania and motivated external interaction for the members of the communities as well as for the religious elites. To be precise, the lack of possibilities for local Islamic theological training, along with a lack of organisational capabilities for making the pilgrimage to Mecca (one of the most important religious obligations for Muslims), represented opportunities for interaction among the local communities and the Islamic transnational actors. These religious, humanitarian organizations, since the early days of their activity in Kosovo and Romania, as in all the Balkans, acted by trying first to fulfil material needs, but also trying to fill the void created in Islamic religious practice during the communist period. Thus, the NGOs started conducting activities to spread Islamic teaching by publishing, translating and donating religious literature, organizing religion classes, opening boarding schools aimed especially for children coming from poor families. In post-war Kosovo they got involved in the reconstruction of houses, hospitals, and schools that had been destroyed during the war and built new mosques for the communities. Another method of approach was through offers to send young men to study Islamic theology in various countries of the Arab world.

RELIGIOUS SOFT POWER IN TURKEY'S KIN STATE POLICY IN THE BALKANS: THE ROLE OF THE
DIYANET AND TIKA IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN KOSOVO AND DOBRUJA REGION IN ROMANIA

445

Theological scholarships were offered through international NGOs in Turkey, but also in states in the Middle East like Jordan, Syria and Egypt or Saudi Arabia.

The imams in Romania who were trained in Arab countries in the 1990s became representatives or leaders of different Islamic NGOs and separated themselves from the Muftiate over the course of the past 20 years. They accused the local religious elite of lacking knowledge about the 'pure' Islamic religion, and thus perpetuating novelties and local heretic customs, tolerance and a lack of proselytism towards the non-Muslims. On the other hand, the Muftiate responded by notifying the Romanian authorities regarding the spread of fundamentalist Islamic teachings through sermons and religious publications and mentioned the danger of infusing the local Islam with radical ideas.

In Kosovo the young imams trained in the Middle East after the war were strategically placed in the urban and rural NGOs' mosques in Kosovo, where they preached the orthodox version of Islam, specific to the countries where they were trained. This was considered by local religious elite and officials as being different from the traditional Islam of Kosovo (*New York Times*, May 21, 2016). If in Romania we are talking about a few imams recruited from the Turkish-Tatar community in Dobruja, the number in Kosovo was much higher, as youngsters were drafted from all walks of life, and covering all the Muslim ethnic groups: Albanians, Turks, Bosniaks.

The consequences started to be noticed in Kosovo where under the pressure of the Arab resources, representatives of this segment of preachers were allowed in prominent localities such as Gjilan, Besiana or Prishtina. Official reports and newspapers were underlining that this fact has inevitably an impact on the tenets of local traditional Islam, as there is already clearly defined confrontation between the older religious leaders and a young generation of imams trained in the Middle Eastern countries (Bobev 2018, 67-68). An investigation of Balkan Insight in 2012 revealed that from 155 new mosques, built by the ICK since 1999 through various funding channels, almost all of the

more than 100 have been erected illegally (*Balkan Insight,* January 12, 2012*)*. Local moderate imams and officials describe these mosques as a deliberate, long-term strategy by Middle East countries to reshape Islam in its image, not only in Kosovo but around the world (*New York Times*, May 21, 2016). They see the new imams trained in Middle East as a base for radical Islam gaining ground in Kosovo (Bobev 2018, 67-68) and as an influential factor in the rise of religiously inspired violent extremism, with more than 300 Kosovo citizens joining the Islamic State as foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria since 2012.

Diyanet and TIKA: Profile of their Modus Operandi

After the abolition of the Caliphate and of the Ministry of Sharia (Islamic Faith) and Pious Foundations in Turkey in March 1924, the Diyanet was founded as a government agency. It is subordinated to the prime minister and its main responsibilities concern administration of religious problems connected to the faith, practice and moral principles, informing society with regards to the Islamic religion, and the administration of places of worship (Sunier 2011, 32). Its activities are focused on two main areas: the administrative coordination of religious personnel (the imams) and the organisation of religious life, turning into the highest authority as far as doctrine and religious practice issues are concerned. Currently it has a budget greater than that of many ministries and it is probably the largest, most centralised Muslim religious organisation in the world (Öktem 2010, 31), and thus a significant global religious actor.

Its trans-nationalisation, reaching the Turkish communities in Western Europe, began since the 1970s (Oztürk 2018, 8-9), but the approach towards the Muslim communities from the Balkans started during Turgüt Özal's mandates as president and prime minister (1983 – 1993) of Turkey and reached its peak after AKP took power in 2002. Following the strategic depth doctrine of Ahmet Davutoğlu, one of the main principles in Turkish foreign policy was the focus on developing relations with neighbouring countries by operationalising historical and cultural ties. In this context, religion and religious actors have come to a prominent position in Turkey's foreign policy (Öztürk and Gözaydın

RELIGIOUS SOFT POWER IN TURKEY'S KIN STATE POLICY IN THE BALKANS: THE ROLE OF THE
DIYANET AND TIKA IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN KOSOVO AND DOBRUJA REGION IN ROMANIA

447

2018, 339, 334). The Diyanet became crucial, one of the most important actors in the Balkans (Öktem 2012, 27-58). It is present in the Balkan states with Muslim communities through its counsellors and attachés focused on religious affairs, functioning in the embassies and consulates (Korkut 2010, 124).

Its fields of action are overlapping with small variations related to local peculiarities in all the countries in the Balkans region, covering the construction and restoration of mosques and Islamic schools, the dispatch of imams, assuring the religious publications in local languages and the charitable actions (Öktem 2011, 155-71). Not least, Diyanet periodically organises the Eurasian Islamic Council (EIC), which has promoted cooperation among the spiritual boards of Muslims in Central Asia and the Balkans since 1995 (Öztürk and Gözaydın 2018, 346).

TIKA was created in 1992 as an agency for development and support, under the coordination of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Over time, TIKA followed Turkey's foreign policy objectives, extending its presence in the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America. In 1999 it was placed under the coordination of Turkey's prime minister, transforming it into a much more flexible agency from the bureaucratic point of view. After 2002 it became an instrument of Turkey's foreign policy (Özkan and Demirtepe 2012, 655), with an important role in building potential for soft power. According to its statute, TIKA offers support to countries that share historic, geographic social and cultural bonds with Turkey, no matter their level of development.[6]

Currently, TIKA has 62 offices for coordinating programmes, located in 60 countries across five continents, 11 of them in the Balkans and Eastern Europe.[7] According to a Turkish Development Assistance Report, in 2020 Turkey provided approximately USD 98.30 million to Europe (including Balkans and Eastern Europe). Kosovo was among the top 14 countries in the world when it comes to benefiting from bilateral official development assistance,

---

6 Statutory Decree on the Organization and Duties of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency Directorate.
7 Bosnia–Herzegovina, Kosovo, Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Hungary, Serbia, Croatia, Moldova, Ukraine.

with an amount of investment of USD 4.69 million in 2020 (Turkish Development Assistance Report 2020 : 20). Regarding the fields of investments in the region, except its non-religious projects in areas such as education, health, and agriculture (TIKA Annual Report 2017), TIKA has generally succeeded in establishing connections with the local Muslim organisations in terms of symbolic projects, such as restoring most of the Ottoman mosques. TIKA projects in the religious field are related to the Islamic cultural heritage and Islamic education, being focused mostly on restoring monuments from the Ottoman period, while some of its education efforts are consisting of building or renovating religious schools (TIKA Annual Report 2017).

Diyanet and TIKA in Dobruja

The presence of the *Diyanet* in Dobruja became official starting in 2001, when an attaché for religious affairs was appointed to the Turkish General Consulate in Constanţa following a local request. The request was approved by the Romanian authorities, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The attaché's role is to offer assistance and religious services to the Muslim community in Dobruja. One of the first initiatives was the project to reconstruct mosques, as they have a symbolic value and are considered part of the Turkish-Islamic cultural heritage. A collaboration protocol was signed in 2006 between the Muftiate and the *Diyanet,* whereby one of the main articles concerns financial assistance in the reconstruction of Islamic buildings.[8] Generally these projects, whether they were meant to renovate or construct, involved collaboration between *Diyanet* and the local administration of various municipalities with Muslim populations, the State Secretariat for Religious Cults, implicitly the Muftiate of Romania, and the Association of Turkish Businessmen from Dobruja.

After TIKA opened an office in Romania in 2015, step by step the main role in this field was transferred from Diyanet to TIKA, whose projects in the field

---

8   Interview with representative of the Muftiate of Romania, Constanța, Romania, 22.05.2014; Interview with representative of the Muftiate of Romania, online interview, 11.02. 2022.

RELIGIOUS SOFT POWER IN TURKEY'S KIN STATE POLICY IN THE BALKANS: THE ROLE OF THE
DIYANET AND TIKA IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN KOSOVO AND DOBRUJA REGION IN ROMANIA

449

became most visible only lately. In 2015 the Romanian government decided to build a mosque and an Islamic educational centre in Bucharest with the financial support of the Turkish state, intermediated by TIKA and in collaboration with the Muftiate of Romania. The intention was to counteract in this manner the influences of the radical Islam, given that the number of Muslims in Romania's capital, Bucharest, had doubled. The Mufti of the Muslim Community in Romania has underlined the peaceful character of the Romanian Islam (Simuț 2015, 1370) and the fact that through this project 'young men will not be attracted to unauthorized mosques where radical propaganda is promoted by Muslims trained in institutions from abroad, that are considered fundamentalist' (Ionescu 2015).

Responding to a local necessity formulated by the Romanian authorities, TIKA assumed the role of counteracting radical Islam and defender of Sunni Islam. The lack of communication with the Romanian public opinion, from all parts involved in the project led to a failure. Because of an unprecedented wave of anti-Muslim feelings in the Romanian society, in which the construction of the grand mosque was seen as an attempt to Islamise Romania, the Muftiate of Romania announced the cancellation of the project, citing as justification the lack of sufficient financial resources. Only in 2021, after a few years of respite in this field, TIKA initiated the restoration project of two historical mosques from the Ottoman period.

The restoration was brokered through diplomatic relations between Romania and Turkey, with the involvement of the Minister of Culture, and the ambassador of Turkey in Romania, the administration of the project being led by TIKA (*Delta*, February 11, 2021). The mosques are part of Turkish-Islamic cultural heritage which became, especially after 2002, an instrumental field for Diyanet and TIKA in legitimizing Turkey's position of leader of Sunni Islam in the two countries, and generally in the Balkans. The focus of Turkish discourse after 2002 on the shared Ottoman past and common cultural and religious values, legitimized TIKA and Diyanet's actions in the religious and cultural fields and generally the Turkish presence in politics and economy, as a natural leader in the region.

Regarding formal religious education, from the beginning Turkey supported the re-introduction of the study of Islam in state schools by supplying auxiliary teaching material printed in Turkey. The curriculum is almost identical to the Turkish one. One of the most important contributions in the post-1990 period has been the re-opening of the Medgidia Muslim Seminary, the only institution in Romania training imams. In this manner, Muslim religious instruction became the field for the first interaction of the Turkish state with the community in Dobruja, and through the Diyanet. The Turkish state provided financial support for lodging, food, clothing and school supplies, with the Turkish Ministry of Education and the Diyanet as intermediates.[9]

The protocol of 2006 stipulates, along with the renovation of Muslim religious buildings, also support through translating and publishing religious literature, books and brochures. This is in fact one of the initiatives started by the Diyanet to influence the religious training of the post-1990 generations. At the same time, it has reformulated religious practice and knowledge for the generation formed under the communist regime, which had previously learned orally from older generations. The religious literature offered by the Diyanet consists of brochures for understanding the Qur'an, prayer books, compilations of the *hadith*, and books of Islamic history. It tries to fill the gaps created during communism and sets norms for religious knowledge and practice according to the Hanafi official version, specific for Turkey and the Balkan area. A great number of these books are in fact Romanian translations of the Diyanet publications that circulate in Turkey and other Balkan states with Muslim communities.

Another level where the support provided by the Diyanet is substantial, both symbolic and financial, is the religious personnel. Based on the 2006 protocol, the support consists of training exchanges for the imams from Dobruja and assistance through the dispatch of such already trained staff from Turkey to serve in the Dobruja mosques alongside local imams. Currently, there are imams from Turkey serving in Dobruja, in the mosques and historical mon-

9   Interview with official working in the educational field, Medgidia, Romania, 18.09. 2013.

RELIGIOUS SOFT POWER IN TURKEY'S KIN STATE POLICY IN THE BALKANS: THE ROLE OF THE
DIYANET AND TIKA IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN KOSOVO AND DOBRUJA REGION IN ROMANIA

451

uments from the Ottoman period,[10] one in the mosque in Bucharest, which was built during the communist period.[11] Their activity is coordinated by the attaché for religious affairs from the Turkish Consulate. Finally, the Diyanet offers the imams financial support, in addition to their basic wage. In the same registry fall the university and pre-university scholarships, offering the youth access to theological learning institutions in Turkey.

The Diyanet also conducts numerous activities in the field of informal religious education, by organising Qur'an reading courses for women. In Constanţa, the courses organised in the Muftiate are held by a trainer appointed by the Diyanet. In previous years, the trainer was the wife of the Turkish imam serving in one of Constanţa's historical mosques, but starting from 2015 the courses are held by a member of the local community, a woman who graduated Islamic theology in Turkey. In the other localities where larger Muslim communities exist, the Qur'an courses are organised at the mosque and are taught by imams. The initiative started with imams who arrived from Turkey, but the practice was gradually adopted by local imams; currently, the courses are organised in certain communities from Dobruja at beginner and advanced levels.[12]

Some of the Diyanet and TIKA practices that have become common in the past 10 years fall in the Islamic tradition of charity. Some examples include ritually slaughtering on the occasion of the *Kurban Bayram* (Sacrifice Feast) and offering bundles for *Ramazan Bayram*. Thus, poor members of the community are supported,[13] while the culture of charity, *Zakat,* one of the five pillars of Islam, is promoted in the community. Since 2015 TIKA is closely assisting Diyanet in the charity field, initiating the programme *Erenler Sofrası* (Saints Tables), through which 2,000 families from vulnerable population groups from towns and villages in Dobruja received food packages. TIKA

---

10 Interview with representative of the Muftiate of Romania, Constanța, Romania, 22.05.2014; Interview with representative of the Muftiate of Romania, online interview, 11.02. 2022.
11 Interview with imam, Bucharest, Romania, 22.02. 2022.
12 Interview with imam, Valu lui Traian, Romania,16.10. 2013.
13 Field observations 2014–2016, February 2022.

charity programs are concentrated mainly, but not exclusively on the Muslims in Dobruja, even as one of TIKA's coordinators asserted in 2015, their kin-communities in Dobruja, the Turks and Tatars represent a priority (*Nine O'Clock*, October 30, 2017).

Finally, the presence of the Diyanet saw the rebirth of celebrations of religious holidays, such as the *Kandil Geceleri* (Holy Nights), whose following had been interrupted in the local community during the communist period. These celebrations are unique to the Hanafi Islam from the former Ottoman territories. At the same time, the Diyanet organises a series of seminaries and events focused on topics like *Kutlu Doğum Haftası* (Holy Birth Week) or the month of Ramadan; the significance of these events is explained to the community during the celebrations.

Diyanet and TIKA in Kosovo

Diyanet and TIKA were among the first foreign institutions to open representative offices in Kosovo immediately after the war. After the diplomatic office opened in Prishtina in 1999 was restructured into the Turkish Embassy in Prishtina, a Diyanet representative office opened, followed in 2004 by the inauguration of the TIKA Kosovo Program Office (Tabak 2016, 131). Turkey's religious assistance to Kosovo, through these actors, came in the general context of the post-conflict restructuring of Kosovo society, in all areas, economic, cultural, religious, and security. Especially after 2002, it targeted, according to the definition of kin-communities introduced in the Davutoğlu era, all Sunni Muslims, regardless of ethnicity: Albanians, Turks, Bosniaks, Ashkali and Egyptians. The religious support targeted especially the ICK, which is exercising for centuries the Sunni Hanafi Ottoman teachings and practices of Islam. Referred to locally as the 'traditional Islam', it is also supported by the political elites (Mehmeti 2012, 103).

With the advantage of linguistic and cultural proximity, unlike Arab Islamic NGOs (Öktem 2010, 9), Diyanet and then TIKA approached the ICK, which in time became the main collaborator and beneficiary of these institutions.

RELIGIOUS SOFT POWER IN TURKEY'S KIN STATE POLICY IN THE BALKANS: THE ROLE OF THE
DIYANET AND TIKA IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN KOSOVO AND DOBRUJA REGION IN ROMANIA

453

According to the ICK, approximately 200 of the more than 600 mosques in Kosovo were damaged or destroyed during the war. Unlike Romania, in Kosovo TIKA was the institution that assumed the main role of renovating the mosques dating from the Ottoman period, and generally of the Turkish-Islamic heritage. Another institutions assisting TIKA in the renovation of mosques, but has a lower profile in Kosovo, has been the General Directorate for Foundations (*Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü,* GDF). The GDF is based in Turkey, under the authority of the Prime Minister. Created in 1920 alongside the Diyanet, it is responsible for governing religious affairs, has replaced the old Ottoman institution, the Ministry of Sharia and the Foundations (*Şerriye ve Evkaf Vekaleti*). GDF differs from Diyanet through the focus of its activities on the administration of charitable endowments (*vakıfs*). To this date, TIKA and the GDF have renovated about 15 historic mosques in Kosovo's cities.[14]

One of the representatives of ICK states that sometimes there is confusion between the identity of the Turkish actors who renovate the Kosovo Turkish-Islamic heritage and that the contribution of the GDF in the renovation of the mosques is not visible in the press. At the same time, the image of TIKA is much more prominent at the level of local public opinion.[15] Currently, of the approximately 15 mosques in major cities, two of the oldest mosques in Kosovo are under renovation, based on a protocol signed in 2018 between TIKA, Kosovo Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports and the ICK. These are Carshia Mosque (or Bazaar Mosque), dating from the 15th century, and Gazi Mehmet Pasha's Mosque also known as Bajrakli Mosque, one of the oldest monuments of Islamic art from Prizren (*Anadolu Agency*, June 11, 2018). Also, in Prishtina the GDF in collaboration with ICK carries out the renovation of the Piri Nazir mosque (Turkish Development Assistance Report 2019, 94).

Another institution that is close to the Diyanet has also been involved in the construction of the grand mosque in Prishtina, on land donated by the mu-

---

14   Estimates are based on interviews with ICK representatives, in Prishtina and Prizren, March 2022.
15   Interview with representative of the Islamic Community in Kosovo (Bashkësia Islame e Kosovës, ICK), Prishtina, Kosovo, 15.03. 2022.

nicipality to ICK. The Diyanet Foundation (*Diyanet Vakfı*), an institution created by the Diyanet officials in the 1970s, is legally separate from Diyanet, but their activities are interconnected. Having the status of a charitable NGO and benefiting from tax exemption, the Diyanet Foundation oversees donations, through which it supports the activities of the Diyanet, which faces budgetary limitations, being a state institution (Szerencs 2021; Bruce 2019, 33). For the Prishtina grand mosque, which is to be built in the Ottoman-Islamic architectural style and will be the largest mosque in Kosovo, Mufti Naim Ternava said there are EUR 46 million worth of donations (*Anadolu Agency*, July 23, 2020). The construction of the mosque caused some friction during peaceful protests in the Dardania District of Prishtina, where the mosque is to be built. The project of the mosque revealed on this occasion the existence of two trends in the local society, On the one hand a religious current, whose supporters affirm the need for the construction of the mosque, claiming the insufficient number of places of worship covering the Dardania district and the nearby Ulpiana district.[16] On the other hand, it is a secular trend, whose supporters believe that the space allocated to the mosque should be used for cultural and educational purposes (Mehmeti 2022, 373) and that such projects can jeopardize the secular character of Kosovo society (Balkan Insight, July 22, 2020).

Imams serving in mosques, especially restored ones, is one of the areas where the Diyanet's support is direct. There are currently 20 Diyanet imams in Kosovo, appointed to various mosques for five-year terms, during which they assist local imams in carrying out religious services. There are cases, however, where only imams of the Diyanet perform the religious services, as is the case with the Sinan Pasha Mosque in Prizren, renovated by TIKA in 2011. The Diyanet also sends religious staff for limited periods of time, specifically during the month of Ramadan. In certain situations, they either aid older imams or cover certain staff gaps created by various situations. For example, the Islamic community of Prizren (*Këshilli i Bashkësisë Islame - Prizren*), has sent for the month of Ramadan, Albanian, Turkish, Bosnian speaking imams, following requests from some Islamic communities in Europe where migrants

---

16　Interview with a member of the Turkish community in Kosovo, Prishtina, Kosovo, 15.03.2022..

RELIGIOUS SOFT POWER IN TURKEY'S KIN STATE POLICY IN THE BALKANS: THE ROLE OF THE
DIYANET AND TIKA IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN KOSOVO AND DOBRUJA REGION IN ROMANIA

455

from Kosovo live; thus, it responded to these requests and received Diyanet imams instead.[17]

Moreover, scholarships offered by the Diyanet, in the field of Islamic Theology under the Turkey scholarships program (*Türkiye Bursları*) have an important impact. Within the Islamic religious elite in Kosovo, there are staff with both bachelor and doctoral degrees in theological faculties from Turkey, most of the staff being graduates of the Faculty of Theology from Prishtina, but also from Malaysia, Indonesia or Middle Eastern states. A characteristic of recent years in the opinion of religious officials is the number of female students accessing these scholarships, compared to the 2000s when the number of women interested in Islamic theology was considerably smaller.[18] The reasons cited by them to explain the upward trend are the geographical and cultural proximity to Turkey, the fact that not many Islamic states offer such scholarships and not least the material conditions they offer, including 'separate buildings for men and women'.[19]

The textbooks used in Islamic religious education, in the three religious schools of Prishtina, Prizren and Gjilan, but also at the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Prishtina are mostly published under the scrutiny of the Ministry of Education of Kosovo. The niche left uncovered and in which Albanian translations of some religious books published by Diyanet are used is the informal religious education for children, which is organized in mosques. Because religion is not compulsory in state public education, to counter the lack of knowledge of Islamic religion among younger generations, ICK organizes classes in mosques, which are held by imams for an hour or two a week.[20] These courses also use translations of religious pamphlets and children books published by the Diyanet, discussing the Islamic religion, the Qur'an or the life of the Prophet Mohammed. Translations of religious books of the Diyanet are dis-

---

17   Interview with representative of the Islamic Community of Prizren (Këshilli i Bashkësisë Islame – Prizren), Prizren, Kosovo, 22.03. 2022.
18   Interview with member of the religious elite, Prishtina, Kosovo, 15.03. 2022.
19   Ibid.
20   Ibid.

tributed to imams along with children's religious literature, some of which can be found on the free shelf of historic mosques from Kosovo, along with religious magazines of the ICK. In communities like the one in Prizren, where the largest Turkish population in Kosovo lives, these books are available also in their native language.[21]

With regards to religious training, one area in which the contribution of the Diyanet is essential is that of the material support to female Islamic preachers from Kosovo. The initiative falls in the direction initiated by the Diyanet, after the AKP came to power in 2002, namely to facilitate the employment of women with Islamic theology studies within the AKP's bureaucratic apparatus (*vaizeler*), followed by the regulation of their status and duties by an official directive (Maritato 2015, 436). The practice of female Islamic preachers was gradually exported to Turkish communities in Western Europe in the process of trans-nationalizing the Diyanet (Oztürk 2018, 8-9).

In the case of Kosovo, it is about upholding a local tradition. Women preachers (*mualima*) were always present in the religious space, even in the communist period. With the establishment in 1997 of the first Kosovo religious schools for women, this tradition began to formalize and institutionalize, especially after the first generations of female graduates of the religious schools, then of the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Prishtina, appeared and began working in mosques in urban and rural communities. After 2005, when a Women's Department was created within ICK, about 20 female Islamic preachers were hired, but the salaries were very low. ICK stated on several occasions that it did not have enough funds from the state budget for this. It is in this context, that the Diyanet assumed around 2010 the payment, in the form of donations, of women preachers from all mosques in Kosovo, providing them with a monthly income that currently amounts EUR 220. Although this form of remuneration is uncertain, being re-evaluated annually by the Diyanet, and does not include a contract or medical insurance, the women involved in this process believe that one

---

21 Field observations, Prishtina and Prizren, Kosovo, March 2022.

RELIGIOUS SOFT POWER IN TURKEY'S KIN STATE POLICY IN THE BALKANS: THE ROLE OF THE
DIYANET AND TIKA IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN KOSOVO AND DOBRUJA REGION IN ROMANIA

457

of the most important consequences of this initiative of the Diyanet is an empowerment of this group.

One of the initiators of the ICK Women's Department identifies four points of impact from a social point of view: 1) ensuring an unprecedented visibility of women in religious institutions; 2) an economic and social prestige of women, in their own families and in society in general; 3) a contribution to the deradicalization process, in the sense that these women preachers can constitute especially for women from vulnerable categories, unique religious information channels, which can counter the radicalization tendencies coming from some popular imams or from the social media; 4) the provision of an interpretation of religious sources from a more tolerant and open-minded perspective, influencing generations of women in this regard.[22]

At the local level of this female religious elite, the Diyanet's investment has no ideological significance in line with Ankara's religious policy goals and has no political impact in Kosovo. Turkey is perceived as a brother in religion with whom they also share common history,[23] an important donor state for Kosovo in all fields, economic, health, cultural, religious and many niche areas where self-support from within the state is not possible, such as that of women preachers.[24]

By strengthening the role of women preachers, the Diyanet creates a positive image of Turkey at the level of some religious segments of the population and affirms in the plan of Kosovo society Turkey's role as leader and protector of the Sunni Muslim world. By strengthening a vulnerable religious group and providing them with symbolic investment, institutional, economic and social visibility, the Diyanet indirectly contributes to the perpetuation and internalization of religious values among religiously inclined women in Kosovo, in line with a model approved and tested internally in Turkey. At the same time, the

---

22 Online interview with B.I., an activist on women's issues, 15.05. 2022.
23 Interview with representative of the Islamic Community of Prizren (Këshilli i Bashkësisë Islame – Prizren), Prizren, Kosovo, 22.03. 2022.
24 Online interview with B.I., an activist on women's issues, 15.05. 2022.

Diyanet creates externally the basis of a loyal group that can in time become a source of religious soft power in a secular society.

The concrete influence of the Diyanet on religious practice can also be seen in introducing holidays, practices and religious themes specific to Hanafi Turkish Sunni Islam, such as Holy Birth Week, whose celebration has become an institutionalized custom in Kosovo. It is celebrated every year by the communities, in events organized by Diyanet, with an active participation in the program of the younger generations, such as the students of the religious schools (*Haberler*, April 24, 2014). At the same time, together with TIKA or local actors, such as ICK or the Turkish community in Kosovo, they plan various informative events with religious themes, such as Islam and Sufism or the life of the Prophet Mohammed (*Kosova Haber*, February 13, 2013). Through these the local dissemination and institutionalization of the norms and practices of official Islam in Turkey takes place. Among these norms is charity, promoted by both Diyanet and TIKA. TIKA's *Erenler Sofrası* program, organizing Iftar meals, ritually slaughtering, offering scholarships to support students in precarious material situation (*Haber*, May 5, 2021), all aiming to normalise and strengthen the Islamic duty of *Zakat*.

Conclusions

Diyanet was one of the first institutions of the Turkish state, both in Romania and Kosovo, to address local representative religious organizations, the Muftiate of Romania and the ICK, and engaged in a direct relationship with them. In an effort to counter the radical Islam in the Balkans and to protect local Sunni Hannafi Islam, part of the Ottoman heritage, these two local institutions have in both cases become the main actors empowered by the Diyanet's presence in the two states.

Both Diyanet and later TIKA approached local communities in an attempt to cover their specific needs for the post-communist period and post-war reconstruction

RELIGIOUS SOFT POWER IN TURKEY'S KIN STATE POLICY IN THE BALKANS: THE ROLE OF THE
DIYANET AND TIKA IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN KOSOVO AND DOBRUJA REGION IN ROMANIA

459

in the case of Kosovo. The restoration of mosques has probably been the initiative with the largest impact for the self-confidence of both Muslim communities, since a large number of these places of worship had degraded during the communist period due to a lack of investment, or were completely destroyed during the war, as was the case of more than 200 mosques in Kosovo. The ICK and the Muftiate of Romania had to approve any restoration works or new constructions, thus assuring Turkey's investments projects in this sense. The constant collaboration with the local religious leaderships recognised and supported by the home states (Kosovo and Romania), in all religious projects, strengthens the legitimacy of the local Sunni Hanafi Islam as the official form of Islam in both states.

In Romania, the Diyanet assumed an active role between 1990 and 2000, while recently this role was taken over by TIKA, which in 2021 started a project to restore Dobruja's historical mosques dating from the Ottoman period. In Kosovo, being a Muslim majority country, the number of mosques restoring projects is more than double compared to the one in the small Muslim community in Romania. Consequently, alongside TIKA, this task was also taken by other religious actors, which are legally separate from but whose activities are interconnected to the Diyanet: the General Directorate for Foundations and the Diyanet Foundation. These, together with the Diyanet, form an important religious institutional framework of wider transnational state apparatus. These actors support each other in their initiatives, empowering the pivotal actors at local levels (ICK and the Muftiate in this case), thus creating the basis for future loyalties and future sources of religious soft power for Turkey.

All the aforementioned institutions have improved Turkey's soft power potential and its position as an influential actor in the region in the post-1990 period. Scholarships for the young generations of theologians, the support for the Islamic female preachers, the assistance for imams and the literature for children, all are creating a positive image for Turkey at the level of these groups and influencing indirectly their religious sociability. Turkey is implementing the foreign and kin state strategies for this purpose, turning these different groups of local Muslims into a foundation for its soft power accumulation. The analysis shows that religion, by offering so many possibilities of support, has been and still is one

of the main field of interactions at the local levels, and has actually been one of the main sources of Turkey's soft power potential in Kosovo and the Dobruja region.

Even if the impact is similar at a general level of these cases, the demographic, historical and status particularities of the communities in Kosovo and Dobruja are generating significant differences. In Romania, since the community is numerically insignificant in a Christian majority country and lacks an Islamic theology faculty, one cannot speak of an assertive Islamic religious elite. This has an impact on the possibility of internally developing strategies for maintaining the Islamic religious identity. In that context, it can be stated that the Turkish Islam, represented by Turkish state actors closer to the local interpretation of the Islamic religion, represents the community's solution of self-preservation of its Islamic identity.

In Kosovo, a Muslim majority state, in addition to the approximately 2,000 imams, the Islamic female preachers are involved in the religious formation of Muslims in Kosovo. Having access to local theological formation, including the female segment, within the Faculty of Islamic Theology in Prishtina, the religious elite in Kosovo is an assertive one, able to produce its own theological and academic knowledge and to generate strategies for preserving the religious identity from inside.

For both the religious elites in Kosovo and Romania, Turkey is perceived as a welcome donor in the first place, having the historical and cultural closeness, over other donor states. They reject in both cases the idea of Turkey's influence on their own communities' internal affairs, although their consolidation by Turkish actors means in time the creation of a religious soft power basis for Turkey.

Emphasizing the common culture, history and religion, Turkey engaged after 2002 in the exportation of its domestic religious community model abroad. Even if Turkey assumes the role of protector of local Islam and fighter against radicalization, the application of its own religious *habitus* in certain external,

RELIGIOUS SOFT POWER IN TURKEY'S KIN STATE POLICY IN THE BALKANS: THE ROLE OF THE
DIYANET AND TIKA IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN KOSOVO AND DOBRUJA REGION IN ROMANIA

461

secular socio-political contexts can produce frictions, manifestations of radical nationalist trends as in the case of Romanian grand mosque or situations of conflict between pro-religious and pro-secular trends, as in the case of the great mosque in Kosovo.

Even if both states, Kosovo and Romania, are secular republics, the level of Turkey's influence differs according to the religious profile of each country. In Romania it's limited because this is a predominantly Christian country. The groups that Turkish actors can co-opt here and that can become a potential religious soft-power source are restricted to the Turkish and Tatar communities. They depend on Turkey for the preservation of their Islamic religious identity and are soft-power sources constituted through the support mechanisms put in practice by Turkey. Though, being small minorities, their position is limited politically and diplomatically.

In Kosovo, Turkey's religious kin-state policy addresses the majority of the population and the possible sources of religious soft power are manifold. They include different groups of Kosovo society, from the formal or informal religious elite (the female preachers), the Turkish ethnic community, to the young generations who access various forms of education supported by the Turkish state. The religious influence of Turkey is more extensive in Kosovo and its various target groups are a basis for the continuous expansion of its religious soft-power. The common feature of the two cases is that belonging to the Ottoman-Turkish cultural-religious zone, practicing the Sunni Hanafi Islam, the variety supported by Romanian and Kosovar authorities as moderate, adapted to local specificities, remains a base for both Turkish-Kosovo and Turkish-Romanian relations. The two states prefer the Turkish influence on their local Islam to other external influences, considered as foreign and radical.

List of Interviews

Anonymous Interviewee 1, representative of the Muftiate of Romania, Constanța, Romania, 22.05.2014;

Anonymous Interviewee 2, representative of the Muftiate of Romania, online interview, 11.02. 2022.

Anonymous Interviewee 3, official working in the educational field, Medgidia, Romania, 18.09. 2013.

Anonymous Interviewee 4, imam, Bucharest, Romania, 22.02.2022.

Anonymous Interviewee 5, imam, Valu lui Traian, Romania,16.10. 2013.

Anonymous Interviewee 6, representative of the Islamic Community in Kosovo (*Bashkësia Islame e Kosovës*, ICK), Prishtina, Kosovo, 15.03.2022.

Anonymous Interviewee 7, member of the Turkish community in Kosovo, Prishtina, Kosovo, 15.03.2022.

Anonymous Interviewee 9, member of the religious elite, Prishtina, Kosovo, 15.03. 2022.

Anonymous Interviewee 8, representative of the Islamic Community of Prizren (*Këshilli i Bashkësisë Islame - Prizren*), Prizren, Kosovo, 22.03.2022.

Anonymous Interviewee 10, activist on women's issues, B.I., online interview, 15.05.2022.

References

Amghar, S. 2011. *Le salafisme d'aujourd'hui. Movements sectaires en Occident*. Paris: Michalon.

Antov, N. 2017. *The Ottoman 'Wild West': The Balkan Frontier in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Aydın, Y. 2014. *The New Turkish Diaspora Policy: Its Aims, Their Limits and the Challenges for Associations of People of Turkish Origin and Decision-Makers in Germany*. SWP Research Papers 10.

Bowen, J. R. 2004. Beyond Migration, Islam as a Transnational Public Space. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30, no. 5: 879-894.

Brubaker, R. 2000. *Accidental Diasporas and External Homelands in Central and Eastern Europe: Past and Present*. Vienna: Institute for Advanced Studies.

Brubaker, R. 1996. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and Nationalism in the New Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

RELIGIOUS SOFT POWER IN TURKEY'S KIN STATE POLICY IN THE BALKANS: THE ROLE OF THE
DIYANET AND TIKA IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN KOSOVO AND DOBRUJA REGION IN ROMANIA

463

Bruce, B. 2019. *Governing Islam Abroad: Turkish and Moroccan Muslims in Western Europe.* Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan*.*

Çitak, Z. 2018. National Conceptions, Transnational Solidarities: Turkey, Islam and Europe. *Global Networks* 19, no. 3: 377 – 398.

Cupcea, A. 2022. Romania. In *Yearbook of Muslim in Europe*, 13, eds. S. Müssig, E. Račius, S. Akgönül, A. Alibašić, J. S. Nielsen and O. Scharbrodt, 544-557. Leiden, Boston: Brill.

Davutoğlu, A. 2008. Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007. *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 1: 77-96.

Demirtaş, B. 2015. Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Balkans: A Europeanized Foreign Policy in a De-Europeanized National Context? *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 17, no. 2: 123-140.

Özkan, G. and M. T. Demirtepe. 2012. Transformation of a Development Aid Agency: TIKA in a Changing Domestic and International Setting. *Turkish Studies* 13, no. 4: 647-664.

Dursun-Özkanca, O. 2019. *Turkey-West Relations. The Politics of Intra-alliance Oppositions.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ionescu, S. 2015. Cea mai mare moschee din Europa creştină se ridică la București. Detaliile unui proiect uriaș, fără propagandă fundamentalistă. (The largest mosque in Christian Europe is built in Bucharest. The details of a huge project, without fundamentalist propaganda). *Adevărul*, 10 June. https://adevarul.ro/locale/constanta/cea-mai-mare-moschee-europa-cres-tina-ridica-bucuresti-detaliile-unui-proiect-urias-propaganda-fundamentalista-1_5576fce9cf-be376e35196fc7/index.html

Gall, C. 2016. How Kosovo Was Turned Into Fertile Ground for ISIS. *New York Times*, 21 May. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/22/world/europe/how-the-saudis-turned-kosovo-into-fer-tile-ground-for-isis.html

Ghodsee, Kristen. 2010. Minarets after Marx: Islam, Communist Nostalgia, and the Common Good in Postsocialist Bulgaria. *East European Politics and Societies* 24, no. 4: 520-542.

2014. Kosova'da Kutlu Doğum Haftası. *Haberler*, 29 April. https://www.haberler.com/guncel/ko-sova-da-kutlu-dogum-haftasi-5964414-haberi/

Krasniqi, K. 2019. *Islamist Extremism in Kosovo and the Countries of the Region.* Cham: Spinger.

Kyuchukov, L. 2018. *Balkan Islam. A Barrier or a Bridge for Radicalization?* Sofia: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

Sunier, T., N. Landman, H. van der Linden, N. Bilgili and A. Bilgili. 2011. *Diyanet, The Turkish Directorate for Religious Affairs in a changing environment*. Utrecht: Utrecht University.

Maritato, C. 2015. Performing Irşad: Female Preachers' (Vaizeler's) Religious Assistance Within the Framework of the Turkish State. *Turkish Studies* 16*,* no. 3: 433-466.

Mehmeti, J. 2022. Kosovo. In *Yearbook of Muslim in Europe* 13, eds. S. Müssig, E. Račius, S. Akgönül, A. Alibašić, J. S. Nielsen and O. Scharbrodt, 372-82. Leiden, Boston: Brill.

Mitrovic, B., M. Dušan Reljić and A. Vračić. 2015. Elsewhere in the Neighborhood: Reaching out to the Western Balkans. In *Turkey's Public Diplomacy*, eds. S. Çedsevik and P. Seib, 99–120. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

National Institute of Statistics. 2011. *Romania. Population and Housing Census.* https://insse.ro/cms/files/publicatii/brosuri/BROSURA-RPL%202011_n.pdf

2017. Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA). Program Coordination Office in Bucharest. *Nine O'Clock*, 30 October. https://www.nineoclock.ro/2017/10/30/turkish-cooperation-and-coordination-agency-tika-program-coordination-office-in-bucharest/

Nye, J. S. 2004. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs. er, M. 2020. *Emigrarea turcilor și tătarilor din România între cele două războaie mondiale (Emmigration of Turks and Tatars between the two World Wars).* Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun.

Özgür Baklacioğlu, N. 2015. Between neo-Ottomanist Kin Policy in the Balkans and Transnational Kin Economics in the EU. *Journal of Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 3: 47-72.

Öztürk, E. A. 2021. *Religion, Identity and Power: Turkey and the Balkans in the Twenty-first Century*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Öztürk, A. E. and I. Gözaydın. 2018. A Frame for Turkey's Foreign Policy via the Diyanet in the Balkans. *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 7: 331-50.

Öztürk, Mustafa Talha. 2020. Kosovo president supports Turkey's mosque project. *Anadolu Agency*, 23 July 23. https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/kosovo-president-supports-turkeys-mosque-project/1919380

Öktem, K. 2010. *New Islamic Actors after Wahhabi Intermezzo: Turkey's Return to the Muslim Balkans.* European Studies Centre, University of Oxford.

Öktem, K. 2012. Global Diyanet and Multiple Networks: Turkey's New Presence in the Balkans. *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 1, no. 1: 27-58.

Simuț, C. 2015. Negative Ecodomy in Romanian Politics and Religion: Anti-Muslim Attitudes in the Bucharest Mosque Scandal during the Summer of 2015. *Religions* 6, no. 4: 1368-1390.

Szerencsés. L. 2021. Inclusion and Repression In Turkey's Diaspora Policies in Kosovo As A Tool Of Loyalty Building In Religious Circles. *A Journal of Transnational Studies* 21, no. 2: 188-208.

Shaban, F. and Dzihat A. 2018. Turkish aid agency to restore 2 mosques in Kosovo. *Anadolu Agency*, 11 June. https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/turkish-aid-agency-to-restore-2-mosques-in-kosovo/1171903.

Statutory Decree on the Organization and Duties of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency Directorate.

Tabak, H. 2016. *The Kosovar Turks and Post-Kemalist Turkey Foreign Policy*, *Socialization and Resistance*. London, New York: I. B. Tauris.

TIKA, 2019. Turkish Development Assistance Report. https://www.tika.gov.tr/upload/sayfa/publication/2019/TurkiyeKalkinma2019WebENG.pdf

RELIGIOUS SOFT POWER IN TURKEY'S KIN STATE POLICY IN THE BALKANS: THE ROLE OF THE
DIYANET AND TIKA IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN KOSOVO AND DOBRUJA REGION IN ROMANIA

465

TIKA, 2017. TIKA Annual Report, https://www.tika.gov.tr/upload/2018/2017%20Faaliyet%20 Raporu/AR_2017%20web.pdf

Urmuz, N. 2021. Geamia Mahmud Yazîcî din Isaccea, reastaurată cu bani turceşti (Mahmud Yazîcî Mosques rehabilitated with Turkish money), *Delta*, 11 February. https://ziaruldelta.ro/2021/02/11/ geamia-mahmud-yazici-din-isaccea-restaurata-cu-bani-turcesti/.

White J. 2013. *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Xharra, B. 2012. Kosovo Turns Blind Eye to Illegal Mosques. *Balkan Insight,* 12 January. https:// balkaninsight.com/2012/01/12/kosovo-turns-blind-eye-to-illegal-mosques/