



# **KOSOVO 2030**

## **POTENTIAL FOREIGN & SECURITY POLICY SCENARIOS**



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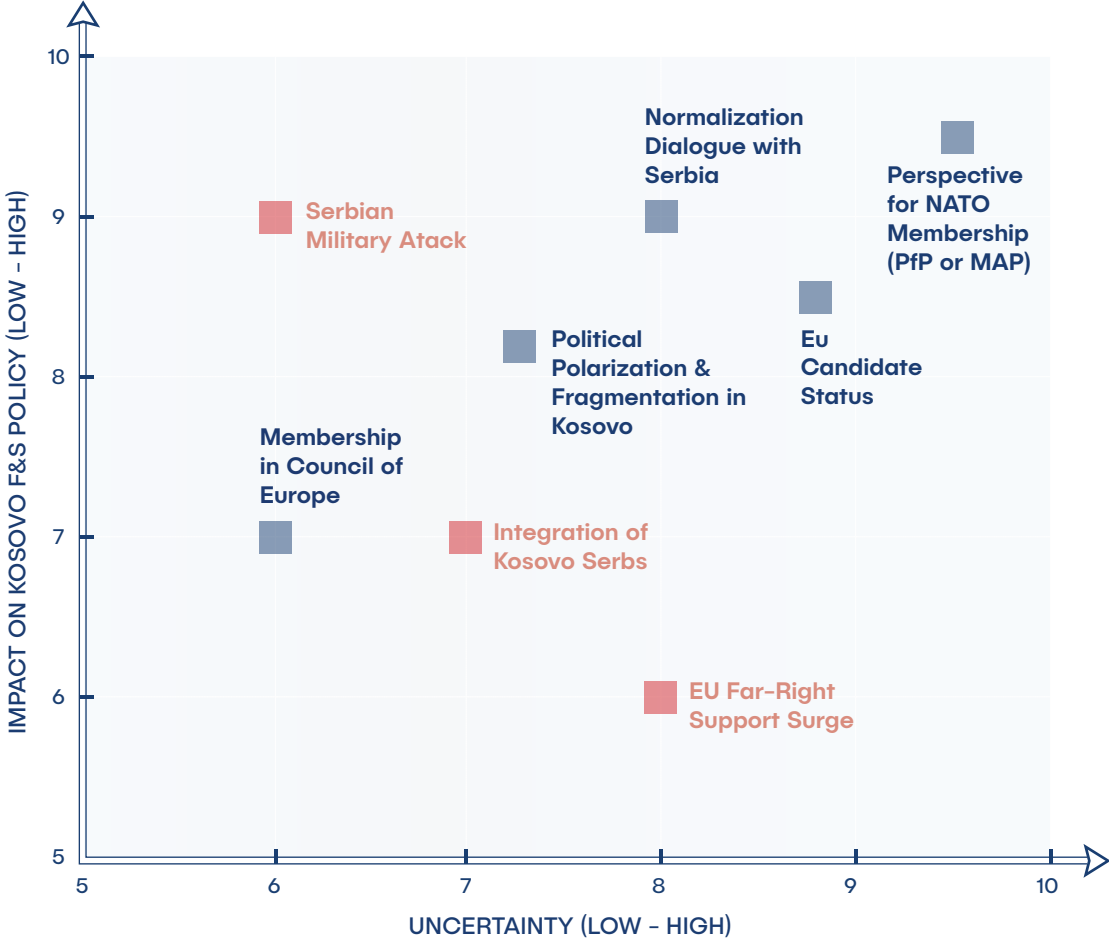
# Driving Forces and Critical Uncertainties

The trajectory of Kosovo's foreign and security policy over the next decade will be shaped by a limited set of highly consequential variables. These drivers vary in both impact and predictability, but together they define what is possible and what is at risk for Kosovo by 2030. The driver's map (Figure 1) provides a structured approach to understanding this outlook, highlighting the issues that matter most and identifying where uncertainty is greatest. The map plots each driver along two axes: its **expected impact on Kosovo's foreign and security policy**, and its **level**

**of uncertainty** based on current trends, external dependencies, and political volatility. Our analysis is not a prediction, but a risk-informed outlook, aimed at clarifying where Kosovo's energy, resources, and diplomacy should be concentrated in the years ahead.

Three drivers occupy the top-right quadrant of the map: those that are both highly impactful and highly uncertain. These are the issues that will shape Kosovo's future more than any others, but where outcomes are also least assured.

Critical drivers: uncertainty map



## NATO Membership Prospects

While NATO's mission in Kosovo, KFOR, offers significant security assurances to the Kosovars, Kosovo seeks, rightly so, proper membership in NATO. Whether through Partnership for Peace (PfP) or a Membership Action Plan (MAP), advancing relations with NATO tops the chart in both dimensions. No other development would carry the same strategic weight for Kosovo. A credible path to NATO integration would be the "Zeitenwende" (A German word referring to a historical turning point) not only for Kosovo but also for relations with Serbia, as it would likely lead to the normalization of ties. Yet this outcome remains hostage to a political consensus within NATO member states, which is dependent on both how the Kosovo government is perceived by NATO and the progress the country makes in normalizing relations with Serbia. Kosovo cannot fully control this trajectory, but it can influence it through rational, unilateral actions, such as participating in normalization dialogues, implementing domestic reforms, increasing participation in military exercises with NATO member states, and lowering tensions in the north.

## The EU Candidate Status for Kosovo is situated

Nearby on the map and follows a similarly consequential logic. Transforming Kosovo into a candidate country could unlock the full potential of the European integration process, and more importantly, mark a significant transformation in relations between Kosovo and the EU, from neutrality to recognition. Candidacy status for Kosovo would also shift international perception of the country and potentially lead to new recognition. The economic implications would be immediate. But the pathway to this result is politically complex. Like advancing NATO relations, achieving candidate status for Kosovo is also contingent upon making progress in normalizing relations with Serbia and gaining recognition from the five EU member states (Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Slovakia, and Romania). Kosovo's best bet is to boost its image as a credible, predictable, and reform-oriented actor that delivers on both reforms and obligations from the normalization dialogue.

## The Normalization Dialogue with Serbia

Completes the trio of critical, uncertain drivers. It functions both as an enabler and/or a blocker across multiple processes for Kosovo. Substantive progress on sequenced implementation of the Agreement on the Path to Normalization of Relations between Kosovo and Serbia from 2023, including the step-by-step approach to establishment of the Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities (ASM), would potentially unlock Kosovo's integration path by easing NATO's hesitations, reducing the EU's scepticism toward our country, and lowering inter-ethnic tensions. But if the dialogue stalls or is derailed by politicization, nationalist backlash, or external manipulation, the ripple effects will be adverse and far-reaching. Kosovo's broader integration agenda is ultimately inseparable from the credibility of this process.

Just below these top-tier drivers sit a second layer of issues that can either reinforce or weaken Kosovo's position, depending on domestic performance and external conditions.

## Political Polarization and Institutional Fragmentation

In Kosovo represents a high-impact internal variable that can be influenced directly. Deep divisions between major political parties and a confrontational political culture have eroded the confidence of the EU and the US in Kosovo's democracy, increasing perceptions of Kosovo as a less predictable actor. Failure to constitute the Kosovo Assembly for months, in the eyes of Kosovo's allies, is an indicator of a country that is yet to mature. By contrast, a cohesive parliamentary majority and political cooperation on national interests (i.e., the European integration process) could quickly de-risk this factor and create momentum across multiple fronts. Managing internal politics is therefore not only a governance concern, but it is a strategic imperative for Kosovo. In other words, for Kosovo, the argument is less about external judgment and more about how Kosovo can position itself as a reliable and constructive actor in a context of global shifts and unpredictability. While post-Trump dynamics have reshaped Western engagement, they also offer an opportunity for smaller actors to shape the agenda by being proactive, reform-oriented, and aligned with core democratic values. This is not about waiting for attention, but about making a credible case for why Kosovo matters.

## The integration of Kosovo Serbs in the north remains a central factor in maintaining stability

Advancing the integration of Kosovo Serbs in the north would not only help foster the credibility of the Kosovo state but also accelerate the Euro-Atlantic integration process. In addition to this, moving forward with the integration of the Kosovo Serbs would also reduce Belgrade's hold on the Kosovo Serbs, especially in the north. In this context, it would be imperative to kick-start the process of establishing the ASM, provided there are assurances that Kosovo will unlock its integration process in the EU and NATO. Kosovo should also consider that the reverse is also true, if it fails to take concrete measures towards integration, in that lack of trust by Kosovo Serbs in the north of the country can lead to different forms of parallel governance, and would likely provoke confrontation, degrade the security situation, and slow integration efforts. Success in dealing with the North depends on credibility and inclusion, not symbolism. If the regime of President Vučić weakens or transitions, it could open new dynamics, but that does not guarantee constructive outcomes for Kosovo. It only underscores the need for Kosovo to consolidate its position now by strengthening its democratic gains, delivering on EU reforms, and building credibility with international partners, primarily the US, EU, and NATO, so that it can potentially shape, rather than react to, any shifts that may follow in Serbia.

However, it is also essential to recognize that it takes two to tango, and that is why it is crucial to have not only the space but also the voices of Kosovo Serbs from the north who recognize the Kosovo state as theirs and make efforts to engage. Civil society leaders from the north can start this. This, in return, needs to be supported by Kosovo Albanian political parties and civil society. While political structures often dominate the narrative, there are individuals and communities on the ground seeking normalcy, stability, and cooperation. Amplifying these voices and ensuring they have a seat at the table is essential

## Membership in the Council of Europe

Carries less operational weight but is essential for institutional signaling. It would deepen Kosovo's European integration process, expand access to

human rights protections for Kosovars, and, most importantly, from a political perspective, it would demonstrate Kosovo's ability to cross a multilateral threshold despite non-recognition from five EU member states. If delayed or derailed, it may not alter the fundamentals, but it would cast doubt on Kosovo's broader integration narrative and provide critics with a ready talking point.

## TWO ADDITIONAL DRIVERS SIT OUTSIDE OF KOSOVO'S DIRECT CONTROL BUT CARRY CLEAR STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS.

### FIRST,

**The rise of far-right political parties in the European Union (EU)** Is reshaping the political context for enlargement. Every seat gained by Eurosceptic parties in Berlin, Paris, Vienna, or The Hague increases the likelihood that some of the Serbian narratives on Kosovo become institutionalized. These shifts narrow the space for progress on Kosovo's EU file, regardless of its technical performance. They also encourage Kosovo to be more proactive in its diplomacy, implement reforms more quickly, and be more creative in presenting its case.

### SECOND,

**The possibility of a Serbian military provocation** has a high theoretical impact but a lower likelihood in the near term. A credible NATO deterrent posture in Kosovo and Serbia's European aspirations currently contains the risk.

However, a significant weakening of NATO's regional presence or an international environment where coercion carries fewer political costs could shift this balance. Kosovo must not treat this threat as purely hypothetical. Instead, it should continue to strengthen bilateral security ties, particularly with regional and NATO-aligned partners (i.e., Croatia, Turkey, Albania, Greece), as a means of extending deterrence while the NATO file remains unresolved.

The Critical Drivers Map is not a forecast, but highlights where Kosovo's most significant leverage lies and where its vulnerabilities intersect.

## THREE CONCLUSIONS STAND OUT:

**FIRSTLY,** Kosovo's top priorities (NATO and EU integration) are not out of reach, but they require **de-risking the domestic front and advancing the dialogue with Serbia**. Neither the EU nor NATO will act without preconditions. The burden of proof lies with Kosovo, whether fair or unfair.

### SECOND,

**Internal discipline matters.** Current political polarization and fragmentation add uncertainty and invite delay. Political parties must find a way to separate domestic politicking from national interests.

### THIRD,

**Time must be used deliberately.** Kosovo still has time and agency, but it must have a clear focus and firm political convictions and deliver on its obligations.

Kosovo's development by 2030 will most likely be shaped by how the country chooses to manage its critical uncertainties. The next five years will define whether it consolidates its domestic and international consolidation or remains suspended between recognition and resolution.

## BASED ON THE ANALYSIS OF THE CRITICAL DRIVERS MAP, FOUR KEY TAKEAWAYS ARE IDENTIFIED:

### FIRST,

**Sequencing matters.** Progress in the normalization dialogue with Serbia, along with visible steps to reduce political polarization, creates the space for movement on both NATO and EU tracks. Without these preconditions, even supportive allies face structural limitations in advancing Kosovo's integration.

### SECOND,

Kosovo's diplomatic efforts must be focused on key priorities, such as Council of Europe membership, NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) or a membership action plan with a different name, potentially, and EU candidate status, which have the highest impact and uncertainty.

### THIRD,

**Internal cohesion is a multiplier; without a sustainable governing coalition, Kosovo risks losing significant momentum and** exacerbating the perception of the country as unstable and unpredictable.

### FOURTH,

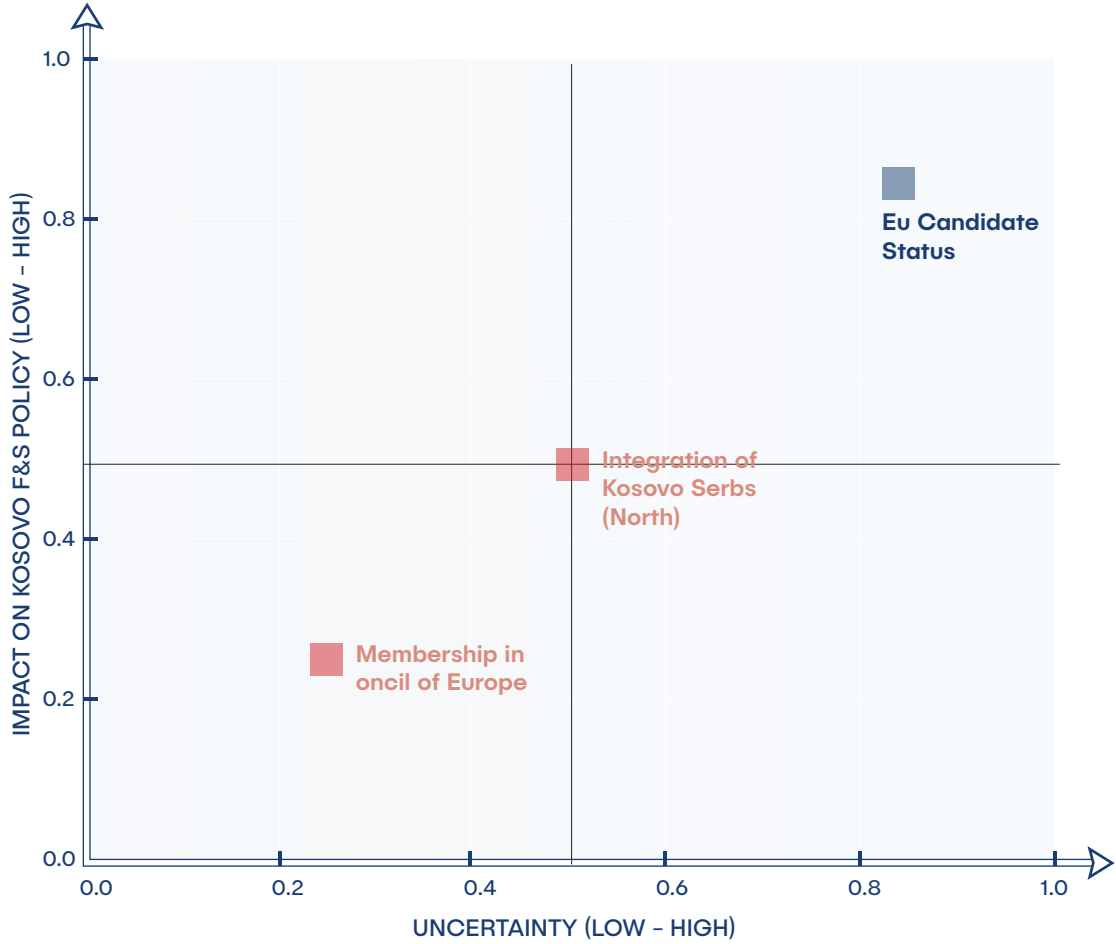
**Maintain credible deterrence while integration remains uncertain.** Bilateral partnerships, including with Bulgaria, Turkey, Croatia, the UK, and Albania, on security matters, should be expanded. Participation of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) in NATO or US security exercises can help project readiness and reduce Kosovo's vulnerability.

# Kosovo's Possible 2030 Scenarios

There are arguably two major forces shaping Kosovo's path towards 2030, especially in the context of foreign and security policy: one, is the process of normalization of relations with Serbia, and secondly the prospects for advancing in Euro-Atlantic

integration process, respectively making progress in accession process in the EU and making some concrete step towards greater integration in NATO, such as becoming part of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program.

Scenario Landscape – Kosovo 2030



The two major driving forces of Kosovo's development in foreign and security policy are interconnected, and this is not just a matter of analytical observation. Still, it is an official position of both the EU and NATO that progress in the EU-led dialogue for normalization of relations will also translate into progress in the integration process for Kosovo in the EU and NATO.

For the EU, the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia is part of the contractual relations with both countries. Therefore, for Kosovo, the level of implementation of the agreements reached during the normalization dialogue will be a crucial factor in how the EU and NATO approach relations with Kosovo.

Now, depending on how much Kosovo makes progress in delivering on the normalization dialogue and integration into the EU and NATO, three potential outcomes are expected by 2030. A positive outcome that sees **Kosovo's consolidation as a state** both internally and externally. Internally by ensuring full integration of the Kosovo Serbs in the north, and externally by becoming a member of the Council of Europe (CoE), candidate status for membership in the EU, NATO's PfP, etc. To ensure this is the reality by 2030, Kosovo must treat the normalization dialogue as an opportunity and take steps towards implementing its part of the obligations, while leaving it to the EU to pressure Serbia to do its part.

In the upper-right corner, Integration & Statehood Consolidation sits. Here, Prishtina has translated the Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities statute into functioning local institutions, dismantled parallel security structures in the north, and implemented rule-of-law reforms that provide Quint governments with the political cover to push a Partnership for Peace invitation through NATO and a candidate status decision through the EU Council. Recognition by at least one non-recognising EU member follows, investment risk premia fall, and the KFOR presence shrinks to a training mission. Kosovo is no longer a perpetual project; it is a net contributor to Euro-Atlantic security.

At the centre of the chart lies **stagnation and polarization**. Dialogue engagement continues, but deadlines slip; the ASM text sits in legal limbo, and each coalition crisis restarts the clock on judicial reform. EU funding and political attention flow in stop-start fashion, always tied to narrowly defined "next steps" that never quite add up to candidacy. NATO maintains the current battalion, but PfP talks go nowhere. The IMF pegs growth at three per cent—enough to avoid a fiscal crisis, not enough to reverse emigration. Polarized media keep public trust below fifty percent, locking the political class into short electoral cycles and tactical grandstanding.

The lower-left quadrant, **Isolation & Instability**, emerges if both external momentum and internal delivery collapse. A far-right surge in key EU capitals suspends enlargement, Kosovo withdraws or delays the ASM statute under domestic pressure, and Belgrade exploits the impasse to tighten its grip on the north through overt financial transfers and covert security assistance. Hybrid attacks on infrastructure prompt a new surge in KFOR, while two Pacific micro-

states quietly rescind their recognition. Prishtina's energy is consumed by crisis containment, not integration benchmarks.

The sequence is the hinge on which all three futures turn. Kosovo's leaders worry that implementing the ASM before concrete NATO or EU steps materialise would cash in their last major bargaining chip without guarantees that partners will meet them halfway. That fear has fostered a political culture of "show me first," which outsiders often misread as foot-dragging. Yet, delay carries its risks: every month the statute remains frozen strengthens the hand of those in Brussels and Washington who argue that Kosovo is unwilling to fulfill its signed commitments, making it harder, not easier, to deliver PfP, MAP, or candidacy decisions. The challenge is to design a lock-step timeline whereby the process of establishing the ASM triggers a Council of Europe vote within days, followed by a NATO staff assessment with a hard deadline, so that each side's move becomes the other's assurance. The whole establishment of the ASM should be followed by progress in different steps of EU accession, such as achieving candidate status.

The pessimistic track darkens further if the war in Ukraine ends on a **"territory-for-peace"** arrangement that legitimises boundary changes achieved by force. Such a precedent would embolden voices in Belgrade—and perhaps in certain EU quarters—who argue that a northern Kosovo land swap could unlock a grand bargain. Once that logic gains traction, every incentive tilts toward hard bargaining and brinkmanship: Serbia holds out for maximal territorial concessions, Kosovo digs in to protect sovereignty, and the international community fractures over which principle to defend. Under that scenario, the dots on the chart would slide even further to the left and down, toward outright partition and recurrent instability—a future no stakeholder publicly endorses, yet one that becomes imaginable if sequencing fails and precedent shifts.

The map, therefore, illustrates more than three neatly boxed outcomes; it shows a dynamic race between credible reform delivery and credible Euro-Atlantic reciprocity. Kosovo's safest route upward and to the right is to turn the sequencing dilemma into a structured bargain, locking each move into an irreversible timeline. Anything less risks drifting into stagnation, or worse, giving revisionists a window to redraw borders under the guise of final settlement.

# Kosovo's Possible 2030 Realities

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This section presents a forward-looking reflection on Kosovo's foreign and security policy trajectory, framed around three possible futures by 2030. Each scenario draws from current trends, policy debates, and regional developments as they stood in 2025. Rather than forecasting, the aim is to map out how different decisions made by Kosovo's institutions, its political elite, its partners, and its neighbours could shape the country's standing, internal stability, and direction over the decade. At the centre of each scenario are three interlinked factors: the state of the EU-led normalization dialogue with Serbia, Kosovo's relationship with Euro-Atlantic institutions, and the ability of domestic institutions to foster societal cohesion and act in unison on national interests. External dynamics, such as shifting EU politics, regional security risks, and geopolitical rivalries, play a significant role; however, how Kosovo responds to these pressures ultimately drives the outcomes.

## **THE FIRST SCENARIO,** "Crossing the Threshold"

Imagines a Kosovo that managed to stabilise its internal political scene, advance reforms, and implement the Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities in a way that unlocked recognitions from the EU and moved the country forward in its EU and NATO accession process. Kosovo does not resolve every challenge by 2030, but it consolidates

its statehood and takes its place in the EU and the international community.

## **THE SECOND,** "Stuck in the Middle"

Describes a Kosovo that avoids breakdown but falls short of real progress. The normalization dialogue remains open but unresolved, reforms are partial, and integration remains stalled. The country continues to function, but with growing frustration and diminishing optimism.

## **THE THIRD,** "Losing Altitude"

Outlines a more difficult future. In this scenario, domestic fragmentation and external political shifts lead to a breakdown in normalization dialogue, resulting in growing tensions in the north and a loss of trust both at home and abroad. Kosovo remains a recognised state, but is increasingly isolated and institutionally strained.

Each scenario points to different outcomes, but all are shaped by decisions made during 2025 and 2026. The years ahead are not predetermined. How Kosovo navigates its internal priorities and external relationships will define not only where it ends up by 2030 but also how it gets there.

# Optimistic scenario:

## Integration and Statehood

### Consolidation

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#### **Crossing the Threshold.**

Prishtina, December 31, 2030.

Looking back, it is hard to believe how far we have come in just five years. In early 2025, Kosovo was stable yet stagnant. The public mood was mixed: hopeful but tired of waiting. What followed was not a breakthrough moment, but a series of difficult decisions by the Kosovo government, which were sometimes unpopular. Still, they slowly unlocked what had once seemed out of reach, Kosovo's Euro-Atlantic integration process.

The turning point came in early 2026, when the government, after months of internal coordination and international consultation, submitted the long-delayed statute for the Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities (ASM) to the Constitutional Court. The decision came with risks. Within weeks, Kosovo was voted into the Council of Europe. Interpol followed later that year. Following the ruling by the Constitutional Court, the Kosovo government took action to define an action plan for implementing and establishing the ASM. EU restrictive measures were fully lifted in early 2026.

Recognition gained new momentum as Kosovo moved towards the establishment of the ASM. In 2027, Greece and Romania formally recognised Kosovo, as a result of Kosovo's actions to implement ASM and other agreements from the EU normalization dialogue. With that, the EU Council finally moved. Kosovo was granted candidate status, and in 2029, the first EU-Kosovo intergovernmental conference was held in Brussels.

NATO moved in parallel. Restrictive measures on

Kosovo's participation in specific NATO formats were quietly lifted in 2026, after joint operations and political coordination. In 2027, Kosovo was invited to join the Partnership for Peace at the Tirana Summit. The Kosovo Security Force (KSF) has contributed to NATO missions, and its cyber team has become integrated into NATO's operations. A NATO-accredited Search and Rescue centre of excellence was established, and Kosovo began hosting regular training rotations with Allied forces.

Domestically, these steps were underpinned by reform. A broad coalition elected in 2025 had run on a "Europe in Seven Years" platform. Within months, it passed significant legislation and started to deliver on the action plan to implement the Growth Plan. Opposition parties do not challenge or use the Euro-Atlantic agenda for political purposes. Civil society remained active, contributing to diaspora return initiatives and public policy debate. By 2028, Kosovo had achieved observer status at the United Nations, signalling broader maturity.

The integration of Kosovo Serbs progressed quietly but steadily. Municipal elections were held in the four northern municipalities in late 2025. Turnout was high, and newly elected mayors began cooperating with central institutions. The number of Kosovo Serbs patrolling in the north has increased, and the establishment of the ASM has helped facilitate the integration of Kosovo Serbs in the north, including resolving the gap left by the closure of several Belgrade-funded institutions that had operated in the north. The process of integration was gradual, at times tense, but no longer blocked. Serbian-speaking schools in Kosovo applied for accreditation of their curriculum with the Ministry of Education,

and the municipality of Mitrovica North initiated the establishment of a university.

Regionally, Kosovo took a more active role in cooperation platforms. It hosted the Berlin Process Summit in 2028.

In early 2025, Kosovo's foreign policy seemed stuck in orbit, always circling but never docking. EU candidacy was still hypothetical, NATO's Partnership for Peace seemed shelved, and talk of Council of Europe membership was talk. Then came a series of hard, sometimes risky choices that changed our trajectory.

The turning point came in spring 2026, when the government, after months of internal discussion, sent the long-delayed statute for the Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities to the Constitutional Court. Many feared it was too much, too soon. Critics warned we were giving up leverage for uncertain returns. But this time, the gamble paid off. The Court upheld the statute with some adjustments, and that legal stamp was enough. Within weeks, Kosovo was voted into the Council of Europe. Interpol followed soon after.

Another critical turning point for Kosovo was the unfreezing of the integration of Kosovo Serbs in the north. Following the Constitutional Court's ruling on the ASM, and backed by EU-funded **municipal outreach, municipal elections under Kosovo law were held in the four northern municipalities in late 2025.**

Despite initial resistance, voter turnout surpassed 35%, and newly elected **Kosovo Serb mayors** were sworn in under Kosovo's constitutional framework. These mayors have since engaged in joint planning initiatives with central institutions and participated in intermunicipal cooperation. Kosovo Police in the north have begun to notice an increase in Kosovo Serb police officers patrolling the area, following recent recruitments. While challenges remain, the shift from parallelism to participation has started quietly, steadily, and under local terms.

The wave of multilateral recognition gave new momentum to bilateral diplomacy. Spain and Greece, long skeptical, shifted their stance. Both extended recognition in 2028, after citing Kosovo's

"constitutional maturity" and "regional stabilising role." With their support, the EU Council broke its long stalemate. Kosovo secured candidate status in 2028, and the first intergovernmental conference was held in Brussels just last summer.

NATO did not wait for the EU to act. At the 2026 Tirana Summit, Kosovo was invited to join the Partnership for Peace. Our track record in exercises with NATO forces, as well as the rapid deployment of a KSF engineering platoon to NATO missions, has proven our reliability. A tailored Membership Action Plan was agreed upon by 2028. The KSF remains modest in size, but its cyber unit now contributes to NATO's Operation Cybershield and runs coding camps in the north, helping to bridge both digital and ethnic divides. NATO has accredited an excellence center for search and rescue, and Kosovo regularly hosts NATO member states for training.

This was not just about institutions and summits. Our politics changed, too. A broad, reform-oriented coalition won the 2025 elections with a clear Europe-focused mandate. The opposition matured, focusing on fiscal policy and governance rather than identity or old grievances. Civil society, which is often critical and marginalised, now plays a significant role in shaping the return and reintegration agenda for diaspora professionals.

In 2027, Kosovo was granted **observer status at the United Nations**, a symbolic but meaningful step that reflected its growing legitimacy. Regionally, Kosovo hosted the Berlin Process summit in 2028 and actively contributes to agendas on energy transition, cyber resilience, and minority rights.

The horizon is still demanding. Accession negotiations will be extended. Judiciary reforms are not finished. But for the first time, the path feels real. Kosovo is no longer Europe's unfinished file; it is a state in motion, part of the conversation, and a net contributor to regional security. We are no longer a footnote in diplomatic briefings. We are, slowly but surely, becoming a footbridge, one that others can walk across, with us, toward a more stable and united Balkans.

# Status-Quo Scenario:

## Stagnation and Polarization

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### **Stuck in the Middle:** Prishtina, December 31, 2030.

By the end of 2030, Kosovo finds itself in a holding pattern, neither adrift nor advancing. The country has avoided significant instability but remains short of real breakthroughs. Institutions function, elections are held, and the public discourse remains democratic, but the sense of momentum that once drove European integration and reform has waned. Many in Prishtina describe the last five years as a period of managed stagnation marked by political turnover, policy fatigue, and a growing gap between stated ambitions and delivered results.

Three snap elections since 2025 have eroded public confidence in Kosovo's ability to govern itself effectively. No coalition has lasted a full term. Most governments inherit the same to-do list (energy, economic competitiveness, implementation of the Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities (ASM)), but rarely complete more than what is needed to unlock the next tranche of EU funds from the Growth Plan. The EU's Growth Plan continues to provide financial support, but candidacy status remains out of reach, and much of the existing restrictive measures against Kosovo are in place. European officials speak of "further conditions" and "pending political alignment." NATO's Partnership for Peace remains on the table, but unresolved recognition issues within the alliance block progress. NATO also fails to remove its restrictive measures against Kosovo, such as participation in some of NATO's programs, which were introduced in 2022.

Internally, institutions are under pressure but operational. Kosovo Police and the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) deliver on core functions, but without access to broader regional or NATO security frameworks, their development is constrained.

Defence cooperation with Turkey has expanded, but attempts to deepen integration with regional and European defence initiatives have gone nowhere. KFOR maintains a steady presence, with a limited deterrent.

The north remains a barometer of how far Kosovo's integration agenda can go. Mayoral elections were held in the Serb-majority municipalities in late 2025, under the auspices of the EU. Turnout was low, but higher than expected, and new mayors were sworn in under Kosovo's legal framework. While some progress was made in formal coordination, the Mayors, once sworn, do everything in their power to counter and challenge the authority of the Kosovo institutions. The ASM statute is yet to be sent to the Constitutional Court for review, with no political consensus on how or when to proceed. For both government and opposition, ambiguity has become a substitute for progress.

Kosovo's diplomatic visibility has increased slightly, but its influence remains unchanged. It continues to participate in CEFTA and the Common Regional Market mechanisms and has hosted several regional digital and energy forums. Still, its inclusion in European and international platforms remains limited. Council of Europe accession remains frozen, and recognition by five EU member states has not moved. Kosovo is, in many forums, present but peripheral.

Public frustration has grown. Emigration continues, driven not only by economic factors but also by a more profound uncertainty about the country's direction. Young professionals express limited trust in institutions and little confidence that the political system can deliver meaningful change. Civil society remains active, and investigative media continue to hold power to account; however, donor fatigue is evident. Significant reforms have been repeatedly delayed, diluted, or abandoned.

# Pessimistic Scenario:

## Isolation and Instability

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### **LOSING ALTITUDE:** Prishtina, December 31, 2030.

The mood in Prishtina at the end of 2030 is heavy. The hopes of the previous decade have given way to exhaustion, and the country finds itself more isolated than at any point since its independence was supervised in 2012. Institutional fatigue, political fragmentation, and shifting international priorities have left Kosovo in a holding pattern, formally recognised, but with fewer allies, weaker institutions, and growing internal tensions.

The turn began in early 2025, following a push to “settle” the Kosovo–Serbia dispute quickly, reviving the unpopular idea of a land swap under the banner of a “final deal.” Though framed as a pragmatic solution, the proposal triggered widespread backlash within Kosovo, from both the government and the opposition. After weeks of pressure, Kosovo withdrew from the talks. The collapse of the initiative was viewed in Washington, D.C., as a failure of Kosovo’s leadership to be flexible and rational. The US government signalled a downgrading of its engagement in Kosovo. During 2026, the United States withdrew from the KFOR mission, citing the need to allocate resources elsewhere.

This marked a shift in how Kosovo was viewed in key Western capitals. With the U.S. stepping back, Serbia renewed its long-standing request for the deployment of up to 1,000 troops to Serb-majority areas of Kosovo. For years, the idea had been politically unthinkable. Still, by mid-2027, with tensions rising in the north and NATO internally divided, the request began to receive cautious consideration within some NATO circles. Some member states argued that a limited Serbian presence under NATO oversight might help “stabilise” the situation. Kosovo reacted with alarm, but its warnings carried less weight than before.

At home, the consequences of these developments were felt quickly. Political instability deepened, a verdict from the Specialist Chamber against former

KLA leaders in 2026 triggered protests, followed by street clashes throughout Kosovo. In response, Kosovo decided to withdraw from the normalization dialogue. The governing coalition collapsed, and Kosovo entered a period of caretaker rule. Over the next five years, four successive governments failed to secure a lasting parliamentary majority. The statute on the Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities (ASM) was withdrawn from the Constitutional Court and never resubmitted.

Barricades returned in the north, and the Kosovo Police, under-resourced and politically constrained, began withdrawing from some localities. In response, KFOR increased its presence, with a primary focus on deconfliction. EULEX resumed a more prominent role, this time with a more explicit security mandate. By 2029, the presence of both the EU and NATO was primarily focused on crisis containment, rather than integration.

The economy and the private sector have weakened. Investor confidence declined sharply, and foreign direct investment fell sharply. The government turned to austerity to stabilise public finances, leading to strikes in healthcare and education. Remittances, while still significant, could not cover the gap. Young professionals, particularly those in the IT and medical fields, are leaving the country in increasing numbers. The brain drain accelerated, and with it, public trust in institutions plummeted to historic lows.

Regionally, Kosovo became increasingly marginalised. In 2028, Montenegro joined the EU, followed by Albania in 2030. Kosovo’s own EU path remained blocked, with five member states continuing to withhold recognition. Serbia’s derecognition campaign gained momentum, with two recognitions withdrawn in just two years. Kosovo was admitted to a few international forums and gained little ground in regional cooperation. Participation was tolerated, but rarely welcomed.

Elections were held in the municipalities in the north in 2025, but turnout was minimal, and the newly elected mayors were widely viewed as aligned with

Belgrade; municipal assemblies operated with limited coordination with Kosovo institutions. In practice, the north increasingly resembled a conflict zone with frequent clashes between police and the local population, which increasingly demanded KFOR intervention.

As further explained in the wildcard section below, another vital development in the pessimistic scenario is the awaited verdicts from the Kosovo Specialist Chambers. If those verdicts result in convictions of senior KLA leaders, it is expected that these will ignite a wave of political instability and social unrest across

Kosovo. The decisions are perceived by much of the public not as impartial justice, but as an assault on Kosovo's liberation narrative, triggering mass protests, institutional paralysis, and renewed ethnic tensions. In the north, opportunistic actors exploit the unrest to undermine Kosovo's authority, while across the country, political discourse becomes increasingly radicalized. The normalization dialogue with Serbia collapses, and Kosovo's Euro-Atlantic trajectory stalls, as trust in international partners erodes and domestic politics pivot toward nationalist responses, including calls for unification with Albania.

# WILD CARD:

## Justice or Fallout?

### The Impact of Verdicts from the Kosovo Specialist Chambers

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A conviction of high-profile KLA leaders by the Specialist Chambers, particularly on charges related to command responsibility or systemic crimes, would represent one of the most politically and emotionally charged developments in Kosovo since independence in 2008. While the court was established precisely to handle such cases impartially and in accordance with international standards, the domestic perception is that the court is not impartial, and the political consequences would likely be far from neutral.

In this scenario, verdicts are handed down in mid-2026, and the reaction in Kosovo is swift and volatile. Protests erupt in major cities, starting peacefully but quickly escalating, particularly in areas with strong partisan loyalties. Opposition parties accuse international actors of undermining Kosovo's liberation struggle and statebuilding process. In contrast, parts of the ruling coalition struggle to defend the process without appearing disloyal to the national narrative.

The violence intensifies in Mitrovica and parts of western Kosovo. In the north, opportunistic groups exploit the unrest to challenge the presence of Kosovo institutions. The Kosovo Police find themselves stretched to the limit.

The broader diplomatic fallout is equally severe. The normalization dialogue with Serbia, already under strain, becomes politically toxic in Kosovo. Any move by the Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities becomes nearly impossible. No government,

regardless of its composition, is willing to proceed with implementation while protests continue and the legitimacy of Kosovo's post-war narrative is under open attack.

Western partners, particularly EU member states with troops or diplomatic personnel in Kosovo, urge restraint. However, their messaging is met with growing skepticism, as the verdicts are widely seen not as justice, but as a geopolitical convenience and an act of criminalizing the process of liberation and statebuilding in Kosovo. The U.S., under pressure from its domestic debates and reduced global bandwidth, issues a statement supporting the rule of law but avoids deeper engagement.

In Brussels, the sentiment hardens; without stability and cooperation, Kosovo's EU candidacy cannot proceed. Momentum behind Council of Europe accession disappears. NATO states remain divided on further collaboration. Serbia, meanwhile, remains silent, mainly choosing to wait as Kosovo's institutions absorb the shock.

Some of the main consequences may include: the normalization dialogue entering a deep freeze; domestic politics radicalizing; unification with Albania becoming the main political agenda for the Kosovo leadership; and Kosovo entering a new cycle of fragility and violence, especially in the north. This wild card assumes that state collapse in Kosovo is a potential outcome.

## **KOSOVO 2030**

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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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