



# KOSOVO FOREIGN AND SECURITY CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES



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# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In recent years, events in Kosovo's Serb-majority north and ongoing tensions with Serbia played a major role in shaping the country's foreign policy and security. These issues became central to Kosovo's international standing, affecting its progress toward EU integration, relations with NATO, access to international organizations, internal security, and its reputation. Two major developments had a profound impact on Kosovo's internal security and foreign policy. The first is the Banjska terrorist attack. The European External Action Service (EEAS), through a statement by High Representative Josep Borrell, explicitly condemned the Banjska attack as a "*hideous and cowardly terrorist attack against Kosovo Police officers*", calling for the perpetrators to surrender and to be brought to justice.<sup>1</sup> Almost a year after the attack, Kosovo Special Prosecution formally qualified the Banjska attack as an act of terrorism, indicting 45 individuals, including Milan Radoičić, on charges related to organizing and directing terrorist activities, crimes against the constitutional order and security of Kosovo, financing of terrorism, and money laundering.<sup>2</sup>

The second development was the November 29, 2024, explosion that severely damaged the Ibër-Lepenc water canal near the village of Varagë in the municipality of Zubin Potok, in north of Kosovo. The canal is part of critical infrastructure, supplying drinking water to several municipalities and providing essential cooling water for Kosovo's main electricity generation facilities. According to the Kosovo Special Prosecution, approximately 20 kilograms of military-grade explosives (TNT) were planted and detonated inside the canal, causing significant structural damage, disrupting water supply, and temporarily endangering electricity production. In December 2025, Kosovo's Special Prosecution issued an indictment against three individuals, charging them with committing

a terrorist act, espionage, endangering the constitutional order, and illegal possession of weapons, officially qualifying the attack as an act of terrorism targeting vital public infrastructure.<sup>3</sup>

This shift became clearer when the Ibër-Lepenc canal explosion in November 2024 highlighted the vulnerability of critical infrastructure and the risk of escalation beyond street-level disorder. The Kosovo Special Prosecution later indicted three suspects on charges including *committing a terrorist act*, espionage, and weapons offenses. The prosecution alleged the use of substantial explosives and described concrete impacts such as disruption to the drinking water supply and endangerment of energy infrastructure. The canal attack reinforced the sense, especially in Brussels, that northern Kosovo was not just politically contested but also infiltrated by actors willing to target strategic infrastructure. In the wider regional context, where Serbia's security orientation, narratives, and external alignments are often debated, this incident added weight to the argument that Kosovo faced hybrid and coercive tactics rather than only civic protest dynamics. Even when partners avoided endorsing Kosovo's framing on attribution, the *nature* of the act—sabotage of vital infrastructure—was hard to downplay.

These developments changed realities on the ground in the North by eroding the de-facto security agency exercised by figures such as Radoičić and associated networks. Banjska exposed an armed chain of coordination and justified a more robust approach to law enforcement and security in northern municipalities. This was true both in Kosovo's own view and among some international stakeholders. The combination of an EU-level terrorist label and a prosecutorial indictment on terrorism-related charges made it less plausible to treat these networks as merely political

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1 European External Action Service (EEAS), "Kosovo: High Representative Borrell speaks to Prime Minister Kurti and President Vučić following the attack against Kosovo Police," 24 September 2023, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/kosovo-high-representative-borrell-speaks-prime-minister-kurti-and-president-vucic-24-september-2023>

2 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), "Kosovo Indicts 45 Over Alleged Roles in 2023 Attack That Killed Police Officer," 11 September 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kosovo-indicts-banjska-attack-suspects-radoicic/33116016.html>

3 Balkan Insight (BIRN), "Kosovo Indicts Three for November 2024 Canal Explosion," 9 December 2025, <https://balkaninsight.com/2025/12/09/kosovo-indicts-three-for-november-2024-canal-explosion/bi/>

intermediaries. Instead, it highlighted their role as informal security controllers—actors capable of organizing violence, deterring institutional access, and shaping daily governance through intimidation. In that sense, Banjska did not just shift rhetoric. It accelerated a reframing of the North from a political management problem to a state authority and security problem, narrowing the space for armed gatekeepers to operate with impunity.

The Banjska attack in September 2023 marked a turning point in how much of the international community perceived security dynamics in the north of Kosovo. This mattered because it contributed to clearer recognition among key partners of Kosovo that the north was not only a challenge of governance and acceptance of the authority of the state of Kosovo but also a hard security problem. Together, Banjska and the attack on the water canal in Zubin Potok helped shift the external narrative about what Kosovo government was doing in the north. It moved from one that often-scrutinized Kosovo's north-related decisions or actions primarily as heavy handed to one that more openly acknowledged the presence of coercive actors challenging the state's monopoly on force.

At the same time, the postBanjska environment did not produce unconditional Western endorsement of all Kosovo government actions in the North. Even as Banjska (and later the canal explosion) increased understanding for Kosovo's security concerns and strengthened the perceived legitimacy of certain enforcement actions, the EU and the US perceived some actions as insufficiently coordinated, disproportionate, or politically escalatory. This dual track, of having greater recognition of Kosovo's security concerns, but persistent criticism of "heavyhanded" implementation, to some degree helps explain why Kosovo could gain credibility on the core claim (that coercive networks in the north were a concern of vital interest for Kosovo) while still facing political costs for specific choices in timing, communication, and consultation with partners, on some other measures targeting the Serbian-run institutions in the north. In other words, the Banjska terrorist attack raised Kosovo's legitimacy to act in the north, but it did not remove

expectations about how Kosovo should act.

Due to, what the EU perceived as uncoordinated and escalatory actions by Kosovo government in the north on June, 2023 introduced temporary and reversible restrictive measures against the country.<sup>4</sup> The United States suspended the planned Strategic Dialogue in September of 2025 "due to concerns about caretaker government actions that have increased tensions and instability".<sup>5</sup> These negative developments created challenges for Kosovo's security and foreign-policy objectives.

By late 2025 and early 2026, the EU changed its approach, reflecting the limits of prolonged punitive measures, and recognizing that indefinite isolation of Kosovo was counterproductive. In March 2026, the European Commission formally announced lifting all EU punitive measures against Kosovo, following productive engagement of the government on dealing with implementation of the Law on Foreigners in the north of Kosovo.<sup>6</sup> The lifting of the measures was arguably an acknowledgment that, while Kosovo's actions in the north were often heavy-handed and poorly coordinated, the broader security context and the result of the December 2025 snap-elections, which gave the ruling party of Prime Minister Kurti 51%, required re-engagement.

Kosovo's central foreign policy goal is advancing integration into the Euro-Atlantic community. In terms of progress, in the last five years this included visa liberalization in 2024, applying for EU membership in 2022, and access to the EU Growth Plan and Reform and Growth Facility. NATO also played a key security role through KFOR and ongoing support from the NATO Advisory and Liaison Team and the enhanced interaction framework. In the NATO-Kosovo file perhaps the most important development was the participation in the NATO-led "Defender Europe 25" exercise, with Kosovo Security Force contributing about 1,000 personnel and hosing parts of the drills. These took place from 26 May to 9 June 2025 alongside 28 partner countries.<sup>7</sup>

Kosovo took some steps to build a stronger, more independent security policy, especially through

4 Read more at: <https://legalpoliticalstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/EI022024-GLPSEI-The-One-Year-Anniversary-of-EU-Measures-against-Kosova-1.pdf>

5 Read more at: [https://xk.usembassy.gov/st\\_9122025/](https://xk.usembassy.gov/st_9122025/)

6 Read more at: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2026/03/18/kosova-leaders-welcome-lifting-of-all-eu-punitive-measures/>

7 Read more at: <https://a2news.com/english/rajoni-bota/kosova/aktualitet/truri-i-operacionit-ne-gjakove-ushtria-e-kosoves-t-i1149015>

increased budget for defense and announcement of partnership with Türkiye state-owned defense manufacturer MKE to build an ammunition production facility in Kosovo. The government also released key documents like the Kosovo Security Strategy 2022-2027<sup>8</sup> and the National Cyber Security Strategy 2023- 2027<sup>9</sup>. Progress on Kosovo's international recognition was slow but not stalled. Israel established diplomatic relations with Kosovo in 2021 after the Washington agreement, and Kenya

recognized Kosovo in 2025, marking the first major recognition in nearly five years. Recognitions from Sudan, Syria and Bahamas followed. Kosovo also applied to join the Council of Europe in 2022<sup>10</sup>, though this process is linked to Kosovo's steps to establish the Association/Community of the Serb-majority Municipalities (ASM).<sup>11</sup> Kosovo also strengthened its security cooperation with EU, through establishment of working arrangement with EUROPOL.<sup>12</sup>

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8 Read more at: <https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/2-Strategjia-e-Sigurise-e-Kosoves-ENG.pdf>

9 Read more at: <https://mpb.rks-gov.net/Uploads/Documents/Pdf/EN/2692/Strategjia%20për%20Siguri%20Kibernetike%20-%20ENG..pdf>

10 Read more at: <https://rm.coe.int/application-by-kosovo-for-membership-of-the-council-of-europe-/1680af1575>

11 Read more at: <https://www.esiweb.org/proposals/admit-kosovo-council-europe#:~:text=This%20is%20probably%20why%2083,France%2C%20Germany%20and%20Italy>

12 Read more at: <https://www.europol.europa.eu/partners-collaboration/agreements/kosovo>

## 2. INTRODUCTION

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From 2021 to 2025, Kosovo's foreign and security policy had a clear strategy but faced growing challenges. The country remained committed to its Euro-Atlantic path, supported the West on key issues, and continued working toward recognition, joining NATO and the EU, and taking a greater role in international security and diplomacy. However, this period showed how easily progress can stall when crises in the Kosovo-Serb majority north, ongoing tensions with Serbia, weak coordination with allies, and a changing global environment get in the way. In reality, Kosovo's agenda was less about lacking goals than about the struggle to carry them out consistently and practically.

This report looks at Kosovo's main foreign and security challenges and highlights some potential priorities for future policy. It uses a mix of document analysis, process tracing, and key-informant interviews. The document analysis covers government records, EU and NATO reports, statements, policy papers, and other relevant sources. Process tracing follows major events from 2021 to 2025, such as crises in the north, the progress of the EU-led normalization talks, shifts in relations with important allies, and Kosovo's steps toward European and international integration. Interviews with senior officials, both current and former, provide insights into Kosovo's weaknesses, missed chances, and strategic decisions.

The main argument of this report is that Kosovo's biggest challenge in terms of foreign and security policy is not about choosing a direction. The country's strategy and orientation are clear. The real issue is turning that strategy into beneficial

results for Kosovo's vital national interests, which may include stability and integration of the north of the country, real perspective for membership in the NATO and EU, full normalization of relations with Serbia, keeping strong ties with the United States, and making institutions more resilient against crime, cyber threats, disinformation, and outside pressure. Going forward, Kosovo's foreign and security policy should focus less on slogans like foreign and security policy priorities and more on better planning internally, stronger coordination with allies, and becoming a reliable and predictable partner.

This report has four main sections. First, it looks at how Kosovo's foreign and security policy has changed in recent years, especially as the regional and international environment shifts. Next, it reviews the main challenges Kosovo faces, such as developments in the north, the normalization process with Serbia, relations with key Western partners, and the increasing impact of hybrid threats, cyber insecurity, and foreign influence. The third section outlines Kosovo's top priorities for the near future, focusing on building domestic resilience and strengthening ties with NATO, the EU, international organizations, and other partners. Finally, the report brings these points together and suggests that Kosovo's main task now is to put its strategic plans into action in a more consistent and credible way.

### 3. PROCESS TRACING MAJOR SECURITY AND FOREIGN POLICY RELATED DEVELOPMENTS FROM 2021 TO 2025 AS A CONTEXT SETTING

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From 2020 to 2025, Kosovo's story followed two main paths. First, there were some important steps toward Euro-Atlantic integration, such as formal application for EU membership in 2022, visa liberalization finally achieved in 2024 and update of status in NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA) from observer to associate member status in 2024. Second, there were repeated crises in the north of the country, which strained political resources, led to stricter responses from the key partners (EU and US), and revealed some weaknesses in security resilience of Kosovo.

In 2020, the economic normalization agreements between Kosovo and Serbia, commonly referred to as the Washington Agreement was signed.<sup>13</sup> This consisted of two separate documents through which both parties committed to advancing economic cooperation. The agreements were signed by Kosovo's Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti and Serbia's President Aleksandar Vučić at the White House, in the presence of then U.S. President Donald Trump. As part of the agreement Israel recognized Kosovo's independence. A major development for Kosovo in 2020 was the conclusion of a working arrangement with Europol, which established a formal framework for cooperation between Kosovo institutions and the EU's law enforcement agency.<sup>14</sup> The agreement marked an important step in strengthening Kosovo's engagement with European security structures, enabling structured information exchange and cooperation in areas such as serious and organised crime, terrorism, and other security-related threats.

Kosovo and Israel formally established diplomatic relations in February 2021, with Kosovo agreeing to open an embassy in Jerusalem.<sup>15</sup> This move drew some attention to Kosovo, from its major allies. Turkey officially reacted strongly condemning the move. In a statement issued by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ankara described the decision as contrary to relevant United Nations resolutions on the status of Jerusalem and argued that it undermines the twostate solution and prospects for peace in the region.<sup>16</sup>

In September of 2022, tensions between Kosovo and Serbia escalated following Kosovo's decision to enforce reciprocal vehicle licenseplate regulations, requiring vehicles using Serbianissued plates to switch to Kosovoissued plates.<sup>17</sup> The measure, presented by Kosovo institutions as an assertion of rule of law and reciprocity, was strongly opposed by Belgrade and by Kosovo Serbs in the north, leading to protests, roadblocks at key border crossings, and heightened security deployments by Kosovo police, and NATO's KFOR mission. By December 2022, tensions escalated, with barricades and Serbia's requesting permission from NATO to deploy up to 1,000 troops in Kosovo.<sup>18</sup> Kosovo and Serbia reached an EUbrokered agreement in November 2022 to deescalate the dispute over vehicle license plates.<sup>19</sup> Under the deal, Serbia agreed to stop issuing license plates bearing Kosovo city names, while Kosovo suspended further measures related to the forced reregistration of vehicles. The agreement was presented by the EU as a concrete

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13 Read more at: <https://peacemaker.un.org/en/node/10069>

14 Read more at: <https://www.europol.europa.eu/partners-collaboration/agreements/kosovo>

15 Read more at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/14/kosovo-opens-embassy-in-jerusalem-after-israel-recognises-its-independence>

16 Read more at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkey-strongly-condemns-kosovos-embassy-in-jerusalem>

17 Read more at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/kosovo-tensions-serbia-license-border/32015648.html>

18 Read more at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/serbia-request-permission-deploy-its-troops-kosovo-2022-12-15/>

19 Read more at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/kosovo-and-serbia-reach-european-solution-on-number-plate-dispute/>

step toward easing tensions and improving freedom of movement. Building on this, **in January 2024 the EU announced that the licenseplate dispute had been formally closed**, with both sides agreeing to mutually recognize each other's license plates, fully abolishing the temporary sticker regime.<sup>20</sup> The EU described this as an important confidencebuilding measure within the framework of the EU facilitated dialogue.

At the beginning of 2023, the EU made the Agreement on the Path to Normalisation the main focus of talks, followed in March by the **Ohrid Implementation Annex**. While the EU later formalized this as its own proposal, it actually started as a **Franco-German initiative** in autumn 2022, when Berlin and Paris tried to restart stalled discussions.<sup>21</sup> Many analysts pointed out that the proposal was based on the 1972 Basic Treaty between East and West Germany.<sup>22</sup> It did not require formal mutual recognition, but aimed to normalize relations by having each side accept the other's institutions and international roles in practice. So, rather than being a new EU idea, the proposal was a renewed German-French diplomatic effort that all 27 EU member states later supported.

Supporters of the Agreement on the Path to Normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia believed it was the most serious effort in years to move the talks beyond short-term crisis management and toward lasting normalization. However, critics said the plan did not solve key political issues, especially about the order of steps, how to carry them out, and the status of Kosovo Serbs in the north.<sup>23</sup> Even before the Brussels and Ohrid meetings, Albin Kurti said the Franco-German proposal was the right starting point and called for it to be discussed right away.<sup>24</sup>

However, events on the ground soon showed some of the weaknesses of the agreement. In May 2023, tensions rose quickly after ethnic Albanian mayors took office in Serb-majority areas, following elections that Kosovo Serbs boycotted. Clashes in the north injured about 25 to 30 KFOR troops, led NATO to send more forces, and brought new

calls from international groups for immediate de-escalation and better coordination with KFOR and EULEX. NATO later said that 2023 saw enough violence to require up to 1,000 extra troops, the largest increase in KFOR forces in ten years. Due to escalating situation in Kosovo, and what the EU saw as a lack of coordination by the government on actions taken in the north, by June, the EU put in place temporary and reversible measures against Kosovo, saying they would be lifted if there were real steps to ease tensions in the north. These events highlighted the main problem with the 2023 process that even though the Agreement on the Path to Normalisation was seen as a major step forward, its rollout occurred in a setting where Serbia continued to challenge Kosovo's right to exist as a state. Instead of marking a new phase of normalisation, 2023 marked a serious backsliding in Kosovo-Serbia relations, escalating in the September 2023 terrorist attack in Banjska in the north of Kosovo.

In January 2024, visa liberalization for Kosovo citizens entered into force, which marked the first and most serious tangible result of the European integration process for the Kosovars and helped significantly reduce Kosovo's isolation. However, it also brought new challenges, like the need to monitor false asylum claims, as mentioned in the 2025 country report by the European Commission. In the north of Kosovo, disputes over currency, among others, became more serious. Reuters reported that Kosovo required payments to be made only in euros, and Western officials warned this could raise tensions. Later in 2024, a terrorist attack in Kosovo's critical infrastructure damaged the Iber Lepenc/Ibar Lepenac water canal in Zubin Potok in north Kosovo that supplies water to the main coal power plants and affected Prishtina's drinking water capacity as well.<sup>25</sup>

In 2025, Kosovo faced political gridlock, a conditional easing of EU measures, and a breakthrough in international recognition, with four countries recognizing Kosovo, Kenya (March), Sudan (April), Syria (October), and the Bahamas (December). Kenya's recognition marked the first

20 Read more at: <https://www.eunews.it/en/2024/01/08/end-of-the-license-plate-row-between-serbia-and-kosovo-after-two-and-a-half-years-thanks-to-eu-mediation/>

21 Read more at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS\\_BRI\(2025\)779231](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2025)779231)

22 Read more at: [https://hiiu.hu/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/mki\\_FPR\\_beliv\\_online\\_173-183\\_kreft.pdf](https://hiiu.hu/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/mki_FPR_beliv_online_173-183_kreft.pdf)

23 Read more at: <http://www.democratizationpolicy.org/why-the-german-french-initiative-on-kosovo-serbia-wont-add-up/>

24 Read more at: <https://www.balkanweb.com/en/albin-kurti-propozimi-franko-gjerman-te-vendoset-ne-tryeze-nje-ore-e-me-pare/#gsc.tab=0>

25 Read more at: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/kosovo-statement-high-representative-water-canal-attack-zubin-potok\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/kosovo-statement-high-representative-water-canal-attack-zubin-potok_en)

recognition after nearly five years of no progress in this dimension of foreign policy, since, Israel had recognized Kosovo in 2021. The European Commission's 2025 country report for Kosovo

describes a divisive campaign before regular elections that were held in February of 2025, and a period of gridlock afterward, with a caretaker government.

**TABLE 1:** Some of the major developments in the period 2020 to 2025 of potential relevance to foreign and security policy of Kosovo

Year	Developments	Security / foreign-policy impact
2020	Washington commitments on economic normalization (U.S.-brokered). Kosovo and Serbia signed separate commitments at the White House focused on economic normalization rather than the core status dispute.	Energized the U.S.-led diplomatic channel to normalize relations between Kosovo and Serbia, but did not resolve the underlying political dispute. For Kosovo, the package also produced concrete foreign-policy effects, such as recognition from Israel.
2020	Europol working arrangement enters into force. The arrangement with Europol entered into force on 27 July 2020.	A concrete step in functional integration with European security structures. It improved the basis for cooperation on organized crime, terrorism, and information exchange, even without full operational status.
2021	Kosovo–Israel diplomatic relations formalized. Diplomatic relations were formally established on 1 February 2021.	A clear result for Kosovo's recognition agenda. At the same time, the decision to open the embassy in Jerusalem created backlash with for Kosovo's broader foreign-policy and relations with key partners such as Turkey.
2021	License-plate crisis in the north. The dispute escalated into protests and road blockages before an EU-facilitated interim arrangement was reached, with KFOR taking on a visible stabilizing role at the border crossings between Kosovo and Serbia.	Showed how quickly technical reciprocity measures can become a security issue in the north. It also reaffirmed that KFOR remains the key external stabilizer when local tensions spill over.
2022	Identity-documents dispute defused through EU facilitation. Serbia agreed to abolish entry/exit documents for Kosovo ID holders, and Kosovo dropped plans to impose the same requirement on Serbian ID holders.	A useful example of EU crisis management working as intended. It showed EU still had leverage when both sides wanted to avoid a new confrontation.

Year	Developments	Security / foreign-policy impact
2022	Barricades in the north and Serbia's request to NATO to deploy up to 1,000 security troops in Kosovo. Belgrade formally asked NATO to allow such a deployment during the crisis. <sup>26</sup>	One of the clearest escalation points of the period. The episode underlined that KFOR is the ultimate gatekeeper on hard-security questions and that Serbia was prepared to raise the stakes rhetorically and institutionally.
2022	Kosovo submits its application for EU membership. Kosovo filed its application in December 2022. <sup>27</sup>	A move that was rather seen as tactical to push EU to discuss the matter and lock Kosovo more firmly into the EU accession process.
2022	Kosovo submits its application to the Council of Europe. The application was submitted on 12 May 2022. <sup>28</sup>	Most realistic foreign policy objective, that did not materialize, due to Kosovo government not addressing – an unfairly as it was not included – political conditions from some CoE member state to end the draft statute of the Association of the Serb-majority Municipalities (ASM) to the Constitutional Court of Kosovo.
2023	Agreement on the Path to Normalisation <sup>29</sup> and Ohrid Implementation Annex <sup>30</sup> . The EU turned the Franco-German initiative into the main framework for the dialogue and linked implementation to both sides' EU paths.	The Agreement on the Path to Normalisation matters for Kosovo's foreign and security policy because it moves Kosovo and Serbia relations to practically de-facto recognition. According to the agreement, both sides will aim for "normal, good-neighbourly relations" based on equal rights, recognize each other's documents and national symbols, settle disputes peacefully, and avoid threats or the use of force. The agreement is especially important for Kosovo because it says neither side will represent the other internationally, and Serbia will not block Kosovo from joining any international organization.

26 Read more at: [https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/serbia-request-permission-deploy-its-troops-kosovo-2022-12-15/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/serbia-request-permission-deploy-its-troops-kosovo-2022-12-15/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

27 Read more at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/kosovo-submits-eu-membership-application-2022-12-15/>

28 Read more at: <https://rm.coe.int/application-by-kosovo-for-membership-of-the-council-of-europe-1680af1575>

29 Read more at: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-agreement-path-normalisation-between-kosovo-and-serbia\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-agreement-path-normalisation-between-kosovo-and-serbia_en)

30 Read more at: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-implementation-annex-agreement-path-normalisation-relations-between\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-implementation-annex-agreement-path-normalisation-relations-between_en)

Year	Developments	Security / foreign-policy impact
2023	Crisis in the north of Kosovo, clashes with KFOR, and EU measures against Kosovo. After Kosovo Albanian mayors took office following Serb boycotts of the local elections, clashes injured KFOR troops and NATO deployed up to 1,000 additional troops, the largest reinforcement in a decade, while the EU imposed temporary, reversible measures on Kosovo.	This was the year Kosovo's handling of the north produced the sharpest pushback from EU and the US. The result was both a security crisis, and a tangible political cost in relations with the US and the EU.
2023	<b>Banjska terrorist attack. An armed Serb group attacked Kosovo Police in Banjska on 24 September 2023, killing police sergeant Afrim Bunjaku. The assailants later barricaded themselves in the monastery complex.</b>	
	<p>This was the most serious organized security incident in Kosovo in recent years and now there is a before and after Banjska situation with respect to Kosovo-Serbia relations, but also in general how Serbia is perceived vis-à-vis Kosovo. It showed that Kosovo is vulnerable to external armed attacks, and shifted the focus of discussions in Kosovo to security issues rather than normalization. It also raised questions about the credibility of deterrence in the north of Kosovo, because if an armed group could mount an operation of that scale from Serbia, enter Kosovo, and sustain a firefight with the Kosovo Police, then the existing security posture had plainly not been sufficient to deter such an incursion. NATO's decision after the attack to authorise additional forces and further strengthen KFOR's presence only underlined that concern. Kosovo's government said the Banjska terrorist attack was not a spontaneous local event but a planned operation organized in Serbia. The Kosovo Foreign Ministry's report<sup>31</sup> stated that the armed group left Novi Pazar, entered Kosovo illegally near Izvor, and was led by Milan Radoičić. The report also mentioned evidence from seized phones, connections to Serbian security and political groups, and weapons that did not match what would be expected from a local improvised attack. Serbia denied any state involvement. Milan Radoičić publicly accepted responsibility for organizing and taking part in the Banjska attack, yet he remains free in Serbia.</p>	
2024	Euro-only payment enforcement and the dinar dispute. Kosovo's formal currency is Euro and the government moved to enforce it as the only legal currency in the north where Serbian dinars were widely used and this triggered strong criticism from the EU and U.S. because of the effects on everyday life in Serb-majority areas dependent on Serbian-funded payments and services.	The issue was not only about currency as according to the civil society organizations in the north it affected welfare delivery, education, health financing, and day-to-day life in the north. Politically, it reinforced the view among partners that Kosovo government was taking steps without sufficient coordination on sensitive community issues.

31 Read more at: <https://prishtinainsight.com/kosovos-report-reveals-banjska-terrorist-attack-details-mag/>

Year	Developments	Security / foreign-policy impact
2024	Terrorist attack on critical infrastructure, respectively the Ibar-Lepenc canal affecting water supply and power generation. <sup>32</sup> The blast damaged infrastructure feeding the country's main power plants and disrupted water supply, including for Prishtina.	A serious reminder that Kosovo's critical infrastructure remains vulnerable to sabotage or politically motivated attacks. Kosovo government argued that the attack was committed by "gangs directed by Serbia," <sup>33</sup> The attack had immediate implications for energy security, public services, among others
2025	Prolonged political crisis and repeat elections. Regular parliamentary elections were held in February 2025 but failed to produce a stable majority, resulting in prolonged delays in government formation. Kosovo operated for most of the year under an acting government, and the impasse eventually resulted in new elections in December 2025. <sup>34</sup>	2025 became a lost year for Kosovo in political and policy terms. Prolonged caretaker government slowed decision-making, weakened reform delivery, and directly affected Kosovo's ability to meet commitments under the EU Growth Plan, resulting in delays to access to EU funding. The political crisis also reduced Kosovo's credibility with EU partners, limited its ability to engage proactively in the dialogue with Serbia, and constrained foreign and security policy planning. Public institutions were absorbed by internal deadlock, with tangible costs for Kosovo's European integration track. <sup>35</sup>
2025	Kenya recognizes Kosovo. Kenya's decision in March 2025 was the first new recognition in nearly five years. <sup>36</sup>	Limited in immediate practical effect, but politically significant.

32 Read more at: [https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/explosion-damages-canal-feeding-power-plants-northern-kosovo-2024-11-29/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/explosion-damages-canal-feeding-power-plants-northern-kosovo-2024-11-29/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

33 Read more at: <https://www.dw.com/en/kosovo-claims-terrorist-act-after-power-plant-canal-blast/a-70925973>

34 Read more at: [https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/feb/10/kosovo-elections-ruling-vetevendosje-party-loses-majority-initial-results-show?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/feb/10/kosovo-elections-ruling-vetevendosje-party-loses-majority-initial-results-show?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

35 Read more at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/AFET-PR-784231\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/AFET-PR-784231_EN.pdf)

36 Read more at: [https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/kenya-recognises-kosovo-independent-state-first-such-move-five-years-2025-03-26/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/kenya-recognises-kosovo-independent-state-first-such-move-five-years-2025-03-26/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

## 4. THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT

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From 2020 to 2025, Kosovo's foreign and security policy operated within a clear but limited strategic framework. Kosovo's vital allies are the European Union (EU) and NATO/KFOR. It faced ongoing challenges from Serbia's non-recognition campaign, which breached EU-facilitated agreements on normalization of relations and was reinforced by Russia and China internationally. Despite these constraints, Kosovo achieved several concrete results. The Stabilisation and Association Agreement remained in effect. Visa-free travel to the Schengen area began on 1 January 2024. Kosovo applied for EU membership in December 2022 and fully aligned with the EU's foreign and security policy. However, gaps in implementation of the EU related reforms, repeated crises in the north, and institutional paralysis in 2025 hurt Kosovo's credibility, limited its access to EU tools, and reduced its flexibility with key partners.

The EU influenced Kosovo's strategic environment by using its leverage. After the 2023 tension in the north, the EU introduced temporary, reversible measures on Kosovo in June 2023. By May 2025, the Commission began easing these measures, which were fully lifted in March 2026. However, the restrictive measures caused important financial losses. By mid-2025, some estimates suggest that about €613.4 million in projects had been suspended or delayed, and over €7 million lost permanently.<sup>37</sup> Beyond the material impact, the measures damaged Kosovo's reputation and image, as it was excluded from many EU-related meetings and processes. During this time, the Prime Minister's bilateral engagement with EU member states was very limited and mostly confined to multilateral settings, mainly within the Berlin Process and the European Political Community. In practice, President Vjosa Osmani-Sadriu took on a compensatory diplomatic role, pursuing an active foreign policy and acting as a de facto bypass in external relations. She was widely seen by international partners as more constructive

and cooperative, unlike the Prime Minister, whose engagement with EU capitals remained constrained.

NATO is Kosovo's core security partner. Based on NATO's Secretary General annual report "as of October 2025, 33 Allies and partners provided approximately 5,200 troops to KFOR, including deployed reserve forces"<sup>38</sup> NATO makes it clear that KFOR is the third responder to security incidents, after the Kosovo Police and EULEX. After the Banjska terrorist attack in 2023, NATO sent up to 1,000 extra troops, which marked the largest increase in ten years, and strengthened KFOR's presence in the north. This provides Kosovo with a stable deterrent, but it also shows that Kosovo's security forces still operate within a system where NATO has the final say on hard security issues. For leaders in Kosovo, this means that modernising defence is important for readiness and professionalism, but real deterrence still depends on NATO presence and political support. This matters for Kosovo's foreign and security policy because its NATO relations are currently functional rather than formal. The political obstacle is well known as four NATO members still do not recognise Kosovo.

The United States is Kosovo's most important strategic partner, but the period 2021-2025 showed that Kosovo cannot always count on automatic support from Washington. The U.S.-brokered Washington commitments in 2020 energized talks on economic normalization with Serbia. By late 2022, both Washington and Brussels focused on reducing tensions and managing political crises in the north. In September 2025, the United States suspended its planned Strategic Dialogue with Kosovo. The U.S. Embassy cited actions by the caretaker government that increased tensions and instability, along with ongoing delays in forming institutions after the February of 2025 election.<sup>39</sup> This was a significant political move because the U.S. relationship has long been central to Kosovo's security. The lesson is clear: Kosovo's close

37 Read more at: <https://newunionpost.eu/2025/12/22/eu-measures-kosovo-lifted-commission/#:~:text=The%20financial%20impact%20of%20the,under%20the%20IPA%202020%20agreement.>

38 Read more at: <https://www.nato.int/content/dam/nato/webready/documents/publications-and-reports/annual-reports/sgar25-en.pdf>, p. 40

39 Read more at: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/why-did-the-us-suspend-its-strategic-dialogue-with-kosovo-and-whats-next/>

ties with the United States depend on strategic discipline, coordination with partners, and effective institutions, not just past goodwill.

Serbia remains Kosovo's main external security challenge. This was evident in events like the license-plate crisis, the 2022 barricades, Serbia's request to send up to 1,000 military and police personnel to Kosovo<sup>40</sup>, the 2023 municipal crisis, and the Banjska terrorist attack. The Commission's 2025 Serbia country report suggests that for the EU progress in the normalization dialogue is still essential for both countries' progress toward the accession process into the Union. It also notes repeated Serbian actions that violate the Agreement on the Path to Normalisation, such as lobbying against Kosovo's membership in international organizations and failing to ensure accountability for the Banjska attack. This matters because Kosovo faces a neighbor that challenges its statehood, supports destabilizing actions in the north, and tries to maintain influence over Kosovo's international access.<sup>41</sup>

Russia's influence is less direct but still important as it limits Kosovo's international integration and recognition.<sup>42</sup> Russia's wider confrontation with the West after its full-scale invasion of Ukraine has further shaped this dynamic. Unlike Serbia's balancing approach, Kosovo's full alignment with EU sanctions against Russia and consistent support for Ukraine have increased its value to EU but also turned into a target for Russian malign influence. Brussels has repeatedly welcomed Kosovo's strong alignment with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, viewing it as a politically reliable actor in a polarised geopolitical environment.

Russia's wider confrontation with the West after its full-scale invasion of Ukraine has further shaped this dynamic. Russia's main lever regarding Kosovo is international, not domestic. Moscow consistently supports Serbia's position against Kosovo's recognition. It uses its permanent veto power in the

UN Security Council to block Kosovo's membership in UN and other international organizations where it can. Due to these structural constraints, Kosovo's foreign policy has evolved around three linked priorities: (1) expanding international recognition where possible, (2) deepening integration into European and transatlantic structures, and (3) pursuing functional integration with international organizations and EU mechanisms when formal membership is blocked. Unlike Serbia's balancing approach, Kosovo's full alignment with EU sanctions against Russia and consistent support for Ukraine have increased its strategic value to Western partners. Brussels has repeatedly welcomed Kosovo's strong alignment with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, viewing it as a politically reliable actor in a polarised geopolitical environment.

On domestic front, existing research suggests the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) is one of the most significant channels for Russian influence in Kosovo. Former Kosovar officials, and international security officials based in Kosovo, quoted in current research, argue that no other Serb institution has greater capacity to project narratives aligned with Russian strategic interests.<sup>43</sup> As noted by Vllasi's research critics argue that portraying the SOC as acting at Russia's behest oversimplifies its role and motivations.<sup>44</sup> They note that if the Church were primarily guided by Russian or Serbian political preferences, it would likely have endorsed Kosovo's partition along ethnic lines, an outcome reportedly favored by Serbia's President, as Instead, the Holy Assembly of Bishops of the SOC unanimously rejected ethnic partition in November 2018.<sup>45</sup>

China plays a different role in Kosovo's strategic environment. Chinese engagement in the Western Balkans, including Kosovo, is not limited to trade, investment, or infrastructure. Economic tools are part of a broader strategy to shape political environments. China's engagement with Kosovo

40 Read more at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/serbia-ask-nato-deploy-serb-military-police-kosovo-vucic-2022-12-10/>

41 See for example: Reuters, "Kosovan minister says Serbia aims to destabilise the country", <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/tensions-rise-northern-kosovo-local-serbs-block-roads-serbia-puts-army-alert-2022-12-27/> and Koha.net <https://www.koha.net/en/veshtrime/perpjekjet-e-serbise-per-te-destabilizuar-kosoven-taktikat-e-luftes-hibride-dhe-rol-i-sherbimeve-te-inteligjences-dhe-sigurise-serbe>

42 Elis Vllasi, 2020, "Russian Influence in Kosovo: In the Shadows of Myth and Reality" [https://qkss.org/images/uploads/files/Report\\_-\\_Russian\\_Influence\\_in\\_Kosovo\\_-\\_English\\_Version.pdf](https://qkss.org/images/uploads/files/Report_-_Russian_Influence_in_Kosovo_-_English_Version.pdf)

43 Vllasi, 2020, p. 20

44 Ibid.,

45 Ibid.,

is indirect and asymmetric.<sup>46</sup> It treats the Western Balkans as a regional system rather than isolated states. Influence gained in Serbia and elsewhere spills over into Kosovo economically, technologically, and narratively. Like Russia, Beijing is part of the multilateral block that keeps Kosovo out of the UN and other international organizations. However, China's impact on Kosovo's economic security is more of a concern. In 2025, China accounted for €920 million imports, making it one of the country's largest suppliers, and risking potential dependency on China supplies, even though China does not recognize Kosovo.<sup>47</sup>

Taiwan could become a more important, though still underused, partner for Kosovo. It would not replace Kosovo's core Euro-Atlantic anchors but serve as a practical extension of them. In recent years, the relationship between Kosovo and Taiwan has moved from symbolic goodwill to structured parliamentary and municipal cooperation. The Kosovo-Taiwan Parliamentary Friendship Group was established in 2021 alongside a Taiwan-Kosovo parliamentary association. Kosovo's first high-level cross-party parliamentary delegation visited Taiwan in March 2023. Former Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti led another delegation in April 2024 with Artan Abrashi, co-chair of the Kosovo-Taiwan Parliamentary Friendship Group. In March 2024, Prishtina and Kaohsiung signed a sister-city agreement focused on smart traffic, smart healthcare, digital transformation, culture, education, and startup cooperation. Taiwan's sees countering disinformation, disaster prevention and

relief, and resilient supply chains as promising areas for cooperation.

Kosovo passport holders are eligible for Taiwan eVisas under the relevant criteria, and official exchanges have noted the presence of Kosovar students in Taiwan. For Kosovo, deepening these ties has three benefits: it would reinforce alignment with the United States and the wider democratic camp; open concrete channels in digital governance, innovation, education, and resilience; and create modest but useful leverage toward China by showing Kosovo is willing to broaden substantive ties with Taiwan when it serves its strategic interests. Kosovo should treat this partnership not as symbolism but as a calibrated instrument of foreign and security policy.

As Chapter 4 shows, Kosovo operates within a narrow but somehow clear context, with strong political alignment with the EU and the United States, dependence on NATO for hard security, and persistent external pressure from Serbia, backed by Russia and China, in international arenas. At the same time, internal factors such as institutional instability, and recurring crises in the north have reduced Kosovo's credibility and room for manoeuvre with key allies. This creates a paradox where Kosovo is strategically deeply aligned with the West but operationally constrained in advancing its objectives. Kosovo's main foreign and security policy challenges emerge within this context as interconnected pressures that shape its capacity to act.

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46 Read more at: <https://qkss.org/en/publikimet/beyond-economic-considerations-new-frontiers-of-chinese-influence-in-the-western-balkans>

47 Read more at: [https://qkss.org/images/uploads/files/Fin\\_With\\_imports\\_of\\_around\\_€900\\_million\\_in\\_2025%2C\\_is\\_Kosovo\\_moving\\_toward\\_.....pdf](https://qkss.org/images/uploads/files/Fin_With_imports_of_around_€900_million_in_2025%2C_is_Kosovo_moving_toward_.....pdf)

# 5. KOSOVO'S MAIN SECURITY AND FOREIGN POLICY CHALLENGES

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Kosovo's foreign and security policy is ambitious. The Government Programme 2021-2025<sup>48</sup> says Kosovo's foreign policy should be independent, serious, predictable and bold, while also working closely with the United States and the EU. It uses NATO standards as the main guide for security and defence development. The National Development Strategy 2030<sup>49</sup> lists high readiness for peace and security and strengthening international subjectivity as major objectives of the Republic of Kosovo. These are good targets. However, in recent years, actual progress has often fallen short of these plans. As Kosovo 2.0 pointed out in its March 2024 review of the Kurti government, domestic reforms were mostly overshadowed by issues related to Serbia and ongoing dialogue, and relations with the U.S. and the EU became more difficult.<sup>50</sup>

According to the FOL Movement report on the Government Programme 2021–2025, the main problem was inability or to achieve the objectives that were set.<sup>51</sup> The report points out that progress in different sectors was slowed by procedural delays, poor technical planning, and weak coordination between institutions. In foreign policy, the gap between goals and results was very clear. FOL Movement report states that "In relation to NATO, Kosovo has suffered a significant setback. The exclusion of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF)

from participation in the "Defender Europe '23" military exercise has been a major blow to Kosovo's efforts to further integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures."<sup>52</sup> The report notes that although Kosovo made EU and NATO integration a priority at the start of 2021, the year 2025 ended with Kosovo under EU restrictive measure, canceled launch of the strategic dialogue, failed bid to join the Council of Europe as well as secure candidate status.

*"In my view, the predominant challenges of Kosovo's foreign and security policy derive from the radical shifts of the concepts on the basis of which the state of Kosovo was created. The liberal order and international rule-based order have provided nominal and to some extent even substantial safeguarding for Kosovo to advance its state building trajectory. On the other hand, these norms did provide also limits of further advancing this trajectory because some countries were using precisely the international rule-based order that prevented Kosovo's path to international organization. While the existing turmoil makes an exceptional challenge to small countries, Kosovo included, it could serve also as an opportunity should Kosovo properly and timely navigate." (Interview with senior government official, March, 2026)*

## 5.1 Security challenges

**The biggest and most urgent security challenge for Kosovo is the potential of instability in the north of the country. This is more than just a local issue, because the north of Kosovo is a complex mixture of interrelated security issues. It is an area where interethnic tensions, Serbia's influence, organized crime groups, and Kosovo's**

broader strategy all come together. As noted by a senior civil servant interviewed for this report: "achieving mutual recognition and establishing fully-fledged good-neighbourly relations with Serbia will remain the most important challenge." A former government senior security official interviewed for the report agreed, saying that normalization

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48 Read more at: <https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Programi-i-Qeverise-se-Kosoves-2021-2025.pdf>

49 Read more at: <https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/NDSP-2030-dokumenti-i-dizajnuar.pdf>

50 Read more at: <https://archive.kosovotwopointzero.com/tri-vjet-te-qeverise-kurti-qysh-po-shkon/>

51 Read more at: <https://levizjafol.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/86-Programi-i-Qeversie-ALB04.pdf>

52 See FOL Movement report, p. 26, <https://levizjafol.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/86-Programi-i-Qeversie-ALB04.pdf>

is crucial because it would lower security risks and improve Kosovo's international reputation. This view is widely shared. As long as the north remains a source of potential crisis with spillover effect on Kosovo's relations with vital allies, such as the EU and US, Kosovo will likely keep focusing on managing crises, rather than building long-term process for integration of the area. Key to achieve the latter is the establishment of the Association of the Serb-majority Municipalities (ASM), which the Kurti government has indicated is highly unlikely to undertake.

For Kosovo Serbs, security in the north was/is tense and it is seen as a pivotal aspect of the human-rights situation.<sup>53</sup> The Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo for 2024 notes that actions by the Kosovo government like the shutdown of five Serbia-funded illegal institutions in the north increased tensions, and that the Kosovo Serb NGO-AKTIV found core civil rights, including safety, freedom of movement, peaceful protest, and other social liberties, suffered setbacks.<sup>54</sup> The report also shows that for Kosovo Serbs, security in the north is tied directly to representation, trust, and access to services. After the mass resignation of Kosovo Serb officials and the boycott of local institutions, the north was left with a legitimacy gap.

Despite the serious challenges in the north and the need for the government to have a rational and meaningful strategy of integration of the area, there are some good news about the north. The police operations in the north of Kosovo have given the most serious blow to the structures of organized crime in the area. Kosovo government made some progress in strengthening police presence, fostering law-enforcement capacity, and seriously disrupting organised criminal activity in the north. The European Commission's 2024 report explicitly noted the professionalism of the Kosovo Police after Banjska, progress in police reorganization, recruitment of Kosovo Serb officers, and intensified efforts against smuggling and organised crime in the municipalities in the north. The indictment of 45 suspects over the Banjska attack, including

Milan Radoičić, further underlined that Kosovo's institutions were willing to pursue accountability against networks linked to violence and coercion in the north.<sup>55</sup>

### **Another challenge is the growing militarization in the region and Serbia's wider strategic moves. A senior civil servant interviewed for this report**

warned about a "frightening trend of armament around Kosovo and beyond." A former senior security official also pointed out Serbia's ongoing militarization and its closer ties with Russia and China as ongoing worries. KCSS own reporting has raised attention to Serbia's "Project 5000"<sup>56</sup> The KCSS report on Serbia's security doctrine highlights that Serbia does not see Kosovo as just a political disagreement, but as a key national security concern.<sup>57</sup> Serbia's 2021 National Security Strategy describes Kosovo's independence as a direct threat to its territorial integrity and makes this view central to its security policies. Because of this, Serbia's actions go beyond diplomacy and include intelligence work, military build-up, and hybrid tactics like spreading disinformation and lobbying other countries to challenge Kosovo's statehood and block its international recognition. At the same time, Serbia's strategy has two sides: it works with the EU and NATO, but also strengthens its ties with Russia and China, who support Serbia politically and encourage a more confrontational stance toward Kosovo. For Kosovo, this means it is not just dealing with a neighbor that opposes its independence, but with one whose security policies actively support efforts to challenge it in diplomatic, informational, and security areas. Kosovo's vulnerability lies in the interaction between external manipulation of information (FIMI) and internal structural weaknesses, such as limited media literacy, insufficient institutional coordination, and weak enforcement mechanisms. These conditions make Kosovo a fertile ground for disinformation. The Hibrid.info analysis of the Russian "Pravda" network shows that this challenge has become a more organized and systemic hybrid threat.<sup>58</sup> The report makes it clear that the Balkans, including Kosovo, are not just side targets but they are part

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53 Read more at: <https://newsocialinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/04-Report-Civil-Society-Report-on-Human-Rights-2024-ENG-04.pdf>

54 See Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo for 2024, <https://newsocialinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/04-Report-Civil-Society-Report-on-Human-Rights-2024-ENG-04.pdf>

55 Read more at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/09/11/kosovo-indicts-45-for-deadly-attack-by-armed-serb-group-in-banjska/bi/>

56 Read more at: [https://qkss.org/images/uploads/files/What\\_is\\_Serbia's\\_'Project\\_5000'\\_and\\_why\\_should\\_we\\_be\\_concerned.pdf](https://qkss.org/images/uploads/files/What_is_Serbia's_'Project_5000'_and_why_should_we_be_concerned.pdf)

57 Read more at: [https://qkss.org/images/uploads/files/How\\_Serbian\\_security\\_doctrine\\_views\\_Kosovo%2C\\_the\\_West%2C\\_Russia\\_and\\_China.pdf](https://qkss.org/images/uploads/files/How_Serbian_security_doctrine_views_Kosovo%2C_the_West%2C_Russia_and_China.pdf)

58 See "The Russian propaganda network Pravda and the Balkans", by Festim Rizanaj, <https://hibrid.info/the-russian-propaganda-network-pravda-and-the-balkans/>

of a planned information environment where Russian-aligned networks work on a large scale, creating a lot of content aimed at local audiences. For Albanian-language content, the messages often describe NATO as an aggressor, the EU as ineffective, and the United States as manipulative. At the same time, they deny Kosovo's statehood and claim its institutions are either illegitimate or repressive toward the Kosovo Serbian community.

This is important for Kosovo's security because, as both reports point out, disinformation is now less about convincing people and more about overwhelming them and shaping the information environment. The "Pravda" network is a large system of automated or semi-automated websites that keep repeating and recycling certain stories, often taken from Russian state media and similar sources.<sup>59</sup> The goal is to make certain views seem normal. Even if not many people see each piece of content, the sheer volume helps these hostile messages stick around. Their strategy is also to influence search engines, digital platforms, and even AI systems by flooding them with this content, a tactic analysts call content flooding or "LLM grooming."<sup>60</sup>

At a regional roundtable on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) organized by Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) in March, of 2026, participants agreed that Kosovo should see FIMI as a hybrid threat, not just a communications challenge. They emphasized that manipulation does not rely on isolated falsehoods but takes advantage of existing weaknesses in society, such as poor coordination between institutions, low public trust, fragile interethnic relations, limited strategic communication, and the fast, opaque nature of digital platforms. The real danger is not just the spread of misleading stories but the attempt to influence how people understand legitimacy, sovereignty, and security, especially during elections, security incidents, political uncertainty, or sensitive talks with Serbia. The roundtable highlighted that manipulative narratives are especially risky in Kosovo because they can turn isolated events into perceived collective threats, increase fear and division between communities,

and erode trust in institutions before any official response. They also noted that these narratives often go beyond simple disinformation. They challenge Kosovo's statehood, institutional strength, and international partnerships, and are spread by local voices, regional media, and foreign state-linked sources.

This is why FIMI was discussed as part of a wider hybrid-threat environment. It connects with issues like platform dynamics, cross-border narrative laundering, cyber and law enforcement weaknesses, and new technologies like AI, which can quickly spread biased or incomplete views about Kosovo. The roundtable concluded that Kosovo cannot rely on one-off rebuttals. Instead, it needs a permanent inter-institutional system, better early-warning tools, bilingual monitoring and communication, stronger ties with civil society and investigative media, and closer cooperation with the EU and NATO in areas like cybersecurity, strategic communication, law enforcement, and resilience based on rights. In summary, the roundtable argued that FIMI is a serious challenge for Kosovo because it targets the areas where political disputes, social weakness, and institutional gaps meet. For this reason, it should be treated as a core foreign and security policy issue, not just a media concern.

A senior government official interviewed for this report warned that "the overall emerging insecurities deriving from cyber (AI) and, particularly, energy security represent a major concern," and said these areas "should be given absolute priority." Kosovo's cyber-security challenge is not the absence of laws or institutions, but weak capacities and resilience. As the Balkans Group paper shows through the 2022 attacks on public services like eKosova, cyber incidents in Kosovo are not isolated technical events.<sup>61</sup> They directly affect the continuity of state services, public confidence, and institutional credibility. The paper argues that Kosovo lacks the full operational triangle of people, processes, and tools, with few trained professionals, inadequate investment in cyber defence, limited incident-response depth, and an incomplete regulatory framework for vulnerability disclosure, reporting, and enforcement. The KCSS paper reinforces this

59 Read more at <https://hibrid.info/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Rrjeti-Pravda-5-1.pdf>

60 It refers to the deliberate and systematic manipulation of Large Language Models (LLMs) by saturating the internet with disinformation, propaganda, or intentionally biased content designed to be absorbed into future training datasets. This practice amounts to a form of data poisoning and represents a new category of cognitive threat, in which malicious actors attempt to "train" AI systems to internalize distorted narratives and reproduce fabricated information.

61 Read more at: <https://balkansgroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Cyber-Security.pdf>

diagnosis from a regional and EU perspective.<sup>62</sup> It notes that Kosovo has adopted a cybersecurity law, a 2023–2027 strategy, and established a dedicated agency and police cybercrime structures, placing it ahead of some Western Balkans peers in formal set-up. Yet it also underscores that Kosovo remains only partially aligned with EU standards, still needs to align with NIS II and the 5G Cybersecurity Toolbox, is not yet a party to the Budapest Convention, and must invest more in technical capacities, operational mechanisms, and judicial and prosecutorial expertise. The implication is that Kosovo's, what we can call a cyber problem is about how to have the necessary capacities and resources to make the existing laws, policies and institutions work effectively. Unless it strengthens early warning, critical infrastructure protection, inter-institutional coordination, and links to the EU cyber-security architecture, its digital modernization will continue to outpace its digital resilience.

Weak coordination between institutions and inconsistent follow-through are still big security problems inside Kosovo. There are plenty of documents, plans, and statements, but not enough action. A former senior security official warned that

poor coordination between the Presidency and the Government has led to "inconsistent messaging toward international partners," which hurts "the coherence and credibility" of Kosovo's diplomacy. This is a serious issue. For Kosovo, weak internal coordination affects security because allies and outside partners look at both what Prishtina does and how consistently it acts. Another growing security challenge for Kosovo is managing its relationships with the U.S., NATO, and the EU. This point should be made clearer. Kosovo still relies on KFOR and NATO as its main security guarantee. NATO's current description of KFOR says the mission is the third responder after the Kosovo Police and EULEX. After the Banjska terrorist attack in 2023, NATO sent up to 1,000 more troops, the biggest increase in a decade. As of February 2026, NATO says KFOR has about 5,200 troops from 33 Allied and partner countries. In August 2024, KFOR publicly asked Kosovo government not to take unilateral steps over the Mitrovica bridge, and NATO had already reminded everyone in June 2023 that their obligations to KFOR are meant "to ensure coordinated action, avoid escalation and preserve a safe and secure environment."<sup>63</sup>

## 5.2 Foreign policy challenges

*"The most obvious under-discussed issue that might turn into a risk is the need for Kosovo to consolidate its international statehood, namely recognition by fellow nations/states that have so far not formally recognized its statehood and membership into international organisations. It is even more concerning that powerful actors such as the U.S., the EU and other powerful states and international organisations, even Kosovo's own political forces, rather rarely talk about this existential need for Kosovo. It is disconcerting that this issue that is vital for Kosovo as a state and society is downgraded and reduced into conflict micromanagement of the political dispute with Serbia, tackled through transactional 'muddlethroughing' that take the form of 'deals' about an endless number of small, often trivial issues." (Interview with senior civil servant, Government of Kosovo, March, 2026)*

**The main foreign policy challenge for Kosovo is still normalizing relations with Serbia. Serbia's continued refusal to recognize Kosovo's right to exist as a state is a structural foreign and security challenge.** This position persists despite the 2010 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, which confirmed that Kosovo's declaration of independence did not violate international law, and despite Kosovo's status emerging from a UN-led political process by former President of Finland Martti Ahtisaari. In practice, Serbia's stance is a strategy of contestation, combining diplomatic obstruction, support for illegal and parallel structures within Kosovo, and at times, tolerance or backing of destabilising actors on the ground, such as the ringleader of Banjska terrorist attack Milan Radoičić.<sup>64</sup> As a former senior security official of the Kosovo government noted in an interview for this report, Serbia's non-recognition is not only

62 Read more at: [https://qkss.org/images/uploads/files/dESIGN\\_Integration\\_of\\_the\\_Six\\_Countries\\_of\\_the\\_Western\\_Balkans.pdf](https://qkss.org/images/uploads/files/dESIGN_Integration_of_the_Six_Countries_of_the_Western_Balkans.pdf)

63 Read more at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/08/16/eu-warns-kosovo-as-mitrovica-bridge-standoff-goes-on/bi/>

64 Read more at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/kosovo-indicts-banjska-attack-suspects-radoicic/33116016.html> and <https://prishtinainsight.com/who-is-milan-radoicic-the-shadow-power-of-kosovo-serbs-mag/>

symbolic but has direct security implications, as it “contribute[s] to persistent regional instability” and is reinforced by backing from major powers such as Russia and China.

Serbia's refusal to accept Kosovo's statehood has created a long-term environment where the EU-led efforts of normalization of relations is continuously deferred and security risks are reproduced rather than resolved. As shown by the Banjska terrorist attack and other incidents, networks linked to political and security structures in Serbia have demonstrated the capacity to challenge Kosovo's constitutional order and public security. In this context, non-recognition acts as a permissive framework. It allows Serbia to maintain some kind of ambiguity over its responsibilities while contesting Kosovo's sovereignty in diplomatic, informational, and security domains. At the same time, the interviews show that this issue remains central but is insufficiently addressed in strategic terms. As one senior civil servant from the Kosovo government argued in an interview for this report, the need to consolidate Kosovo's international statehood and achieve mutual recognition is often “downgraded and reduced into conflict micromanagement... of an endless number of small, often trivial issues,” rather than treated as an existential priority. This dynamic has allowed the core dispute over statehood to persist unresolved, while political energy is diverted into technical arrangements that do not fundamentally alter the relationship.

Kosovo's diplomacy is still affected by the unresolved dispute with Serbia over the status of the country, and no other priority can fully avoid it. The Kosovo Government Programme 2021-2025 says that working closely with the United States is important in the normalization dialogue with Serbia, and that Kosovo's bigger goal is to strengthen its statehood through integration and recognition. However, in practice, the dialogue often turns into managing small disputes. A senior civil servant interviewed for this report criticized how Kosovo's statehood issue has been reduced to transactional “muddlethrougning” over many minor problems. In

other words too many important players now focus more on daily crisis management than on Kosovo's deeper need for full international acceptance.

**Russia and China both pose foreign policy challenges for Kosovo, but they do so in different ways.** Russia's approach is openly geopolitical and disruptive. According to the KCSS report on Russian foreign policy, Moscow sees Kosovo as more than just a dispute with Serbia.<sup>65</sup> Russia uses Kosovo as a symbol to question Western intervention, challenge Kosovo's statehood, and undermine Euro-Atlantic integration in the Western Balkans. The report also notes that Russia's support for Serbia is part of a broader strategy to create instability, exploit ethnic and political divisions, and block normalization whenever it would reduce Moscow's influence in the region. Another KCSS report highlights that Russia uses Kosovo as part of its wider confrontation with the West, spreading anti-Kosovo narratives to strengthen Serbia's opposition to NATO and keep the Balkans politically unstable.<sup>66</sup>

China poses a different kind of foreign policy challenge. The KCSS report on China's “silent footprint” explains that Beijing does not recognize Kosovo but still engages in selective economic and political outreach.<sup>67</sup> This includes working with local governments and maintaining a liaison office in Prishtina that reports to its embassy in Belgrade. As a result, China can build its presence and influence in Kosovo, while Kosovo has no similar access in China. The report on Kosovo's imports from China also points out that imports nearly doubled from about €450 million in 2021 to €900 million in 2025, making China one of Kosovo's biggest import partners, even though Kosovo exports very little to China.<sup>68</sup> Since China also supports Serbia's stance against Kosovo in international forums, this creates a strategic problem: Kosovo is becoming more economically dependent on a country that does not recognize its sovereignty.

**Kosovo also finds it difficult to turn its pro-Western stance into real access to international institutions.** The Government Programme describes Kosovo as a reliable partner of the U.S.,

65 Read more from KAS and KCSS report, available at: [https://qkss.org/images/uploads/files/Publication\\_24-09-30\\_Kosovo\\_in\\_Russian\\_Foreign\\_Policy\\_Discourse\\_A4\\_-\\_2.pdf](https://qkss.org/images/uploads/files/Publication_24-09-30_Kosovo_in_Russian_Foreign_Policy_Discourse_A4_-_2.pdf)

66 Read more at: <https://qkss.org/en/publikimet/kercenimet-hibride-ne-nje-peizazh-gjeopolitik-ne-ndryshim-lufta-ne-ukraine-dhe-implikimet-e-saj-per-kosoven-dhe-ballkanin-perendimor>

67 Read more at: [https://qkss.org/images/uploads/files/Gjurma\\_e\\_heshtur\\_e\\_Kinës\\_hartëzimi\\_i\\_ndikimit\\_kinez\\_në\\_politikën\\_lokale\\_dhe\\_peizazhin\\_ekonomik\\_në\\_Kosovë\\_Eng.pdf](https://qkss.org/images/uploads/files/Gjurma_e_heshtur_e_Kinës_hartëzimi_i_ndikimit_kinez_në_politikën_lokale_dhe_peizazhin_ekonomik_në_Kosovë_Eng.pdf)

68 Read more at: <https://qkss.org/al/publikimet/with-imports-of-around-900-million-in-2025-is-kosovo-moving-toward-a-potential-dependency-on-chinas-supply-chain>

the EU, and NATO, and promises closer cooperation. But in reality, this alignment has not always led to more access. Kosovo is still not in NATO, still lacks recognition from five EU countries, and still faces political obstacles in major international organizations. A former senior security official interviewed for this report said Kosovo should have taken better advantage of the current geopolitical situation, because “missed opportunities can carry long-term costs.” In other words, while Kosovo is aligned 100% with the West, it has not always turned that into lasting political benefits.

**Kosovo’s foreign policy also faces a credibility problem with its closest partners.** The problem is not that Kosovo has changed its alliances or lost its direction. It has not. The real question is how can Kosovo demonstrate to its closest partners that it acts in a disciplined way, plans ahead, and understands that decisions are stronger when they fit into allied strategies, or in other words to prove itself as a rational actor. The Government Programme 2021-2025 says Kosovo’s foreign policy should be “predictable,” and this is now more important than ever. If Kosovo wants better ties with the U.S., closer links to NATO, and progress with the EU, it must have the right policies and must also be seen as predictable and rational actor. **Another big foreign policy problem is that Kosovo is still not fully recognized and cannot join many international organizations.** Kosovo has made some progress, but not enough to overcome these basic limits. A senior civil servant interviewed for this report said the need to “consolidate its international statehood” is not discussed enough, especially when it comes to recognition by the five EU countries that do not recognize Kosovo and joining international organizations.

*“A key risk and often under-addressed challenge in Kosovo’s foreign and security policy lies in the insufficient coordination between state institutions, particularly the Presidency and the Government. Over the past two years divergences in positions and strategic approaches have, at times, produced inconsistent messaging toward international partners, thereby undermining the coherence and credibility of Kosovo’s diplomatic engagement. In several instances, this lack of alignment has had tangible consequences, including the communication of mixed signals during the imposition of European Union measures partly triggered by government actions as well as the suspending of strategic dialogue with the United States.” (Interview with former senior security official, March 2026)*

As outlined above, Kosovo faces few pressures, such as Serbia’s refusal to recognize the right of Kosovo to exist as a state, limited international recognition, and external influence from Russia and China. It also has internal weaknesses, including institutional fragmentation and deep political polarization, weak coordination, and reactive crisis management. These factors reinforce each other and reduce Kosovo’s ability to turn its strong Euro-Atlantic alignment into concrete gains. The result is a policy environment where Kosovo in practice is aligned with the West but operationally constrained in advancing its core objectives. Against this backdrop, the key question is not about Kosovo’s goals but how it can prioritize, sequence, and implement them more effectively. Chapter 6 discusses some ideas in this aspect, outlining some concrete priorities Kosovo should pursue to strengthen its position.

## 6. WHAT KOSOVO SHOULD PRIORITIZE IN ITS FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY

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Kosovo's next foreign and security policy should focus on a key lesson from the past five years which is that the country often loses ground not because of poor strategy, but because it allows crises, poor sequencing, and institutional incoherence to consume political energy that should be spent on integration, recognition, and state-consolidation. From 2020 to 2025, Kosovo made progress in the right direction. It fully aligned with the West on major geopolitical issues, gained visa liberalisation, applied for EU membership, worked more closely with Europol, stayed committed to its Euro-Atlantic goals, and increased defence spending. However, this period also showed the costs of repeated tensions in the north of Kosovo, political gridlock at home, unfinished reforms from EU accession process, and fairly regular friction with the United States, NATO, and the EU. The next government does not need a new grand strategy per se, but it does need to set clearer priorities and find a better way to achieve them.

Interviews for this report point in the same direction when it comes to what Kosovo should prioritize in its foreign and security policy, even if they use different words. One senior civil servant from the Kosovo government says that "achieving mutual recognition and establishing fully-fledged good-neighbourly relations with Serbia will remain the most important challenge." Another senior government official believes Kosovo should focus on "two parallel layers" which is to say building more bilateral partnerships and joining organizations where membership brings real value, like the Council of Europe, the EU, and INTERPOL. A former senior security official thinks Kosovo should prioritize a "clear pathway toward membership in NATO and EU" and warns that "missed opportunities can carry long-term costs." The Government Programme 2021–2025 also sets a high standard, saying Kosovo's foreign policy should be "independent, serious, predictable and bold."

From this, the message is clear, and that is that Kosovo needs direction. It needs fewer, but clearer priorities, pursued more consistently, with better planning, better coordination, and fewer self-made crises.

**FIRST, Kosovo should focus on a strategy for the north of the country that brings together security, services, and political inclusion, and not focusing mostly on enforcement.** The north is where almost all of Kosovo's most difficult foreign and security issues in a manner of speaking come together, and this includes relations with Serbia, the position of Kosovo Serbs, and trust with Western partners (EU and US). The next government should create a formal strategy for the north, and take a pro-active approach, in coordination with the US and EU. This strategy should include a plan to have public services accessible to the citizens, a package to build trust in rule of law and policing, clear steps for working with partners on sensitive issues, and a national dialogue that addresses the more pragmatic concerns of the Kosovo Serbs. This matters because recent years have shown mixed results. The European Commission's 2025 report says relations with the Kosovo Serb community got worse after Kosovo institutions closed many Serbia-supported parallel or illegal institutions in an uncoordinated manner and without enough attention to local needs. At the same time, the Commission's 2024 report noted that police stepped up efforts against smuggling and organized crime in the north, and the Banjska terrorist attack investigation became a significant operation in Kosovo Police. The main point is that while the state's presence in the north has grown, its legitimacy has not kept up. That gap is risky. A human-rights report from civil society groups also says security in the north stayed tense in 2024 and that some local Serbs have grown more resentful toward Kosovo public institutions. The next government should build on progress in law

enforcement, but it should recognize that control alone is not a real strategy.

**SECOND, Kosovo should see the normalization talks with Serbia as a chance to strengthen the state as well as regional, European and international consolidation, not as a burden to deal with reluctantly.** This is likely the most important political change the next government needs to make. Kosovo has reasons to be cautious about the dialogue process as it has worked so far. But instead of seeing it as something forced from outside and unpopular at home, Kosovo should take control of it. This means publishing a clear plan for carrying out the 2023 Agreement on the Path to Normalisation and its annex, explaining what Kosovo will do, in what order, with what legal protections, and what it expects from the EU and Serbia, but especially the EU. It also means making the process more transparent and increasing parliamentary oversight, since too much of the dialogue has become rumor and slogans for domestic consumption. One senior civil servant put it well, saying that Kosovo's core statehood issue is too often "downgraded and reduced into conflict micromanagement" and endless "muddlethoroughing." Kosovo should avoid this trap. A better way is to meet its obligations honestly while protecting its constitutional limits. This includes preparing a draft statute on the Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities for constitutional review, thinking about whether to rebrand the mechanism, and setting up an expert group to write a concept paper before taking formal steps. The point is not to make concessions just for the sake of it, but to move from reacting to events to managing them with a clear plan. As Gëzim Visoka said in 2021, Kosovo should approach the dialogue with a "detailed, structured, and transparent plan."<sup>69</sup> That advice still holds true.

**THIRD, Kosovo should make rebuilding trust with the United States, the EU, and NATO a top priority. This is important** because Kosovo's foreign policy is no longer about choosing its direction, because the country is clearly aligned with the West. The real issue is that, at key moments, Kosovo's main allies have not seen it as reliable

or predictable. This has had real consequences. In June 2023 the U.S. and the EU warned Kosovo to back down in the north or face consequences. In September 2025, United States suspended its planned Strategic Dialogue with Kosovo because of concerns that caretaker government actions had increased "tensions and instability."<sup>70</sup> Meanwhile, NATO says KFOR is still the third responder after the Kosovo Police and EULEX, and that KFOR now has about 5,200 troops from 33 allied and partner countries. This is the reality Kosovo faces, that it still relies on Western military and political support as its main security guarantee. This does not mean Kosovo should give up its right to make its own decisions. It means that those decisions are more effective when they are coordinated, and clearly explained. The Government Programme 2021-2025 itself said Kosovo's foreign policy should be "predictable." The next government should take this seriously and follow a simple rule for the north and other sensitive issues, with no surprises for allies approach, and no major actions without advance coordination and a clear assessment of the impact on people.

**FOURTH, Kosovo should put establishing contractual relations with NATO at the center of its foreign and security policy.** Those interviewed for this report all support this view. The senior civil servant calls NATO "the most critical security framework" for Kosovo. The former senior security official wants a clearer path to NATO and stronger defence and security cooperation with key partners. The Government Programme also commits Kosovo to building defence capacities to NATO standards and to expanding military diplomacy and participation in international operations under NATO oversight. This now needs to become a more serious agenda. Kosovo should improve how its forces work with NATO, professionalize the Kosovo Security Force (KSF), strengthen procurement and planning, and expand training and education with NATO. It also needs to be realistic that for as long as KFOR is the main security supporter in Kosovo, defence modernization should reassure allies, not raise new concerns about potential escalation, or supply chains. Kosovo has announced plans to build an ammunition factory with Türkiye's state-owned

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69 Read more at: <https://tiranaobservatory.com/2021/03/26/kosovos-next-foreign-policy-a-wish-list/>

70 Read more at: [https://xk.usembassy.gov/st\\_9122025/](https://xk.usembassy.gov/st_9122025/)

defense manufacturer MKE<sup>71</sup>, a drone design lab<sup>72</sup> and to increase defence spending by 60 percent.<sup>73</sup> These steps make sense but they need to follow NATO standards, transparency, and trusted partnerships. The same goes for peacekeeping. Kosovo should contribute more to international security through NATO missions, and the former senior security official interviewed for this report noted that Kosovo needs to transition from being only a consumer of security to also a provider. But this should be done carefully. As Visoka wrote projects like the Board of Peace are appealing because Kosovo is outside major international organizations, but they also need legal clarity, political preparation, and solid force-protection planning.<sup>74</sup>

**Kosovo can improve its relationship with NATO by following two main steps. First, it should work on becoming a more reliable and predictable security partner. Second, it should help create a more stable political environment through progress in normalization of relations with Serbia.** A KCSS report on Kosovo–NATO relations points out that full membership is still blocked because four NATO countries do not recognize Kosovo.<sup>75</sup> However, the report says this does not stop Kosovo from building deeper cooperation. The main idea is for NATO to create a Kosovo-only model (like the EU did with the Stabilization and Association Agreement-SAA) for enhanced cooperation to enable a special partnership track for the country and allow for more training, joint exercises, civil emergency cooperation, military education, interoperability, and building defense institutions, all without requiring non-recognizing countries to change their stance on Kosovo’s statehood. So, instead of waiting for everyone to agree on membership, Kosovo should focus on practical cooperation that makes closer ties with NATO normal, useful, and easier for the Alliance to accept, until the context allows for full membership.

In other words, Kosovo does not need to wait for full consensus on membership to improve its standing and relations with NATO. By advancing a

Kosovo-only cooperation model, it can build a record of practical contributions and interoperability that can already shape how NATO sees Kosovo, as a partner embedded in NATO’s practices, values, and security architecture, ready for deeper ties once the political context allows.

**The NATO Summit planned for Tirana in 2027 gives Kosovo a concrete political opening to seek a step forward in relations with the Alliance, even if full membership remains blocked, presently.** NATO’s official summit calendar includes meetings in Kosovo’s major allies, with summit in Türkiye in 2026, and a NATO summit in Tirana in 2027. Kosovo should not wait passively it can work in parallel to build consensus on membership, as well as push for a Kosovo-specific partnership track, that includes expanded training, exercises, defence institution building, and practical interoperability with NATO. The 2027 summit could therefore be used as a focused diplomatic target and Kosovo government should work with Albania, the United States, Türkiye, and other supportive allies to secure at least a political signal, a tailored cooperation package, or the launch of something special for Kosovo that includes enhanced cooperation.

**One practical potential opening for Kosovo is participation in NATO-accredited Centres of Excellence, where partner countries can join as contributing partners and access doctrine, training, lessons learned, and specialized expertise.** Centres of Excellence are well established institutions that support the Alliance in areas such as hybrid threats, cyber, civil preparedness, and strategic analysis. In parallel, Kosovo should seek regular access to the NATO Defense College and the European Security and Defence College, where institutions from third and candidate countries can apply as Associate Network Partners.

**Kosovo can use cooperation with the European Defence Agency (EDA) as a practical way to join the EU’s defence system, instead of seeing it as something only possible after gaining**

71 Read more at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/defense/turkiye-to-build-ammunition-plant-in-kosovo-as-defense-links-grow>

72 Read more at: <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/kosovo-boost-defence-spending-by-60-plans-drone-ammunition-production-pm-says-2025-03-26/>

73 Read more at: <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/kosovo-boost-defence-spending-by-60-plans-drone-ammunition-production-pm-says-2025-03-26/>

74 Read more at: <https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/kosovo-and-the-board-of-peace>

75 Read more at: [https://qkss.org/images/uploads/files/Exploring\\_options\\_for\\_advancing\\_Kosovo-NATO\\_relations.pdf](https://qkss.org/images/uploads/files/Exploring_options_for_advancing_Kosovo-NATO_relations.pdf)

**membership. The EU is already moving toward more defence cooperation with the Western Balkans.** As recent analysis by EUISS points out, increased defence cooperation between the EU and the Western Balkans is viewed as a key opportunity to bring the region closer to the Union, especially now that defence is a major focus in Europe.<sup>76</sup> This change gives Kosovo a chance to work toward integration, even if it is not yet a full EU or NATO member. Other Western Balkan countries offer useful examples. The EU has already formed security and defence partnerships with Albania and North Macedonia, allowing them to join EU defence projects, work with the EDA, and develop military capabilities together. Analysis from Carnegie Europe suggests that Western Balkan countries should invest in partnerships with EU members to modernize their militaries and integrate gradually into the union's new defense initiatives, showing that integration can happen step by step and through specific projects, not all at once.<sup>77</sup>

For Kosovo, this option might be both necessary and realistic. Practically, Kosovo should take a step-by-step approach. First, it should make sure its defence governance, procurement processes, and ability to work with others match EU standards. Next, Kosovo can join EDA-supported projects or take part as an observer by working with EU member states. Finally, it should connect its defence development such as in areas like cyber security, resilience, and light defence industry to EU priorities.

**The most important domestic security priority is a structured, coordinated process of integrating Kosovo Serbs, particularly in the north, into Kosovo institutions** in a way that (1) improves daily life, (2) reduces coercion space for criminal and foreign actors, and (3) is synchronized with the EU-facilitated normalization dialogue and not framed as unilateral "wins." A strong integration strategy should include a concept document, such as a government white paper, that is firmly based on the principles of the UN Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement (Ahtisaari Plan).<sup>78</sup> This proposal was designed to meet Kosovo Serb needs by promoting decentralization and community rights, giving Serb-majority

municipalities more control and stronger powers. It also set out security arrangements based on a professional, multi-ethnic security sector with unified command and local policing that matches the ethnic makeup of each municipality.

**Kosovo could present a "integration and stabilisation offer" for the north through a concept document covering 2027 to 2030. This document would turn legal and constitutional norms of Kosovo as well as obligations from the normalisation dialogue into specific sequenced measures for implementation in the north.**

The main issue in the north is not only political disagreement, but also ongoing uncertainty about predictability, legitimacy, and coordination. To work well, the concept document should focus on four main areas. First, it should guarantee practical services and rights in line with the Ahtisaari Plan principles, including on education, healthcare and social welfare. Second, the document should include a plan to strengthen trust in policing and security in the north. Legitimacy is crucial, and the Kosovo government should commit to ensuring that a Kosovo Serb becomes the commander of the regional police command for the north and to increasing the number of police officers from the Kosovo Serb community serving in the north. Third, the Kosovo government should establish a working group to draft the statute and the act of establishment of the Association/Community of Serb-majority Municipalities. The document should also provide a clear plan for the return of Kosovo Serbs from the north to their institutions, making it easier, administratively, for them to rejoin without facing social or political backlash. Fourth, the concept document should require close coordination with the EU and key security partners. Major decisions in the north should follow a structured process and avoid unintended escalation or consequences.

**Kosovo should make cyber security, critical infrastructure protection, and hybrid threats a central part of its national security agenda.**

Interviews for this report and research agree on this point. As noted by senior government official

76 Read more at: <https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2026-02/2025-10%20BZ%20Western%20Balkans.pdf>

77 Read more at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/europe/strategic-europe/2025/10/how-the-western-balkans-can-contribute-to-european-defense>

78 United Nations Security Council. *Letter Dated 26 March 2007 from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2007/168)*. New York: United Nations, 2007. <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Kosovo%20S2007%20168.pdf>

interviewed for this report cyber and energy security should be given absolute priority. In this context, another important domestic priority is to carry out a thorough and reliable review of the security sector, especially the police and public safety system. It has been a while since Kosovo implemented a holistic overview of the security sector, and Kosovo's challenges today are about keeping up with professionalism, building trust, improving services, and strengthening its ability to fight organized crime and foreign influence.

**Government of Kosovo must ensure that the KSF transition plan is implemented fully and in a way that fosters credibility with partners, not just capability.** Kosovo should fully prioritize the completion of the Kosovo Security Force transition plan in a way that builds trust with partners and strengthens deterrence. The focus can be a dual track of building capabilities as well as improving governance and meeting NATO standards, making acquisitions transparent, and adding integrity checks to defence planning. Kosovo should also start screening for 'trusted suppliers' in defence and dual-use technologies to lower dependency risks and show strategic maturity. Defence development will only be credible if it is predictable, coordinated, and matches expectations of the EU, especially.

**Kosovo needs to rethink its approach to international police cooperation. The focus should be on closing real security gaps, not just gaining symbolic inclusion.** In practice, cooperation with Europol has grown through SIENA exchanges, joint operations, and having liaison officers. However, it is still limited by the current Working Arrangement, which does not allow personal data to be shared. As the KCSS policy memo notes, "operational cooperation is already happening, but the legal framework has not yet caught up."<sup>79</sup> This gap is important. Without a stronger legal foundation, Kosovo is the only Western Balkan country outside Europol's operational framework. This makes it harder to fight organized crime, trafficking, and cross-border threats. Kosovo should make it a priority to finalize an Operational Agreement by updating its data protection laws to match EU standards and showing it is ready for secure data exchange. **Kosovo should see INTERPOL membership as a long-term**

**goal that supports its overall capabilities.** Not being a member limits real-time cooperation and means relying on slower, bilateral channels, which weakens law enforcement. A strong strategy should mix building alliances with practical steps like improving institutional readiness, expanding police cooperation with other countries, and showing steady contributions to regional security.

**Kosovo's foreign policy should also become more diverse, practical, and focused on results.**

When dealing with EU countries that do not recognize Kosovo, a tailored approach is needed. While gaining recognition should stay as a goal, Kosovo can still build strong working relationships, similar to the "Greek model," through trade, cultural exchanges, and regular engagement, with support from civil society and academic groups. In international organizations, while Kosovo should always keep as an ultimate goal full UN membership it should prioritize at this stage to secure at least an observer status in the UN, as well as work to join UN agencies (i.e., UNESCO) and technical bodies. Since Permanent Observer status for states is granted by the General Assembly, this is potentially achievable for Kosovo. Kosovo should also look to expand its economic and strategic ties, especially with Gulf countries, by encouraging transparent investment, improving energy security, and developing infrastructure. A clear strategy for Asia is also important, focusing on technology, and secure supply chains, especially with partners like Taiwan. Kosovo should see interfaith dialogue and non-majority protection not just as local duties, but as strengths that boost both stability at home and its reputation abroad. In this context Ministry of Foreign Affairs should return the annual conference on interfaith dialogues.

**Other important to do list for Kosovo in terms of foreign and security policy should include developing a clearer strategy for recognition, joining international organizations, and diversifying its diplomacy, because recognition is still political, costly, and necessary.** The interviews for this report note that Kosovo should be more selective and strategic. The senior civil servant points out the need for recognition from the five EU member states that have not yet recognized Kosovo. The senior government official says Kosovo

79 Read more: <https://qkss.org/al/publikimet/policy-memo-why-is-kosovo-still-outside-europols-operational-framework>

should focus on organizations where membership brings real benefits, like the Council of Europe, the EU, and INTERPOL, instead of spreading its limited diplomatic resources too thin. At the same time, Kosovo should expand cooperation beyond its usual partners, as the senior government official suggests, by building stronger ties with countries like Japan, the Baltics, Nordics, and other medium powers, and by improving staffing in key embassies. **Kosovo should create a formal foreign and security policy strategy and make sure all institutions coordinate, because lack of coordination now has real external costs.** This is clear from the interview with the former senior security official,

who warns that poor coordination between the Presidency and the Government has led to mixed messages to international partners, hurt credibility, and even caused problems during EU restrictive measures and the suspension of the Strategic Dialogue with the United States. For a small country like Kosovo with little room for mistakes, lack of coordination quickly becomes a big risk. The next government should work with parliament and adopt a formal foreign and security policy strategy that sets out priorities, the order of actions, coordination rules, and clear communication, that ensure sustainability and predictability beyond political cycles.

## 7. CONCLUSION

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From 2021 to 2025, Kosovo's foreign and security policy was defined by a sort of a paradox, because, while the country's orientation remained clear, its ability to turn that orientation into concrete gains was constrained by internal crises and inability to compromise between political parties on forming institutions, and a rather antagonistic approach to the principle of coordination and consultation with the US and EU on matters related to the normalization dialogue with Serbia and north of the country. The north of Kosovo became the central area where almost all major pressures have converged. Serbia's continued contestation of Kosovo's statehood, security risks, organized crime, interethnic tensions, allied expectations, and Kosovo's international credibility. At the same time, newer threats such as sabotage of critical infrastructure, foreign information manipulation, and hybrid pressure showed that Kosovo's security environment is broader, more complex, and more demanding than before.

The report also shows that Kosovo did not stand still. It made some progress with the visa liberalization entering into force in 2024, full alignment with Western positions on major geopolitical issues, deeper cooperation with NATO and Europol, increased defence investment, and new recognitions. But these gains were often diluted by domestic political gridlock, poor inter-institutional coordination, insufficient planning, and avoidable friction with the EU and the United States. The hard truth is that Kosovo does not lose ground only because of Serbia, Russia, China, or limits of the international system. It also loses ground when it allows crises to overshadow priorities and fails to act as a disciplined, predictable, and well-coordinated partner.

For that reason, the central policy lesson is not about a need for a new foreign and security policy

orientation/approach, but that Kosovo must execute its existing direction more seriously. This means treating the north not only as a law-enforcement issue but as a governance, legitimacy, and inclusion challenge. It means approaching normalization with Serbia as a state-consolidation priority rather than permanent crisis management. It means rebuilding trust with the EU, NATO, and the United States through better coordination and fewer surprises. It also means placing resilience against cyber threats, critical infrastructure, and FIMI much higher on the security agenda. Kosovo's direction is not in question. What is in question is whether it can act with the consistency, maturity, and the discipline needed and required to convert its strong Western alignment into security, stronger statehood, and deeper international integration.

This matters more in the current global context, marked by unpredictability, fractured multipolarity, and blurred lines. For a country like Kosovo, alignment with the West remains the only serious geopolitical anchor. However, it is no longer always clear what that alignment requires in practice when the United States, and the EU do not always interpret the same situation the same way. The controversy around Kosovo's decision to join President Trump's "Board of Peace" illustrates this well. For Kosovo, the move could be seen as a demonstration of closeness to the West and Washington.<sup>80</sup> Yet most of the EU member states refused the invitation to be part of this initiative. This shows that in a less coherent West, and so symbolic gestures of loyalty can produce mixed effects. For Kosovo, the implication may be that foreign and security policy must now be more disciplined, carefully sequenced, and politically calibrated. Being pro-Western is no longer only about taking the right side but also about navigating competing expectations within the West itself.

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80 Read more at: <https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/kosovo-and-the-board-of-peace>

## **KOSOVO FOREIGN AND SECURITY CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES**

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## About KCSS

Established in April 2008, the Kosovar Centre 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.

## About KAS

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung is a German political foundation that developed from the Society for Christian Democratic Educational Work that was founded back in 1955. Since 1964, it has borne the name of the first Federal Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer. We feel bound to Adenauer's political memory and legacy; his principles serve as our guidelines, mission, and commitment. We are therefore politically affiliated with the Christian Democratic Union of Germany but are financially and organisationally independent.

The promotion of liberal democracy and a social market economy, of peace and freedom, transatlantic relations, and European unification – this is what the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung stands for.

Although the work in Kosovo started much earlier through various projects, KAS was formally registered in Pristina in June 2007. Since then, KAS has focused on political education, civic education and strengthening of civil society, European integration, support of inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue, promotion of free market economy and other topics, which together with our local and international partners, we have addressed through seminars, conferences, discussions and numerous publications.



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