



KCSS
Kosovar Centre for Security Studies

A DISCUSSION OF KOSOVO-NATO RELATIONS AND PROSPECTS FOR GREATER COOPERATION



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INTRODUCTION

Membership of Kosovo in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is regarded as a national interest across Kosovo's political spectrum and receives substantial public support. According to the 2022 Security Barometer by the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS), an overwhelming 92 percent of all citizens in Kosovo are in favor of joining NATO. This support is even more pronounced among the Kosovo Albanians, where the approval rate soars to 99.5 percent. This is the only objective in Kosovo that enjoys this level of public backing. Kosovo's Security Strategy 2022-2027 states [‘The irreplaceable aim of the Republic of Kosovo is NATO membership and integration as the mechanism that provides long-term strategic security’](#).

NATO's leading role in ending the 1999 war and averting a potential genocide in Kosovo is widely seen as a major reason behind the strong public support for the alliance. However, this sentiment has been reinforced by recent developments, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, intensifying Kosovo's appreciation for NATO membership. The urgency for Kosovo to join NATO is further heightened by the unresolved bilateral disputes with Serbia and the increasingly adversarial positions of Serbian President Vucic towards, as shown by a recent statement from him, which implies that on Kosovo, [Serbia should learn from Azerbaijan, adding that: “They waited 27 years for special geopolitical circumstances”](#). The Banjska terrorist attack in September 2023, which is believed to have been orchestrated with the support of Serbian security institutions and in cooperation with Russia, reinforces the perception that Serbia sees a military solution to the “Kosovo problem”.

Although Kosovo benefits from NATO's protection via the KFOR mission, NATO's stance on Kosovo remains status-neutral, with no significant advancement in NATO-Kosovo political relations since 2016. This paper delves into these challenges and seeks to explore the obstacles Kosovo faces on its path to NATO membership. Accordingly, this paper includes an analysis of the current NATO-Kosovo relations, options for Kosovo to enhance these relations and overcome key challenges, including exploration of the Partnership for Peace and the Membership Action Plan (MAP), a review of NATO accession processes in Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia, and concluding remarks with recommendations.

THE COMPLEX DYNAMICS OF NATO-KOSOVO RELATIONS: SECURITY, SUPPORT, AND UNFULFILLED ASPIRATIONS

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 significantly impacted global geopolitics, highlighting security and stability concerns across Europe, including in Kosovo. This situation has underscored the urgency of Kosovo's NATO membership, viewing it as crucial for security against any potential plans, be that from Serbia or Russia to influence security and stability in Kosovo. The current state of NATO-Kosovo relations is characterized by a complex interplay of military, political, and ethnic issues, with NATO's continued support being essential for Kosovo's stability and its aspirations toward integration into the alliance.

In May 2023, in response to the deteriorating security situation in Kosovo, including injuries to [30 NATO/KFOR soldiers, an additional 700 troops](#) were deployed to the north of Kosovo as part of NATO efforts to bolster capabilities of KFOR. This was complemented by placing a reserve battalion on standby, showcasing NATO's commitment to Kosovo's security through the nearly 3,800 KFOR troops. Tensions escalated further in September 2023 when NATO authorized more forces following the Banjska terrorist attack, where a Kosovar police officer was killed.

Since its operations began in 2009, following an [eight-month training period with NATO](#), the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) has been working towards becoming a professional and multi-ethnic force. The KSF achieved full operational capability for non-military tasks in 2013. NATO has played a crucial role in shaping the KSF to meet its standards, emphasizing the creation of a force that contributes to regional stability and reflects NATO's commitment to democratic transitions.

The [Kosovo Security Force 10-year transition plan](#), initiated in 2019, aims to transform the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) into a territorial defense force. This transformation is part of a broader strategy to enhance Kosovo's defense capabilities and interoperability with international forces, with significant contributions from the United States Department of Defense and the Ministry of Defense of Kosovo. Through [bilateral Defense Consultations](#), both parties have underscored a commitment to security cooperation and the development of the KSF's practical capabilities, within the framework of Kosovo's parliamentary democracy. [The KSF 10 year transition plan](#) includes structural reforms to strengthen the KSF's operational effectiveness, focusing on organizational development, professionalization, modernization, and international cooperation. This strategic evolution positions the KSF as a credible force for national security and regional stability, with its implementation demanding continuous dedication and strategic navigation within the regional security landscape.

Currently, the plan is nearing the completion of its [second phase, set to conclude in 2025](#), with subsequent phases aimed at enhancing military capacities. Since the escalation of the conflict in

Ukraine, there has been significant investment in modern weaponry, highlighted by [the defense budget](#) increases in 2021 and 2022, totaling 67 million euros and 123 million euros, respectively. This funding facilitated the acquisition of state-of-the-art weapons, [including Bayraktar TB-2 drones from Turkey](#), marking a significant step in modernizing Kosovo's military capabilities. This modernization effort is supported by the United States, which is in the negotiating process of modern weapons like [Javelin missiles](#), aligning Kosovo's military development with NATO standards. The [United States](#) as the biggest supporter of the Republic of Kosovo has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale of Javelin Missiles.

The [NATO Liaison and Advisory Team \(NALT\)](#) in Kosovo plays a critical role in aligning the KSF with NATO standards, advising on the professional development of the KSF, enhancing institutional capacity, and supporting security sector reform efforts. The drafting of [three basic laws for the Ministry of Defense and KSF, the establishment of the parliamentary commissioner for the KSF, and improvements in the recruitment process](#) exemplify the NALT's significant impact on Kosovo's defense capabilities and its path toward integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.

NATO's significant operational presence, especially in ethnically tense and politically challenging areas like north of Kosovo, is vital. KFOR's peacekeeping activities, such as patrols and community dialogues, play a key role in preventing conflict escalation and maintaining stability.

NATO'S ACCESSION PROCESS AND KOSOVO'S EFFORTS FOR INTEGRATION

[NATO's "open door policy](#), "based on Article 10 of the Washington Treaty, allows any European state that can further NATO's principles and contribute to North Atlantic security to apply for membership. Since 1949, NATO has expanded from 12 founding members to 32 members through ten rounds of [enlargement](#). During the Cold War, Greece, Türkiye (1952), West Germany (1955), and Spain (1982) joined NATO. Post-Cold War, new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe sought membership, leading to the accession of Czechia, Hungary, and Poland in 1999, and Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia in 2004.

The 2008 [Bucharest Summit](#) facilitated the membership of Albania and Croatia (2009), Montenegro (2017), and North Macedonia (2020). NATO's focus on the Western Balkans aims to ensure long-term stability in this historically volatile region. Georgia and Ukraine, engaged in Intensified Dialogues with NATO, are also recognized as future members. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Finland and Sweden applied for NATO membership, joining in 2023 and 2024 respectively, reflecting NATO's commitment to European security and stability.

Kosovo has shown a strong desire to join NATO. According to a public opinion poll by the International Republican Institute (IRI), [88 percent of Kosovars believe full NATO membership](#) serves their country's future best, and 91 percent view NATO positively. NATO membership would enhance Kosovo's role as a force for stability, reduce ethnic tensions, and foster sustained

peace. This membership aligns with NATO's efforts in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and resolution.

Joining NATO would also provide Kosovo with better defense mechanisms against external threats, particularly from actors aiming to destabilize the Balkans. Membership would enable Kosovo to participate in NATO's "[Enhanced Security Cooperation](#)" framework, improving regional security collaboration, enhancing counterterrorism efforts, and contributing to a safer Europe. Additionally, NATO membership is crucial for Kosovo's Euro-Atlantic integration, strengthening ties with the European Union and other Western entities, and bolstering political and economic stability. As a NATO member, Kosovo would enhance its defense and deterrence capabilities, effectively addressing regional security challenges.

Kosovo has undertaken important security sector reforms to meet NATO's standards for membership. These reforms include enhancing interoperability with NATO forces and developing cyber defense capabilities. A significant milestone in this effort is the inauguration of the [State Cyber Security Training Center at the Kosovo Security Force \(KSF\) in March of 2024](#). This center aims to raise awareness of cyber security risks, improve professional skills, and bolster the cyber security levels of government institutions.

The Kosovo Search and Rescue International Training Centre ([SARITC](#)) has quickly developed into a leading facility since it officially began operations in 2016, with the assistance of the [Swedish Rescue Training Centre](#) and expert consultants, featuring 'collapsed' and 'semi-collapsed' training buildings. Initially focused on [urban, mountain, and diving/water rescue training](#), SARITC expanded its facilities to include train carriages, large hazardous materials containers, vehicles, an 18m high rappelling tower with scenario rooms, and a 23m long mock-up helicopter. This expansion allowed the center to address broader training needs and accommodate emergency responders regionally.

By 2018, [SARITC](#) aimed to become a premier training site with the most diverse training objects in one location worldwide, positioning itself as a 'One Stop Shop' for search and rescue training. The site now rivals other European training centers, offering realistic training scenarios. In May 2022, during an Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) exercise, SARITC's potential as a leading training ground for different militaries from NATO member states. The site is well-equipped, and future plans include adding more realistic collapsed structures for training. SARITC's facilities are available to all emergency response organizations, which can use the site independently or with their instructors, role players, and equipment. Recent visitors include emergency teams from Israel, Jordan, the Netherlands, Ukraine, and the UK.

The KSF's active participation in international peacekeeping, exemplified by its deployment to [Kuwait in March 2021](#), Kosovo's first international peacekeeping mission, signifies its readiness to contribute effectively to NATO operations. This, along with its humanitarian efforts, such as accepting [Afghan refugees](#), demonstrates Kosovo's alignment with NATO's values and missions.

Kosovo's involvement in international military exercises, particularly '[Defender Europe 2023](#),' hosted by Kosovo and involving over 24,000 personnel from 25 countries, underscores its growing capabilities and commitment to international defense initiatives. However, Kosovo's

exclusion from the final phase of the exercise, in response to uncoordinated actions by Kosovo government, that led to heightened ethnic tensions particularly in the north of Kosovo.

A paradox exists within the NATO–Kosovo dynamic. Despite Kosovo being one of the most pro-NATO countries globally and enjoying widespread recognition from NATO members, it still faces challenges for full NATO membership. Furthermore, NATO has not made any substantial offer to Kosovo for advanced relations. The most recent highlight in NATO–Kosovo relations since 2016, when NALT was initiated, was in May 2024 Kosovo’s status in the [NATO Parliamentary Assembly](#) was upgraded to that of an associate member from the observer status it held previously. While NATO’s operational support and strategic guidance have been significant, there has been a noticeable absence of concrete steps or proposals to elevate Kosovo’s status within the alliance framework. This reluctance to formalize a more advanced relationship leaves Kosovo in a state of uncertainty, despite its demonstrated commitment and strategic importance to NATO’s objectives in the region.

CASE STUDIES: REGIONAL EXAMPLES

The accession of Albania, North Macedonia, and Montenegro to NATO provides compelling insights into the alliance’s role in enhancing regional stability, security, and geopolitical orientation towards Western democratic values. Despite facing distinct geopolitical challenges, their integration into NATO has produced significant benefits, particularly in diminishing Russian influence and fortifying regional security frameworks.

To begin with [Albania’s accession to NATO in 2009](#) represented a transformative milestone in the nation’s foreign policy evolution. This momentous integration into the Alliance affirmed Albania’s commitment to Western defense principles and democratic values, significantly enhancing its strategic posture. By joining NATO, Albania bolstered its defenses against regional adversities and cemented its status as a steadfast partner in promoting peace and stability in the region.

NATO membership played a crucial role in reinforcing Albania’s democratic institutions and governance reforms, acting as a catalyst for political and social modernization. It provided a framework for continued development and reform, aligning Albania’s legislative and military frameworks with international standards of democracy and rule of law. This alignment was critical for Albania’s aspirations for deeper integration into European structures, paving the way for its eventual accession to the European Union.

In essence, Albania’s entry into NATO was emblematic of its broader strategic realignment towards Euro–Atlantic institutions, signifying a departure from its past and moving towards an era of cooperation and democratic partnership. This strategic pivot has not only fortified Albania’s security infrastructure but also advanced its socio–political landscape, demonstrating NATO’s pivotal role in facilitating member states’ comprehensive security and democratic development.

The [accession of North Macedonia to NATO in 2020](#) stands as a hallmark of the Alliance’s

ability to navigate and resolve deep-rooted regional disputes, particularly the longstanding name issue with Greece. This diplomatic triumph not only paved the way for North Macedonia's integration into the Euro-Atlantic community but also played a pivotal role in enhancing the stability of a region often affected by ethnic tensions and political strife. NATO's involvement in facilitating dialogue between North Macedonia and Greece exemplifies the Alliance's role as a mediator in international conflicts. By providing a platform for negotiations, NATO helped both nations reach a historic agreement on the name dispute, a contentious issue that had impeded North Macedonia's path to membership for decades.

Furthermore, NATO's support for North Macedonia extended beyond diplomatic mediation. The Alliance's commitment to assisting North Macedonia in meeting membership criteria—through reforms in the defense and security sectors, and aligning with NATO standards—demonstrated a tangible investment in the country's democratic and institutional development. This support was instrumental in ensuring that North Macedonia could effectively contribute to and benefit from collective security arrangements under NATO's umbrella. North Macedonia's integration into NATO not only signifies the country's fulfillment of its Euro-Atlantic aspirations but also reinforces the Alliance's strategic interest in the Balkans. By extending its membership to include North Macedonia, NATO has strengthened the region's security architecture, deterred potential external aggression, and fostered a more stable and cooperative geopolitical environment in Southeast Europe.

The success story of North Macedonia's accession to NATO underscores the Alliance's transformative impact on regional dynamics and its capacity to support its member states' sovereignty and democratic processes. It serves as a testament to the power of diplomatic engagement and collective security in overcoming historical impediments and advancing peace and cooperation in the Balkans.

Montenegro's accession to [NATO in 2017](#) marked a pivotal moment, emphasizing the strategic importance of the Alliance's expansion in the Balkans. This move came in the wake of an alleged Russian attempt in 2016 to sway Montenegro's political direction, showcasing the intense external challenges countries encounter en route to NATO integration. Successfully joining NATO, Montenegro not only thwarted such external meddling but also solidified its allegiance to Western democratic values and security measures. Following its entry into NATO, Montenegro's endorsement of EU sanctions against Russia was a significant foreign policy shift, underlining NATO membership's critical role in transforming both national and regional security landscapes.

This action directly contributed to diminishing Russian influence within Montenegro, showcasing NATO's capacity to bolster the sovereignty and democratic resilience of its member states against external pressures. Montenegro's journey to NATO membership thus stands as a testament to the transformative power of the Alliance in reducing Russian sway in the Balkans, reinforcing a collective commitment to democratic principles and regional stability.

These case studies collectively underscore the transformative impact of NATO membership on the Balkans, pushing the region towards enhanced stability, security, and a closer alignment with Western democratic norms. In essence, the journeys of Albania, North Macedonia, and Montenegro to NATO membership illustrate the profound benefits of aligning with the alliance in terms of national security, democratic progression, and regional stability. For Kosovo, pursuing a similar path promises not only enhanced security and sovereignty but also deeper integration into the Euro-Atlantic community, with far-reaching implications for the stabilization and democratization of the Balkans.

EXAMINING KOSOVO'S OPTIONS FOR ADVANCED RELATIONS WITH NATO

Prioritizing membership in the [Partnership for Peace \(PfP\)](#) program is a strategic move for Kosovo. In 2022, Kosovo initiated an internal institutional working group to push NATO membership; nevertheless there are no specific steps toward this goal. Working with NATO member states that support Kosovo, to advocate inclusion of the country in PfP is one area where Kosovo government should invest, such as in closer cooperation with United States United Kingdom and Turkey. These efforts are crucial for consensus-building within NATO about Kosovo's role and potential membership. Moreover, internal efforts to enhance stability, address ethnic tensions, and foster reconciliation within Kosovo are imperative for demonstrating to NATO and its member states Kosovo's capacity as a stable and reliable partner.

Kosovo has taken substantial steps to showcase its eligibility and readiness for the PfP program, reinforcing its commitment to the program's core objectives. Kosovo has undertaken significant reforms within its defense and security sectors, aiming to build a professional, accountable, and transparent security framework. These reforms are designed to ensure that Kosovo's military and security institutions operate under the principles of democratic governance and civilian oversight. Understanding the importance of [interoperability with NATO forces](#), Kosovo has focused on upgrading its military capabilities and operational procedures. This includes adopting NATO-compatible communication systems, logistics, and technical standards, facilitating the potential for seamless collaboration in NATO-led missions. Kosovo has made strides in strengthening its democratic institutions and governance mechanisms, emphasizing the rule of law, human rights, and minority rights. These efforts are crucial in aligning with the values and principles upheld by NATO and its PfP program.

As mentioned above a pivotal obstacle to Kosovo's PfP membership is the lack of recognition from some NATO member states. These nations' reservations stem from various geopolitical and regional considerations, complicating Kosovo's bid for closer integration with Euro-Atlantic structures. Meaning that Kosovo's diplomacy needs immediate awakening In order for Kosovo to be more active and open its doors into the International Community. Kosovo must navigate these diplomatic waters carefully, seeking allies and building consensus among NATO members to advance its PfP candidacy. The challenges ahead demand continued dedication to reforms,

strategic diplomacy, and international engagement. Overcoming the obstacles posed by non-recognition and building a compelling case for membership will require Kosovo to leverage its achievements, foster alliances, and engage in persistent diplomatic efforts. Kosovo's path to PfP is not just a pursuit of security integration; it's a journey towards affirming its place as a responsible, democratic actor on the international stage, committed to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic region. The engagement of certain countries to PfP, such as Russia or Serbia reflects NATO's broader strategy of engaging diverse countries in dialogue and cooperation to promote European and global security. Therefore, Kosovo needs to activate its diplomacy and work harder toward being part of PfP despite the challenges and limitations that arise from the geopolitical dynamics and historical legacies.

Expanding the mandate of the [NATO Liaison and Advisory Team \(NALT\)](#) could deepen Kosovo-NATO institutional cooperation, offering broader advisory roles in defense planning, civil-military relations, and security sector governance. The NATO Liaison and Advisory Team (NALT) in Kosovo is at a pivotal stage where it can substantially broaden its influence and support for Kosovo's aspirations towards closer NATO integration and ultimately membership. By extending its advisory services beyond mere military training, NALT has the opportunity to encompass a more general approach to institutional development. This would involve strategic planning, resource management, and optimizing defense procurement processes to ensure Kosovo's defense mechanisms align closely with NATO's standards of transparency, accountability, and efficiency.

Additionally, increasing the Kosovo Security Force's (KSF) participation in NATO-led exercises and training programs, particularly those focused on interoperability, peacekeeping operations, and emergency response, are essential for greater cooperation between NATO and Kosovo. Identifying and leveraging specialized training opportunities in areas such as cyber defense, counter-terrorism, and strategic communications could significantly augment Kosovo's defense capabilities, ensuring alignment with NATO's rigorous standards. Coordinating with NATO centers of excellence for the delivery of such specialized training would also be an important step on its own to advance relations between NATO and Kosovo.

THE ADRIATIC CHARTER'S ROLE IN PAVING THE PATH TO NATO MEMBERSHIP

The [Adriatic Charter](#) was initially created by the United States, Albania, Croatia, and North Macedonia in 2003. Currently, the full members of the Adriatic Charter include Albania, Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia. Kosovo is the only observer country in the Adriatic Charter. Kosovo receives invitations to participate as an observer in the Adriatic Charter through diplomatic channels and discussions among the full members such as Croatia, US, North Macedonia. These invitations are extended based on Kosovo's alignment with the objectives of the Charter, its efforts toward regional security and stability and its aspirations for Euro Atlantic Integration, including NATO membership. The decision to invite

Kosovo as an observer is made by consensus among the full members of the Adriatic Charter. This initiative plays a crucial role in fostering regional cooperation, implementing necessary reforms, and sharing best practices for Euro Atlantic Integration.

The primary purpose of creating the Adriatic Charter was to [enhance regional stability and security in Southeast Europe](#) and to support the aspirations of member countries for NATO integration. This initiative was driven by the need to promote collective security and stability in the Balkans, a region that had suffered significant conflict and instability during the 1990s. The wars in the former Yugoslavia, including the conflicts in [Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo](#), underscored the necessity of a cooperative security framework. NATO's intervention in the Kosovo conflict in 1999 and its subsequent peacekeeping efforts further highlighted the importance of aligning with NATO to secure regional peace and stability.

Among the Adriatic Charter members, [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) has not recognized Kosovo's independence, posing a significant obstacle to Kosovo's full membership. This stance is influenced by the complex political dynamics within Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly the opposition from the [Republika Srpska entity](#), which maintains close ties with Serbia and aligns with its stance on Kosovo. Currently, Kosovo participates in the Adriatic Charter as an observer. This status allows Kosovo to engage in discussions, attend meetings, and participate in various cooperative initiatives without full membership privileges. For instance, Kosovo is regularly invited to the Annual Meeting of Defense Ministers of the Adriatic Charter. During the meeting hosted by North Macedonia in November 2023, the [Minister of Defense of the Republic of Kosovo, Ejup Maqedonci](#), emphasized the need for a clearer and stronger international response against actions by terrorist groups supported by Serbian state structures. He also highlighted Kosovo's determination to preserve its sovereignty and protect its territorial integrity in coordination with international partners. Furthermore, Maqedonci requested the support of member countries for Kosovo's full accession to the Adriatic Charter, framing it as a regional initiative that could open doors to other regional and Euro-Atlantic policy pathways.

Participation in the Adriatic Charter offers significant strategic benefits for [Kosovo's pursuit of NATO membership](#). It provides essential support for enacting reforms in democratic governance, defense, and security sectors to meet NATO standards. The technical assistance and capacity-building initiatives, particularly from the U.S., are invaluable in enhancing Kosovo's military capabilities and ensuring interoperability with NATO forces. Moreover, being part of the Adriatic Charter secures influential advocates for Kosovo who have successfully navigated their path to NATO integration, thereby promoting Kosovo's readiness for deeper alliance integration within NATO forums. Engaging with the Adriatic Charter significantly impacts Kosovo by providing a structured pathway toward NATO integration. The Charter's emphasis on regional collaboration and shared security challenges aligns well with Kosovo's goals, making it an ideal platform to advance its NATO aspirations. Kosovo's participation, even as an observer, allows it to demonstrate its commitment to regional stability and security, fostering closer ties with current NATO members.

However, the political challenge posed by non-recognition from some member states, particularly Bosnia and Herzegovina, remains a significant struggle. Overcoming this obstacle

requires sustained diplomatic efforts and broader international support. Full membership in the Adriatic Charter would not only validate Kosovo's progress but also enhance its strategic position in the region, ultimately facilitating its path to NATO membership. Kosovo's commitment to the Adriatic Charter serves as a vital instrument for Kosovo's Euro-Atlantic integration. By leveraging the Charter's framework for cooperation, reforms, and capacity-building, Kosovo can strengthen its defense and security posture, aligning itself more closely with NATO standards and practices. This engagement is crucial for Kosovo as it seeks to solidify its international standing and achieve full NATO membership.

ELEVATING KOSOVO'S ROLE IN NATO THROUGH A CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

A Center of Excellence ([CoE](#)) is a specialized institution within NATO designed to focus on specific areas of expertise, such as search and rescue operations, cyber defense, or counter-terrorism. These centers serve as hubs for research, training, and knowledge-sharing, providing valuable resources and expertise to NATO member countries and partner nations. CoEs play a crucial role in advancing NATO's capabilities, enhancing interoperability among member states, and addressing emerging security challenges.

For Kosovo, establishing a NATO Center of Excellence, particularly one dedicated to search and rescue operations, holds significant strategic importance. Such a center would elevate Kosovo's role within the Alliance, enhancing its contribution to NATO missions and operations and bolstering its security capabilities. Hosting a CoE would also raise Kosovo's profile on the global stage, demonstrating its commitment to regional security and Euro-Atlantic integration. The successes of [Kosovo's Search and Rescue Center](#) serves as a compelling testament to its capabilities. Notably, during the [2023 earthquake in Turkey](#), Kosovo's KSF troops conducted a highly successful rescue operation, saving lives and showcasing their readiness and effectiveness on the global stage. Such operations highlight Kosovo's capacity to manage natural disasters and participate in international humanitarian missions. Establishing a CoE in Kosovo would allow the KSF to share its knowledge and best practices with NATO allies and partners, fostering collaboration and enhancing interoperability across the Alliance.

To realize the establishment of a NATO Center of Excellence in Kosovo, diplomatic efforts and support from NATO member countries would be essential. Kosovo could leverage its existing partnerships and engagement with NATO to advocate for the creation of a CoE tailored to its expertise and strategic interests. Seeking observer status or a participatory role in existing NATO CoEs, such as the [European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats in Helsinki](#), could provide Kosovo with valuable insights and opportunities to enhance its security mechanisms and deepen its integration with Euro-Atlantic security architectures. By establishing a NATO Center of Excellence in Kosovo would not only elevate Kosovo's role within the Alliance but also contribute to NATO's overall capabilities and readiness. Through focused training, research, and collaboration, a CoE in Kosovo would strengthen regional security, promote interoperability, and advance Kosovo's aspirations for NATO membership.

NAVIGATING THE LANDSCAPE OF NATO CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE FOR KOSOVO

Kosovo stands to gain significantly by engaging with CoEs that resonate with its security imperatives, potentially as an observer or participant, in domains where its interests are most aligned and where it can both contribute to and derive substantial benefits.

There are many ways for Kosovo to strengthen its presence into paving the way to becoming a NATO member. For example, [the Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence \(CCDCOE\)](#) focuses on enhancing cyber defense capabilities through training, exercises, and research. Engagement with the CCDCOE could empower Kosovo to strengthen its cyber defense infrastructure and skills. Moreover, Kosovo can look at [The Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence \(STRATCOM COE\) in Latvia](#) offers insights into the intricacies of managing information within complex security environments. Kosovo's involvement with STRATCOM COE could enhance its strategic communication capabilities, a critical asset in today's information-driven world. Another great lead for Kosovo would be [the Crisis Management and Disaster Response Centre of Excellence \(CMDR COE\) in Bulgaria](#) specializes in preparing for and responding to both natural and human-made disasters. Collaborating with CMDR COE could provide Kosovo with advanced expertise in disaster response and crisis management, essential for national resilience.

I strongly believe that Kosovo should to pursue diplomatic engagements with the host nations of these CoEs to explore participation avenues. Identifying specific areas of strategic interest where Kosovo can both offer and gain expertise is crucial. This involves matching Kosovo's training needs with the specialized programs offered by the CoEs, thereby ensuring targeted development and maximization of participation benefits. Establishing formal cooperation frameworks, such as bilateral agreements or memorandum, of understanding with individual CoEs or their hosting countries, is a strategic move. Such agreements would cement Kosovo's cooperation with these centers, ensuring ongoing engagement and support.

Following [Finland's successful engagement model with NATO through the Hybrid CoE](#), Kosovo can identify and pursue similar opportunities with other CoEs. This strategic approach is aimed at advancing Kosovo's security capabilities, fostering deeper NATO collaboration, and furthering its Euro-Atlantic ambitions. This methodical engagement enhances Kosovo's defense preparedness, bolsters its international relationships, and contributes to broader regional and global security objectives, showcasing Kosovo's commitment and readiness to play a constructive role in the international security landscape.

BECOMING A MEMBER

The [NATO Membership Action Plan \(MAP\)](#) is the key how to become a NATO member initiative for countries like Kosovo that aspire to join the Alliance, providing them with a structured program of advice, assistance, and practical support tailored to their specific needs. For Kosovo, engaging with the [MAP](#) represents a significant step toward its goal of Euro-Atlantic integration, signifying the nation's strategic intent to align with Western democratic and security paradigms. The MAP defines a comprehensive framework through which Kosovo can undertake necessary reforms across various sectors including political, economic, and defense, thereby demonstrating its commitment to [NATO's standards](#) and readiness to fulfill the responsibilities that come with membership. Kosovo's path to the MAP is marked by several challenges, including the need for political stability, advancement in the rule of law, professionalization of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF), and addressing the issue of non-recognition by certain NATO member states. Additionally, the normalization of relations with Serbia emerges as a critical hurdle in Kosovo's journey toward MAP participation and eventual [NATO membership](#). To navigate these obstacles, Kosovo must enhance its engagement with NATO members, particularly those that have yet to acknowledge Kosovo's independence, thereby building support for its MAP ambitions. This entails comprehensive reforms across governance, defense, and economic spheres to ensure compliance with [NATO's rigorous standards](#), including enhancing institutional transparency, accountability, and efficiency.

The MAP offers Kosovo a strategic pathway to align its policies and practices with those of NATO, facilitating the country's efforts to showcase its progress in reforms and contributions to regional security. Through the MAP, Kosovo can improve the [interoperability of the KSF with NATO forces](#) and engage in meaningful political dialogue with Alliance members, thereby strengthening its case for membership and potentially gathering additional support within NATO.

ANOTHER OPTION FOR KOSOVO IS TO PURSUE GREATER COOPERATION WITH NATO MEMBER STATES

[Germany](#), for example, has provided Kosovo with considerable development assistance, part of which supports reforms aligned with NATO's standards. [Turkey's military cooperation with Kosovo](#), including training and equipment donation, exemplifies its supportive stance. The [UK assists Kosovo](#) by offering advice on defense and security reforms and supports Kosovo's engagement with NATO through various programs and activities, reflecting the UK's broader commitment to security and stability in the Western Balkans. Countries like Norway and Denmark contribute through specialized training programs and sharing their expertise in democratic governance and military technologies. For example, [Norway's support for peacekeeping training initiatives in Kosovo demonstrates the Nordic countries' commitment](#)

[to enhancing Kosovo's military capabilities](#). Thus, Nordic countries have potential for even greater support toward Kosovo. Croatia and Slovenia: As former Yugoslav republics that have transitioned into NATO and the EU, [Slovenia and Croatia offer Kosovo](#) precious insights and support for its integration efforts. Their bilateral assistance and advocacy for Kosovo's NATO initiatives provide a roadmap for Kosovo, drawing on their own experiences with the integration process.

The collective support from these actors is vital for Kosovo as it aims for NATO membership. Through strategic partnerships, Kosovo benefits from diplomatic advocacy, technical support for reforms, and involvement in military collaborations, marking significant progress toward Euro-Atlantic security integration. Sustaining and expanding these relationships is crucial for Kosovo's path toward full NATO integration.

CONCLUSION

Kosovo's strategic location in Southeast Europe is significant for NATO as it helps monitor regional security. Kosovo has been proactive in addressing ethnic tensions and fostering peace, providing NATO with valuable insights on conflict resolution. The country's commitment to democratic values, such as justice and human rights, aligns with NATO's principles, making Kosovo a suitable candidate for the alliance. The Kosovo Security Force's emphasis on ethnic diversity reflects Kosovo's dedication to inclusivity and unity.

Joining NATO would represent more than just enhanced security for Kosovo; it would establish a strategic partnership contributing to regional peace and stability. Through reforms and adherence to democratic standards, Kosovo demonstrates its readiness to join NATO, which would not only secure the area but also foster peace and collaboration in the Balkans. Kosovo's inclusion in NATO would underscore the importance of resolving conflicts through dialogue and diplomacy, rather than violence. Overall, Kosovo's membership in NATO would mark a significant step towards a more peaceful and cohesive region.

The comprehensive analysis on Kosovo's pathway towards NATO integration and the strategic significance of such a move for both Kosovo and NATO highlights several critical takeaways.

1. One of the main struggles that Kosovo is having is its diplomatic efforts. Therefore strengthening diplomatic efforts for wider recognition is urgent. Kosovo must intensify its diplomatic initiatives to secure broader international recognition and support from NATO members. This includes engaging in dialogue to address the concerns of countries that have not yet recognized Kosovo's independence and leveraging the support of allies to advocate on its behalf within NATO forums.

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2. *Accelerating reforms in the defense and security sectors by implementing comprehensive reforms in the defense and security sectors is essential. Kosovo should continue to develop the KSF's capabilities, ensuring that its forces meet NATO's standards for interoperability, professionalism, and adherence to democratic principles.*

 3. *Enhancing participation in NATO programs and having a strategic partnership with NATO: Joining NATO is not solely about enhancing security; it's about forming a strategic partnership that promotes regional peace and stability. Kosovo should leverage this potential partnership to advocate for its interests and contribute to peace in the Balkans. Kosovo should actively pursue participation in NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program and engage with the Membership Action Plan (MAP) as strategic steps toward closer integration with NATO. Additionally, the establishment of a NATO Center of Excellence in Kosovo, focused on areas such as search and rescue operations where Kosovo has specific expertise, could serve as a pivotal platform for advancing its role and contributions within the alliance. This not only demonstrates Kosovo's commitment to NATO's values and standards but also enhances its strategic significance to the alliance, offering a pathway to lasting peace and stability in the region.*

These recommendations underscore the importance of a concerted and strategic approach by Kosovo to align with NATO's expectations and overcome the obstacles on its path to membership, thereby contributing to the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area.

Katalogimi në botim – **(CIP)**

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ABOUT KCSS

Established in April 2008, the Kosovar Center for Security Studies (KCSS) is a specialized, independent, and non-governmental organization. The primary goal of KCSS is to promote the democratization of the security sector in Kosovo and to improve research and advocacy work related to security, the rule of law, and regional and international cooperation in the field of security.

KCSS aims to enhance the effectiveness of the Security Sector Reform (SSR) by supporting SSR programs through its research, events, training, advocacy, and direct policy advice.

Advancing new ideas and social science methods are also core values of the centre. Every year, KCSS publishes numerous reports, policy analysis and policy briefs on security-related issues. It also runs more than 200 public events including conferences, roundtables, and debates, lectures – in Kosovo, also in collaboration with regional and international partners.

A wide-range of activities includes research, capacity-building, awareness raising and advocacy. KCSS's work covers a wide range of topics, including but not limited to security sector reform and development, identifying and analyzing security risks related to extremism, radicalism, and organized crime, foreign policy and regional cooperation, and evaluating the rule of law in Kosovo.

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