



OPINIONS:

WHY IS GOVERNMENT
TRANSPARENCY AND

ACCOUNTABILITY CRUCIAL IN
THE KOSOVO-SERBIA DIALOGUE
PROCESS?



OPINIONS:

Why Is Government Transparency and Accountability Crucial in the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue Process?

Published by:



Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS)

Authors:

Ramadan **Ilazi**

Gëzim **Visoka**

Isak **Vorgučić**

Reviewer:

Jeta **Loshaj**

These op-eds are part of a project supported by NED (National Endowment for Democracy), titled "Increasing Government Transparency and Accountability in Interethnic Dialogue," and implemented by KCSS. The authors wrote the specific op-eds within their own capacities. As such, the views represented in these op-eds do not necessarily represent the views of KCSS or NED.

Supported by:



Design and layout by:

Brand Vision Shpk

Contact: +383 45 559 923

Email: brandvision.rks@gmail.com

© The views expressed in this publication are those of the author. Intellectual property rights are protected by Law No.08.L-205 on Copyright and Related Rights. Publishing rights are reserved by the Kosovar Center for Security Studies. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in any storage system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Table of Contents

RAMADAN ILAZI

4-6

Why does the role of civil society matter for the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia?

GËZIM VISOKA

7-8

Why Transparency Matters in the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue, and How to Achieve it?

ISAK VORGUČIĆ

9-10

The Case for Openness in the Kosovo-Serbia Normalization Dialogue



Written by:
Ramadan Ilazi

Serves as the Head of Research at the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS). Ramadan holds a PhD in Politics and International Relations from the Dublin City University (DCU), Ireland.

INTRODUCTION

Why does the role of civil society matter for the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia?

The EU-facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia started with the promise of promoting both normalization of relations between two countries and regional stability in the Western Balkans. Over a decade later, while the process has certainly contributed in both directions it is far from any sort of a conclusion. One could argue that relations between Kosovo and Serbia have not been moving towards normalization, but have experienced deterioration, and the EU seems to have lost its grip on the process. The op-eds by Dr Gëzim Visoka and Isak Vorgučić offer an important reflection on the limitations of the current approach of the normalization dialogue and

outline what must change. Building on their insights, and in accordance with EU's own commitments outlined in its Concept on Peace Mediation from 2020, this introduction argues for a reset of the dialogue process around three pillars: first, that transparency is essential for legitimacy; second, that civil society must reclaim its independent role as a guardian of minority rights, and third, that sustainable peace depends on rejecting populist nationalism and fostering genuine social reconciliation. These are not abstract ideals, they are concrete commitments the EU has already endorsed.

FIRST,

Transparency should not be optional.

One of the core problems in the Kosovo–Serbia dialogue has been the near-total absence of transparency. As Visoka argues, the failure to keep the public informed, engaged, or meaningfully consulted has resulted in low trust, selective interpretations of agreements, and ultimately, a legitimacy deficit. Vorgučić’s perspective echoes this concern from within the Kosovo Serb community, where many are left uncertain about the aims and terms of the process. This stands in stark contrast to the EU’s own normative commitments. The Concept on EU Peace Mediation adopted in 2020 highlights transparency, inclusivity, and accountability as fundamental to effective and legitimate mediation. It states that “the EU should consistently engage on the basis of its foundational values... including respect for democracy, the rule of law, and human rights” and that success should be judged not only by outcomes but by the “strengthening of dialogue infrastructures” and “inclusive process design.” Yet in practice, the Kosovo–Serbia dialogue has often ignored these very principles. National parliaments, municipal institutions, and civil society actors are often excluded from the process, and even the public is treated as a passive audience. If the EU wants to uphold its credibility as a value-based actor, it must align its mediation practices in the Western Balkans with its own norms and standards. However, for EU to promote inclusivity and transparency of the normalization dialogue it requires it has suitable partners for such an approach in Kosovo and Serbia, and currently it does not. There have also been some positive signs from the EU lately, on increasing consultations with civil society. High Representative Kallas visit this May to Serbia and Kosovo included meetings with civil society.

SECONDLY,

Civil society must be more assertive in its agency to promote minority rights, especially when it is difficult.

Both op-eds draw attention to the erosion of civil society’s role in fostering peace and accountability. Visoka argues that existing civil society-led peace initiatives are fragmented, short-term, and often disconnected from structural mechanisms of dialogue and prevention. Vorgučić goes further, warning that parts of Kosovo’s civil society have become echo chambers of the government, hesitant to challenge nationalist narratives or defend the rights of vulnerable groups. In the recent period, there have been some genuine attempts from civil society for a more coordinated and assertive role, such as through Kosovo Civic Alternative (KCA). This multiethnic civil society group supports the normalization dialogue and has publicly reacted on a few occasions to allegations of violations of the rights of Kosovo Serbs. Also, the Kosovo Peace and Democracy Summit (KPDS) has been jointly organized by Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs as a platform for dialogue and cooperation not only between civil society in the region. For the EU as well, civil society is central to mediation policy or all-of-society approach. The EU Concept emphasizes the role of civil society as a “partner” in sustaining peace, building bridges, and promoting inclusivity, particularly for marginalized and minority groups. But inclusivity is not just about who sits at the table, it is also about who civil society chooses to represent and protect when the dominant discourse becomes exclusionary. As Vorgučić reminds us, civic courage is unpopular but necessary. Civil society in Kosovo should be bold in standing up even when it means opposing prevailing narratives.

THIRD,

In order for normalization dialogue to succeed we need to dismantle nationalist populism.

The EU's facilitation efforts have often reduced normalization to a technocratic exercise, focused on documents, implementation matrices, and "constructive ambiguity." However, as both op-eds make clear, the real barrier to normalization is political, which means that as long as the Serbian government rejects Kosovo's right to exist as a state, hopes for sustainable normalization of relations between the two countries will remain elusive. Additionally, the entrenchment of nationalist-populist leaderships who treat compromise as betrayal and dissent as treason is not conducive to normalization dialogue of relations between Kosovo and Serbia. In this environment, as Vorgučić warns, even basic acts of interethnic understanding are stigmatized, while Visoka highlights how the elite-level stalemate sabotages interethnic dialogue on the ground. Here too, the EU's own Concept offers important reference. It calls for mediation to be "inclusive of peace constituencies" and to address "root causes of conflict." It also emphasizes that mediation should not reinforce exclusion, but rather "build trust between communities" and "reconstitute social contracts." Yet in Kosovo

and Serbia, the current process, especially from the government, does the opposite, as it sidelines the very constituencies that can build peace from below. As a matter of fact, while relations at the political level and between the two states seem not so normal, civil society in both countries is making an effort to facilitate greater exchange and dialogue between communities at the grassroots level. If normalization is to be more than a façade, it must be rooted in a goal of societal transformation, not just elite consent. But this, first, requires that at least the elites have some level of normalization of relations. In other words, without the success of the normalization dialogue at the state level, efforts of societal reconciliation or transformation of how we see each other will be illusive. What Visoka and Vorgučić are telling us is that this means creating political space for moderate voices, depoliticizing ethnicity, and investing in practices and efforts that reflect Kosovo's multiethnic reality.

The European Union has the tools, the normative framework, and the leverage to support a credible and sustainable normalization dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. But it must practice what it preaches. The current model of dialogue often contradicts EU's own principles by sidelining transparency, and sometimes enabling nationalist populism. To reset the process, the EU and the parties must introduce to the process a dialogue around citizens as well, not just negotiators.

Conclusion

In this piece, I have sought to synthesize the arguments presented in the op-eds by Dr. Gëzim Visoka and Mr. Vorgučić, while also offering a personal reflection. From my perspective, the transparency and accountability of the government regarding the normalization dialogue have significantly declined in recent years. Government officials appear more inclined to participate in civil society events organized by think tanks from EU member states, while often disregarding invitations from local organizations in Prishtina that focus on the dialogue.

Several good practices that once contributed to transparency—such as regular reporting to the Kosovo Assembly on the progress of the dialogue, the publication of annual and periodic updates, and the issuance of timely press releases before and after

meetings—have largely been abandoned. This trend runs counter to the stated commitments of political parties to openness and democratic oversight.

Interestingly, public perception does not fully align with these concerns, as surveys suggest. A [recent study by NGO CASA](#) indicates that 44% of Kosovo Albanians believe the government has provided sufficient information about the dialogue, while another 33% express some satisfaction with transparency but believe more is needed. This suggests a noticeable gap between how civil society actors perceive the state of openness in the normalization process and how the public views it. As a result, the government may feel less public pressure to improve its communication and accountability around the dialogue.



Written by:
Dr. Gëzim Visoka

Is Associate Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies at Dublin City University in Ireland, and currently is a member of KCSS's Advisory Board.

Why Transparency Matters in the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue, and How to Achieve it?

The dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, facilitated by the European Union, remains a key element in efforts to sustain ethnic peace in Kosovo, normalise interstate relations, and preserve regional stability. However, one significant flaw in this dialogue is the lack of mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability. Although it is often suggested that the public's role in peace negotiations can be destructive, it is essential to maintain a degree of public transparency regarding the process and potential outcomes. The EU's approach has predominantly focused on top-down and national-level peace-making involving government representatives and experts from both countries. This has transpired far from the location where normalisation should occur. Under such conditions, transparency would serve as a mechanism to compensate for the displacement of peace talks, thus providing affected communities with much-needed information and a sense of ownership over the process. Notably, broader public consultation may slow the process down, but it ensures that the general interest is upheld and that any agreement reached enjoys public support, which is essential for later implementation and sustainability. Yet, the EU and the parties have decided to offer minimal information to citizens regarding the process and outcomes of this significant political undertaking.

Subsequently, the lack of clear transparency mechanisms has led to counterproductive dynamics between Kosovo and Serbia, where each party has interpreted the dialogue differently and has been able to present the agreements to their domestic audiences selectively. As a result of this top-down approach, the EU and the two respective governments have fallen short of promoting transparency about the dialogue process, which in turn has led to low public trust and support. Moreover, the exclusion of parliaments and elected representatives, both at the national and local levels, in Kosovo and Serbia has created a semi-authoritarian peace process concentrated in the hands of the executive branches of the state, undermining accountability, moderation, and necessary checks and balances. Similarly, superficial consultation with civil society groups has negatively affected the popularity of the process and the subsequent implementation of the technical and political agreements in Kosovo.

The decade-long and high-level dialogue for the normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia under the EU's auspices appears to have negatively impacted the meaning and space for internal dialogue among ethnic groups in Kosovo, especially between the Government of Kosovo and the Serb community. While the Kosovo-Serbia

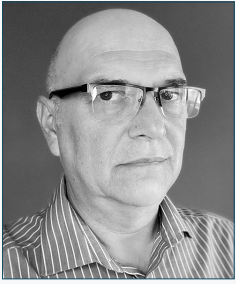
dialogue was initially intended to resolve technical and administrative issues affecting the everyday lives of people, it has evolved into a political battle between the two governments, stalling over the question of recognising Kosovo's jurisdiction, authority, and sovereignty in the Serb-majority municipalities of Kosovo. In turn, the stalled interstate dialogue process is holding hostage the much-needed local inter-ethnic dialogue in Kosovo and is delaying the resolution of many pressing local issues. The absence of a comprehensive peace agreement between Kosovo and Serbia has undermined the local dynamics of peace and opened up space for counter-peace forces to exploit the unresolved dispute, thereby deepening insecurity, undermining order, and engineering the conditions for further tensions. Under the condition of ambiguous peace, the ordinary minor offences, criminal conduct, and inter-personal conflicts are labelled as ethnically motivated crimes and thus amplified and turned into fuel for further ethnic division in Kosovo.

In the absence of an official peace agreement and disrupted peace talks between Kosovo and Serbia, civil society groups in Kosovo have sought to address the legacies of the conflict and manage ethnic relations by providing a platform for dialogue and reconciliation. The focus of international and local peacebuilding and conflict mediation initiatives has been on building bridges across ethnically divided communities and addressing issues of trust, narratives, and attitudes towards one another. While the EU and the Kosovo Government have attempted to consult with civil society on a broad range of roles, there is little evidence of openness to civil society solutions. The role of civil society in the Kosovo–Serbia dialogue has primarily been one of advocating for transparency and inclusion, and they have served as an alternative platform for preventing ethnic tensions at the community level. While there are many NGOs claiming to work for peacebuilding in Kosovo, they have limited capacity to serve as community-based mechanisms that can mitigate political and ethnic tensions and challenge the warmongering narratives propagated at the community level, as well as by the media and national political elites. The existing methods for coordinating joint responses and reactions to ethnic incidents or inflammatory discourse are largely informal and rely on personal networks among civil society activists. They are mostly project-based, ad hoc, and reactive, varying from one case to another, and most importantly, lack a vision for sustainable

engagement in preventing, forecasting, and mitigating future crises. Moreover, the work of inter-ethnic and peace NGOs in Kosovo and Serbia is influenced by the dynamics of the Kosovo–Serbia dialogue. These organisations rely on the interstate peace process to promote local peacebuilding, rather than influence the process from the bottom up.

While there is little interest on the side of the EU and the parties to change the format of the dialogue, or at least they are locked into competing and incompatible agendas, the only avenue to develop a more inclusive, transparent, and accountable approach to interethnic dialogue is to try to improve the existing infrastructure for peace in Kosovo. Peace infrastructures entail local and national efforts, tools, capacities, and institutional mechanisms for conflict prevention, mitigation of situational threats, and building pro-peace relations, structures, and cultures that are central for building sustainable and resilient peace. Despite the absence of permanent peace and complete normalisation of relations with Serbia, Kosovo, under international guidance, has developed a comprehensive and multi-layered institutional and civil society-based infrastructure for managing inter-ethnic relations and promoting peace. Civil society and the Government of Kosovo can take unilateral measures and establish a national peace council or commission, or they can explore the possibility of mobilising existing minority protection mechanisms at the local and national levels, developed as part of the Ahtisaari Plan, to serve as consultative platforms for dialogue and peace in Kosovo. Another option is the creation of a new civil-society-based infrastructure for peace, which would take the shape of a national body serving as an advocacy, coordination, and documentation centre for existing organisations, networks, and activists working on peacebuilding in Kosovo. Such a mechanism could be a promoter of the peace culture in Kosovo, as well as a monitor more closely the EU-facilitated dialogue.

In conclusion, although the formal dialogue process remains stagnant and narrowly focused, meaningful progress towards interethnic reconciliation in Kosovo can still be achieved by enhancing local peace infrastructures. By strengthening and institutionalising existing civil society initiatives and minority protection mechanisms, Kosovo can promote inclusive dialogue, increase public trust, and create a more resilient foundation for long-term peace, irrespective of the limitations of the broader political negotiations with Serbia.



Written by:
Isak Vorgučić

Is director of Radio Kim in Caglavica, Kosovo, since its foundation in 2000. He has a background in journalistic, theological and military education.

The Case for Openness in the Kosovo–Serbia Normalization Dialogue

Peoples of Kosovo and Serbia, affected by the negotiations process, still do not understand many things connected to the dialogue, at least not the crucial ones. This is not an outcome of the lack of media campaign and information or bad reporting, but the lack of transparency of the process led by two opposed sides and mediated by the third. That dialogue attitude is not usual elsewhere in the world, under similar circumstances.

There is a need by the parties in dialogue to be flexible, listen to and understand the other side, having at the same time a heavy burden to represent the majority's stance, and express accountability, especially if we are talking about the Balkans. Young democracies here are still making their path away from the one-party system, which has been deeply rooted in the place for a long time. Although wars are far behind us, we are still occupied with the same war narratives and fears, due to a lack of effective war crimes persecutions and reconciliation movements.

Such notion is the main contributor to the prolonged interethnic tensions in Kosovo but is also widely supported by the mainstream political narratives. These are unfortunately still widely present in the media, especially public broadcasters and small but influential web-portals and social media groups. There is a short path between hate speech on media or Facebook, and real arguments and hostilities between people.

We are whininess of more and more cases of classifying and labelling political opponents and dissenters as "traitors" or those "working for the enemy". Normalization will not come by itself. If basic communication between the nations is disapproved, if expressing understanding with needs of "the other" is condemned, than we are still far from normalizing relations between Albanians and Serbs, or even within each of the two communities.

It should also be said that Kosovo Serbs, who are born and live here for generations cannot "integrate" to Kosovo. They adapted to the new circumstances, took Kosovo identity cards, passports, license plates, participated in institutions at the local and central level. Kosovo Constitution guarantees Serbian language, dual citizenship, civil and human rights, so we should finally say that the continuous violation of all of the above by the institutions cannot be justified by "non-integration".

During the ninety-nineties, many local and international civil rights organizations and activists took part in raising awareness about Serbian regime oppression against Kosovo Albanians. Particularly towards the end of the decade there were numerous websites pointing out human rights violations and war atrocities in Kosovo. There were, and still are, several prominent individuals, movements and organizations from Belgrade that loudly stood, and worked hard against the tyranny at the time. What we lack now, under

much better conditions than three decades ago, and in favor of a much smaller affected community, which is Kosovo Serbs, but also Roma and others, is decisive action by Pristina civil society.

Apart from lacking that kind of active approach of civil society towards affected citizens, we even witness their activities that follow the government narrative, which paradoxically negates their prefix – nongovernmental organizations. Their moving away from the government stance, and promoting civil rights of the citizens, would play a huge role in shaping the relations towards Kosovo's affected minority communities, hence the dialogue. However, that would make them highly unpopular in the country, but do you think that individuals and organizations from Belgrade, talking about ninety-nineties Albanian suffering in Kosovo are popular in Serbia?

Governments represent the majority's political and economic views of the country, and their voice in relation to solving domestic problems and international relationships. In undeveloped democracies, if government leaders go further in fulfilling the "voice of the people", that governing style is usually referred to as "the populism". Unfortunately, both actual governments involved in the dialogue process are deeply populist. That style of governing showed success in both countries, which have political leaderships willing to rule, not to solve the problems, which are economic problems in essence.

People living at the edge of existence should turn against such introvert rulers and choose the democratic governments that will bring back countries to the path of European integrations. Even though Kosovo people are per-se inclined to the EU, it is the government's duty to fulfil their obligations and indeed listen to the advises of the international partners.

At the end, there is a question why do Kosovo need to have a dialogue with Serbia at all? Self-determination movement in Kosovo built their party image around rejection of the very idea of dialog. "No negotiations" (Alb: Jo negociata) was major graffiti all over Kosovo written by the party activists in order to express their stance on the dialogue with Belgrade.

In my opinion, the international community imposed the dialogue to solve Kosovo Serbs position under the "new reality". Kosovo didn't want that dialogue, as Belgrade didn't want the bombing, but international community imposed it then to prevent the extinction of Kosovo Albanians. Country got free from Serbian regime oppression, declared independence, and gradually got all the attributes. Well, except functional multi-ethnicity, so that is why the international community now insists on dialogue, to make Kosovo embrace the 5-6% large community, and hopefully prevent the extinction of Kosovo Serbs.

OPINIONS:

Why Is Government Transparency and Accountability Crucial in the Kosovo–Serbia Dialogue Process?

Published by:

Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS)



These op-eds are part of a project supported by NED (National Endowment for Democracy), titled "Increasing Government Transparency and Accountability in Interethnic Dialogue," and implemented by KCSS. The authors wrote the specific op-eds within their own capacities. As such, the views represented in these op-eds do not necessarily represent the views of KCSS or NED.

Supported by:



Design and layout by:

Brand Vision Shpk

Kontakti: +383 45 559 923

Email: brandvision.rks@gmail.com

Katalogimi në botim – (CIP)
Biblioteka Kombëtare e Kosovës "Pjetër Bogdani"

321.01(496.51:497.11)(047)

Ilazi, Ramadan

Op-Eds : why is government transparency and accountability crucial in the Kosovo–Serbia dialogue process? /
Ramadan Ilazi, Gëzim Visoka, Isak Vorgučić. – Prishtinë : QKSS, 2025. – 9 f. ; 26 cm.

1. Visoka, Gëzim 2. Vorgučić, Isak

ISBN 978-9951-842-46-4



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.



kcss.org
securitybarometer.kcss.org



[@KCSSOKCSS](https://www.instagram.com/kcssokcss)

[#KCSSOKCSS](https://www.facebook.com/kcssokcss)

ISBN 978-9951-842-46-4



9 789951 842464