

Reinventing Engagement Through Affirmative Citizen Consultations (REACH)

National publication

CITIZENS SHAPING KOSOVO'S FUTURE: RULE OF LAW, EU INTEGRATION, AND ENVIRONMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The European project Reinventing Engagement through Affirmative Citizen Consultations (REACH) is an initiative that promotes a culture of democracy through meaningful citizen participation in the debate on the most important European policy issues. In a context of growing distrust in many societies and limited opportunities for public participation, REACH is an initiative that allows citizens to participate in inclusive debates on subjects that directly impact their daily lives and their future. The three cross-cutting themes of the project: the rule of law, the environment and EU integration, are in constant debate, and with this action, citizens are given the opportunity to reflect, participate and offer concrete proposals to decision-makers, at both national and European level. The project is carried out between July 2024 and December 2025 and is co-funded by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). It is implemented by a consortium of eight organizations: European Policy Centre (CEP) as coordinator, European Policy Centre (EPC, Brussels), Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS), Foreign Policy Initiative BH (FPI BH), Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD), Notre Europe Institut Jacques Delors (NE IJD), Association for Civil Society Development SMART, and the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP).

Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) has led the implementation of REACH in Kosovo through a series of citizen consultations. In these, citizens were invited to deliberate on the three main focus areas of REACH alongside subject-matter experts to reflect on the most pressing issues in governance and development, producing specific policy recommendations that could be of use to policymakers. This exercise was done through two local consultations, one in Prishtina and another in Gjakova, and through a national consultation in Prishtina, where the topics and the policy recommendations of the local consultations were combined and summarised into 10 concrete policy proposals. This consultative process gathered in total 99 citizens took part, 35 experts and 64 citizens. In all three consultations, Kosovar citizens from all walks of life, including young people, students, professionals, activists and civil society representatives, had the opportunity to deliberate on the issues of the rule of law, EU integration, and the environment, in the company of experts in the field of rule of law and judicial reform, EU integration, and environmental governance and sustainability. In this way, the process of developing policy recommendations ensured both technical expertise and valuable citizen input.

Focusing on the rule of law, EU integration, and the environment was of great importance to Kosovo.¹ In the three consultations conducted, it was a recurrent theme, and it was of major concern to all citizens that rule of law be established in Kosovo, with citizens from Prishtina voicing their main concern in relation to the rule of law by stating “justice is often delayed to the point where it no longer feels like justice at all”. Furthermore, the citizens from Gjakova underlined that “judicial independence is critical, without it trust in any reform will remain fragile.” In the same manner, the EU integration of Kosovo was treated as a strategic choice, but also as a process that may have its challenges, with the citizens emphasizing their optimism in the prospect of EU membership, but also the scepticism they had with regards to whether the institutions are ready to take up the challenge and reform as needed. Environmental issues have been at the forefront of public discussion both in Prishtina and Gjakova, and this was also reflected in the national consultation, where Kosovar citizens, and especially young environmental activists, noted their pressing concerns about air and water quality, solid waste management, and the need to transition to renewable energy. As underlined by one young environmental activist in Kosovo, “the environment cannot be treated as a secondary issue, it is about our health and our future.”

The process of citizen consultations implemented under REACH has been of value to Kosovo not only for the valuable policy recommendations that came as a result, but also for the fact that citizens were given a platform to become active contributors to the debates on national priorities. In a context where trust in the institutions is rather low, opening up a

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ opinion on Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

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space for citizens to deliberate in an organized, inclusive and constructive manner, with both other citizens, and experts and civil society representatives, had a transparent and collaborative element that helped create trust, understanding, and a sense of shared responsibility for the reforms and progress. This process also had an impact in strengthening civic awareness, and the value of citizens' participation, and showed that policy making can be done in a better, more informed manner, when citizens' input is taken into account. REACH in Kosovo has connected local citizen experience and national level deliberation and shown that citizens can and do have the willingness and capacity to come up with concrete and meaningful recommendations, which help address structural problems, while keeping in mind Kosovo's European perspective.

FROM LOCAL TO NATIONAL CONSULTATIONS – KEY INSIGHTS

The Kosovo REACH component was conducted in a sequence of two local consultations and a national consultation, all with a Citizens Assembly approach and format. Citizens were carefully selected, as diverse as possible in gender, youth representation, and field of occupation, with invitations extended through outreach to CSOs, universities, community organisations, and other networks. For the Kosovo REACH process, experts were present not to observe, but to offer technical expertise and context, while at the same time allowing citizens full agency over what conclusions or proposals to make. REACH was designed to be people-centred. Citizens spoke not as representatives of certain demographics or interests, but simply as Kosovo citizens who were willing to engage with their peers from different backgrounds in an open, constructive, and focused manner.

The local consultations in Prishtina and Gjakova were designed to serve as entry points into the broader process. The citizens were free to speak to problems they encountered or challenges they saw in their daily lives, while the national consultation in Prishtina was meant to serve as a synthesis of the local consultations and distil ten citizen-generated priorities. The main difference between the local and the national consultation was therefore less a matter of scale, but rather a difference in scope. The local consultations were aimed at opening space for inclusive deliberation, while the national event was intended to help structure and focus that deliberation into concrete proposals. At the national consultation, the role of experts was more pronounced, with experts assisting participants in refining their proposals and ensuring their feasibility, but ownership of final priorities remained with the citizens.

FROM PRISTINA TO GJAKOVA, LOCAL CITIZEN CONSULTATION REVEALED KEY CONCERNS IN KOSOVO

The first consultation in Prishtina was a diverse group of citizens that included students, young professionals, and representatives of civil society organisations. **Held in January, 2025, the event gathered 37 participants.** The first topic that arose was the justice system. They explicitly cited corruption in policing and prosecutorial institutions as a critical barrier that erodes trust and impedes the prosecution of criminal activity. Many of the citizens present at the meeting spoke about their personal frustrations with the justice system, describing corruption, political pressure in judicial appointments, and long trial delays. One participant captured the general sense of the group when they stated that “justice delayed is justice denied”. Proposed remedies included merit-based hiring and increased judicial accountability through internal and external audits, a specialized corruption prosecutor, and public reporting. The topic then shifted to Kosovo's European path. While participants recognised EU membership as a strategic goal for the country, many of them were sceptical about the timeline and the current level of reform. Citizens demanded better communication from institutions, civic education, and information, while they also felt that reforms should be communicated as Kosovo's priorities and not as external obligations. The topic of environment was also a major source of concern for citizens. Citizens spoke about Prishtina's polluted air and health risks that this causes to all inhabitants, including the younger generations. Participants spoke about unregulated landfills and the lack of systematic recycling. One of the participants stated that “we talk about Europe, but our children cannot breathe clean air”. One of the striking insights from the first Prishtina consultation was that citizens

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viewed all three themes of REACH as highly connected. Weak rule of law was seen as having a direct effect on the enforcement of environmental laws and standards, while the EU path was the context in which both governance and environment are situated.

The second consultation in Gjakova, **held in February 2025, gathered 26 participants** and more in-depth discussion. Participants again underscored corruption and political interference as key obstacles to judicial independence, pointing to weak enforcement of anti-corruption laws as a persistent gap. Also the problem of accessibility of justice for marginalised groups was an issue that was discussed at greater length. Citizens from rural areas described financial and other obstacles to accessing justice, while others noted that enforcement of court decisions is often not possible, resulting in the exclusion of certain groups. One participant stated that “rights written on paper mean nothing if people cannot access them”. On the topic of EU integration, participants expressed both hope and frustration. Citizens were optimistic about the educational and mobility opportunities provided by European programs such as Erasmus+ and others, but they were worried about Kosovo–Serbia dialogue and its possible impact on Kosovo’s accession to the EU. Opinions on that matter differed, with some participants stating that Kosovo was held hostage to external politics while others more readily accepted the need for normalisation. Despite some differences, there was agreement that government communication with citizens should be much improved. Environmental challenges were discussed with a different emphasis than in Prishtina. While pollution was more prevalent in the discussion in the capital, citizens in Gjakova were more concerned about landfills and illegal waste dumping, as well as deforestation. They criticised the lack of a systematic recycling infrastructure and weak enforcement of laws on the environment, calling for a national recycling strategy and stricter fines against illegal logging, as well as citizen initiatives such as reforestation. Across all themes, participants in Gjakova agreed that Kosovo’s main challenge is not the lack of laws but rather their implementation.

NATIONAL CONSULTATION IN PRISTINA UNEARTHING KEY CITIZENS’ RECOMMENDATIONS

The national consultation in Prishtina **held in May 2025, brought together 36 participants, 14 citizens and 22 experts**. Unlike the local consultations, which were more open and exploratory, the national consultation focused on the formulation of recommendations. Citizens and experts were divided into three thematic groups: rule of law, EU integration, and the environment, and tasked with working together to develop concrete policy measures. The group focused on the rule of law selected three main recommendations: **depoliticization of judicial appointments, reduction of court backlog and case duration, and the introduction of strong oversight**. The participants of this group emphasized the need for trust in the justice system and that without judicial credibility, any reform effort in other sectors would have a limited impact. The group on **EU integration** recommended **structured civic education and information campaigns**. Citizens expressed their frustration that they felt reforms were not being done for them, but rather for Brussels. A better understanding of EU integration was also connected to the provision of concrete improvements in people’s lives. Citizens called for institutional communication not only to be more frequent, but also structured and to take place through civic education in schools and municipalities. The group working on the **environment** submitted some of the more ambitious proposals. Recommendations in this area included the **gradual transition from coal, investment in green energy, the establishment of a national recycling program, and wastewater treatment facilities**. Citizens also called for stricter penalties for illegal logging and for environmental education in schools. A key difference between the local and national consultations was the process of deliberation around proposals. The national consultation involved participants in a process of discussion, disagreement, and eventually reaching a consensus around each of the recommendations. The discussions were sometimes quite heated, but through that process, the participants were able to make sure that the proposals submitted for the final document were both ambitious and achievable.

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Taken as a whole, the REACH consultations in Kosovo produced several cross-cutting insights. Citizens repeatedly identified the rule of law as a prerequisite for progress in other areas. This view is based on the general understanding that without independent, capable, and accountable institutions, corruption is likely to persist, environmental laws will not be enforced, and the EU accession process will lose credibility and legitimacy. At the same time, the European path was seen as a framework for change with the capacity to accelerate domestic reform and provide incentives for improved governance. Citizens regarded the environment as an urgent priority and not a distant, secondary, or abstract concern. They viewed environmental degradation as a direct source of health risk, an economic cost, and a violation of intergenerational justice. All three REACH themes were seen as inextricably linked. Environmental protection for instance, was only possible when citizens and institutions trust that environmental laws are enforced and violators are punished. EU integration is seen as a way of providing resources, frameworks, and monitoring of both governance and environmental issues. The consultations also produced a number of trade-offs and synergies in the minds of the citizens. While some participants noted that environmental reform may have short-term costs, like increased energy prices or limitations on some industries, they saw these as investments in a healthier, cleaner, and more sustainable future. Other citizens noted the synergies between the three themes, saying that without rule of law reform, economic development and environmental protection could not be fair and equitable, while the EU process, with conditionality and benchmarks, could serve as a way of ensuring that progress will be made in both these areas.

Finally, an important but perhaps less visible impact of the Kosovo REACH component is the effect that it had on citizens' empowerment. Citizens repeatedly noted in the different consultation groups that being heard and having the opportunity to deliberate in a structured, respectful manner is invaluable. "We are used to hearing policies announced to us, not shaped with us," was a common phrase among the participants. The process of REACH consultation in Kosovo has increased transparency and has created expectations of citizens' participation in policy design. It also created civic awareness, particularly among youth, and has shown them that their opinion matters and is relevant for the future of the country. REACH in Kosovo has shown that citizens are not only aware of problems, but they are eager to provide pragmatic solutions. From Prishtina to Gjakova, and back to Prishtina, the citizens took their personal experiences and connected them with the national priorities and contributed to the articulation of a more coherent vision for Kosovo. The consultations bridged the gap between institutions and communities, enriched public debate, and showed that deliberative democracy can function when citizens and experts can engage as equals. The linkage of local voices to national policymaking through REACH Kosovo, has left more than ten recommendations. It has reinforced the belief that Kosovo's democratic and European future can only be built with citizens at the table.

PRESENTING TEN POLICY PROPOSALS

At the end of the national consultation in Kosovo, the ten policy proposals that had been selected and produced by citizens during the debates were adopted. This is done with the support of experts who helped shape, reformulate and specify the proposals to make them viable. The recommendations are a compromise between the urgency of short-term changes and more ambitious long-term demands, and a reflection of how the challenges in the area of the rule of law, EU integration and the environment are intertwined. The participants in the process have prioritised the recommendations in the final outcome according to the strength of the support and the potential impact of each proposal, in a way that captures the group consensus while being mindful of the institutional realities in the country.

#	Policy Proposal	Addressed To	Area
1	A comprehensive plan for environmental infrastructure aligned with EU standards	Ministry of Environment	Environment

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2	Concrete projects for sewage networks and sustainable drinking water access	Ministry of Environment, National Audit Office, local municipalities	Environment
3	A national public communication strategy on EU integration	Prime Minister's Office	EU integration
4	A harmonised criminal and administrative code	Ministry of Justice, Kosovo Judicial Council	Rule of law
5	Incentive schemes and clarification programs for businesses meeting environmental standards	Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Environment	Environment
6	Mandatory training for public officials on integrity and good governance	Ministry of Public Administration, Civil Service Agency	Rule of law
7	Provision of translators in multi-ethnic courts	Ministry of Justice, Kosovo Judicial Council	Rule of law
8	Institutionalised participation of marginalised groups in policymaking	Ministry of Local Government	Rule of law
9	Strengthening the Kosovo Judicial Council's monitoring system	Kosovo Judicial Council	Rule of law
10	Digital platforms for transparent reform monitoring	Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Information	EU integration

1. A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR ENVIRONMENTAL INFRASTRUCTURE ALIGNED WITH EU STANDARDS

Drafting and implementing a comprehensive national plan for environmental infrastructure was the most strongly supported recommendation from the national consultation. Citizens emphasised that piecemeal projects and cosmetic interventions were not enough to address Kosovo's environmental problems, and pointed to the absence of wastewater treatment, the mismanagement of landfills, and unsafe levels of air pollution as proof of systemic failures. A comprehensive national plan could provide strategic guidance, help coordinate between ministries, and help connect reforms to the EU Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. Consultation participants acknowledged that this would take time, donor support and significant financial resources, but consensus was that only an integrated and comprehensive approach could address the root causes of environmental problems. North Macedonia's National Environmental Action Plan was highlighted as a model for effectively using donor coordination and conditionality to align external support with domestic priorities and achieve measurable results. Strengths of this proposal lie in vision; a clear weakness lies in susceptibility to political turnover. Risk factors also include institutional capacity: the Ministry of Environment is still significantly underfunded and many municipalities have limited or no expertise in this area. However, participants were clear that inaction is more costly in the long run; without a plan, fragmented measures will continue to fail to reduce pollution or improve public health.

2. CONCRETE PROJECTS FOR SEWAGE NETWORKS AND SUSTAINABLE DRINKING WATER ACCESS

Related to the foregoing was the citizens' proposal to engage in the design of concrete projects for sewage networks and sustainable access to drinking water. This was presented as an issue of basic dignity, a very material preoccupation on a

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daily basis, particularly in rural areas. Participants in the group recounted both the practice of direct discharge of untreated wastewater into rivers and the fact that many neighbourhoods only periodically have access to clean drinking water. They felt that these were not only technical questions, but matters of human dignity and public health. The proposal was a very large-scale one, involving investment in wastewater treatment plants and in sustainable and continuous access to clean water, financed by a combination of state and municipal resources and international aid. Institutions involved included the Ministry of Environment, municipal utilities, and the National Audit Office, with the last as a condition to avoid corruption. Despite the expense and complexity, it was clear to participants that this was a high-impact investment that could be made with rapid results that visibly and directly impact people's lives, while also offering the potential to rebuild some trust in institutions. Croatia was referenced as an example of a state that made pre-accession investments in precisely this type of water infrastructure, and that Kosovo should learn from and adopt a similar, phased approach, which guarantees donor assistance and local ownership. Participants noted that such investment should be planned and executed with equal access for all as a central guiding principle. Rural areas should not be left behind for urban centres, and environmental standards must be applied equally and not selectively.

3. A NATIONAL PUBLIC COMMUNICATION STRATEGY ON EU INTEGRATION

A third important topic was related to the need to draft a national public communication strategy on EU integration. This issue was highlighted by citizens who, on numerous occasions, expressed their dissatisfaction with how reforms are constantly communicated as something that Kosovo needs to do for Brussels or as an obligation derived from negotiations, instead of being priorities of Kosovo itself, which in turn does not appeal to citizens and weakens the support of integration. In the proposal, the elaboration of a communication strategy was recommended under the leadership of the Prime Minister's Office in coordination with civil society and academic institutions and with a special focus on schools, municipalities and groups at risk of exclusion. Citizens noted that people need to be informed about where we are, what is next and how reforms will affect their day-to-day lives, but, on the other hand, they were also concerned that a communication strategy like this could easily be instrumentalised for political or party purposes. To ensure credibility, they thus stressed the need for shared ownership between institutions and independent actors. The example of Montenegro, which approached communication on EU integration through communication strategies that combined the use of mass media and civic education, was put forward for comparison. The strength of this proposal is the potential to reduce mistrust and scepticism, while the weakness is in the fact that this could not continue with the change of governments. Without institutionalisation and unless there are appropriate mechanisms in place, it could be dropped with a change of political leadership or even hijacked and politicised. Citizens insisted on shared ownership that would be as wide and non-partisan as possible, and with the inclusion of civil society as a safety net.

4. A HARMONISED CRIMINAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE CODE

Justice system reform was a priority in this area as well. Respondents called for a new harmonised criminal and administrative code to be drafted. Discrepancies between the codes, according to the citizens, generate legal confusion, provide space for corruption and lead to inconsistent penalties. Citizens want a predictable and clear legal framework in which the law is applied equally to all. The Ministry of Justice and the Kosovo Judicial Council are the institutions that, together with parliamentary committees, would have to take the initiative for this kind of reform. The strength of this recommendation is that it directly corresponds to the EU accession benchmarks on the rule of law, whereas a weakness is that the legislative process is time-consuming and subject to political capture at the drafting stage. Participants mentioned the pre-accession experience of Albania, for example, where the harmonisation of codes was among the most important demands. This could be a way for Kosovo to harmonise its codes, with public consultations being part of the drafting process and thus strengthening the legitimacy of the new codes. Another strength is that such a reform could help reduce

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case backlogs by clarifying procedures, but there is a risk that the implementation will be obstructed by political interests in preserving grey areas. Citizens perceived this reform as important for restoring trust in the justice system and ending the widespread feeling of selective justice.

5. INCENTIVE SCHEMES AND CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS FOR BUSINESSES MEETING

ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS

A further proposal tying environmental and economic reform recommended the establishment of incentive schemes and annual certification programs for businesses that incorporate environmental standards. Participants argued that an improved environment cannot be delivered through state regulation alone, as businesses also need to be incentivised to 'do their part'. Incentives could come in the form of tax reductions, subsidies or preferential treatment in public procurement, for example. Certification schemes would identify responsible companies and enable them to be more competitive in regional and European markets. The Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Environment were identified as the two institutions that could implement this proposal, in partnership with chambers of commerce. Although there were some concerns over the fiscal sustainability of such a program, international donor co-financing was seen as a way to reduce pressure on the state budget. Participants also cited Slovenia as a comparative practice in this area, where certification schemes have helped to improve the competitiveness of green SMEs in the country. Citizens further noted that this reform would also create jobs in green sectors, and this would be a positive message to Kosovo's youth who may be considering emigration. However, they also noted that the risk of corruption in certification schemes is a serious concern, which is why oversight would need to be by an independent institution.

6. MANDATORY TRAINING FOR PUBLIC OFFICIALS ON INTEGRITY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

Citizens also recommended to reform the public sector, in particular to introduce mandatory trainings for all public officials on integrity, human rights and good governance. Many participants believed civil servants and staff of the justice sector were not aware of the ethics and rules that should be followed, which led to corruption and inefficient public services. Mandatory trainings would also help in promoting professionalism and creating a culture of accountability. It would also ensure that public officials and civil servants would treat citizens with respect and professionalism. Institutions that would be primarily responsible for the implementation of this proposal would be the Ministry of Public Administration and the Civil Service Agency. The greatest strength of this proposal is the fact that it is less expensive than the previous reform on infrastructure. However, the effectiveness and the compliance of this reform would need to be independently monitored and evaluated. A model of mandatory trainings for public officials could be Estonia's digital training modules that contributed to increasing institutional trust. Citizens claimed that this proposal could be relevant for young people entering the civil service and other public institutions in order to create a new culture of integrity. The main weakness of this proposal is the difficulty in changing people's attitudes, which can often be resistant to mandatory training.

7. PROVISION OF TRANSLATORS IN MULTIETHNIC COURTS

A different popular recommendation sought to improve access to justice in multiethnic areas by providing a legal basis for regular translators at courts and other justice institutions. Citizens contended that language barriers often result in the exclusion of minority communities and jeopardise equality before the law. As such, translation by professionals should be ensured. This suggestion obliges the Kosovo Judicial Council and Ministry of Justice to ensure translation services are available at all courts in multiethnic municipalities. This recommendation is very much in line with EU human rights standards and could have a direct positive effect on vulnerable communities. The citizens noted that there would be a few issues to consider, in particular, on how this would be funded and the quality control would be ensured. They also presented

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North Macedonia's system of state-financed translation services in court as a best practice example. Citizens also considered that ensuring translation is not only a legal and practical necessity, but also a symbolic expression of equality and inclusion. The cost would be relatively minor compared to other reforms, but there may be some issues in quality and consistency.

8. INSTITUTIONALISED PARTICIPATION OF MARGINALISED GROUPS IN POLICYMAKING

Another important pillar of the citizens' approach to reform was participation and inclusion. They proposed the creation of formal consultative committees to institutionalise the participation of marginalised groups in policymaking. Citizens noted that while such consultation mechanisms are already in place in Kosovo, they lack clear mandates and thus serve a largely symbolic and powerless function. Consultative committees with a clearly defined mandate, representation of marginalised groups and an effective monitoring mechanism would be an important way to guarantee inclusivity and accountability. Citizens identified the Ministry of Local Government as the key actor to design and implement such consultative structures in cooperation with the Prime Minister's Office, with the municipalities themselves ensuring that the committees work properly. As a positive example, participants cited Finland's experience with citizens' councils, which have given a long-term voice to marginalised groups in legislative processes. Citizens felt that the proposal would be particularly relevant for young people and persons with disabilities who are excluded from formal decision-making processes. The strength of the proposal lies in its inclusive nature, while its weakness lies in the potential for tokenism, in the form of consultative bodies being created, but ultimately ignored. Citizens insisted that such structures would need to be given clear mandates, including reporting obligations.

9. STRENGTHENING THE KOSOVO JUDICIAL COUNCIL'S MONITORING SYSTEM

The last concern raised about inequality of sentence and selective justice was approached through another proposal for reform, which aimed to improve the monitoring system of the Kosovo Judicial Council in order to ensure equal judgment in court decisions. Citizens explained that even in similar cases, a range of punishments can be awarded, which results in many citizens feeling that the judiciary is corrupt and discriminatory. Better monitoring would ensure that decisions were consistent and fair, while also helping Kosovo meet accession criteria set by the EU. The reform has a strong potential for implementation as it was the responsibility of the Kosovo Judicial Council with support of the Ministry of Justice and oversight bodies. It is directly linked to rule of law benchmarks, while a key challenge to implementation identified was the resistance of the judiciary. The example of Croatia and its monitoring systems as part of EU accession process were presented, including its performance indicators and system of publishing regular reports. The participants noted that transparency in the judiciary was the first step towards regaining trust, and that even incremental change in consistency would result in a major credibility gain.

10. DIGITAL PLATFORMS FOR TRANSPARENT REFORM MONITORING

Citizens finally proposed digital platforms for transparent reporting of progress in reforms. They were dissatisfied with the absence of accessible information on the government's promises and results and wanted a mechanism to monitor reforms in real time and hold institutions accountable for their commitments. This option would see the Prime Minister's Office and Ministry of Information develop digital platforms in consultation with civil society, which would publish regular updates, timelines and data on implementation. Issues of sustainability and credibility were acknowledged, but participants felt that digital transparency could help recalibrate the relationship between citizens and government. Estonia's e-governance platforms, which enable citizens to monitor the progress of laws and track public spending, were raised as an example of a best practice Kosovo could emulate. Beyond a transparency measure, participants also saw digital monitoring as a means of furthering civic education, helping Kosovars to see how reforms are put into practice and where blockages occur.

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Taken together, these ten recommendations form a coherent set of citizen-driven priorities, which address Kosovo's systemic weaknesses while also pointing toward the country's European future. They balance both more ambitious reforms, such as a national plan for environmental infrastructure, with smaller, more practical measures, such as translators in multiethnic courts. The strength of the proposals lies in their grounding in daily life and in EU benchmarks, while their weaknesses are linked to institutional capacity, political will, and resource constraints. Above all, they reflect the spirit of the REACH initiative: of citizens working hand in hand with experts to not just name the problems, but propose solutions, and to participate in the setting of national priorities.

CONCLUSIONS

The citizen consultations in Kosovo have provided a remarkable insight into the priorities and pragmatism of Kosovar citizens. When given the space and opportunity to deliberate on issues that affect their everyday lives, citizens do so with a seriousness, sense of responsibility, and pragmatism that is truly inspiring. Citizens' consultations started as deliberations around three thematic pillars: rule of law, European integration, and environment. They culminated in the production of a set of concrete recommendations reflecting the country's democratic aspirations and European ambitions. This was not a process of rehearsing grievances, but one of proposing actionable solutions for institutions to take forward. On the topic of rule of law, citizens expressed both their frustrations and aspirations. Participants were candid in their concern about the issues of corruption, politicisation of judicial appointments, and selective enforcement of the law. Many spoke movingly of the effect this has on public trust, pointing to the detrimental impact of the often-glacial pace of trials, inconsistent sentencing, and weak accountability mechanisms. However, citizens' contributions to the consultations did not end at criticism or demands for justice. Participants proposed a set of constructive solutions to help address these challenges. For example, citizens recommended the harmonisation of the criminal and administrative codes, which would reduce legal discrepancies and close loopholes that allow corruption to persist. Participants also proposed an expansion and strengthening of the monitoring role of the Kosovo Judicial Council in order to ensure equality of court rulings, as well as a commitment to mandatory training for public officials in integrity and human rights. Citizens further called for the drafting of a reform to guarantee translators in all multiethnic courts in Kosovo, thus making justice truly accessible for all communities. Taken together, these proposals reflect the vision of a rule of law system that is transparent, fair, and inclusive – a system in which justice is no longer selective, and institutions truly serve all citizens equally.

Citizens' consultations on European integration revealed a complex mix of hope, frustration, and healthy scepticism. On the one hand, citizens reaffirmed their support for EU membership, seeing it as a strategic anchor for Kosovo's future. On the other hand, participants were clear that the way in which the process is currently communicated leaves much to be desired. Reforms are often talked about as if they are an obligation to Brussels, rather than a set of priorities that Kosovo owns. Citizens' recommendations to address this gap included the drafting of a comprehensive communication strategy that would explain the process in an accessible language, target schools and municipalities, and make reforms tangible in the lives of citizens every day. A further proposal called for the creation of digital platforms allowing the public to track progress of reforms in real-time. These platforms would not only increase transparency and accountability but would also serve to demystify integration and show what it actually means on the ground. Citizens were clear on this point: integration must be a national project owned by the state and society, and not a distant negotiation taking place above society.

Most palpable sense of urgency came through in citizens' debate on the environment. Citizens from across both local and national consultations described pollution, deforestation, poor waste management, and lack of clean water as immediate challenges they are living with every day. Environmental degradation was thus framed not as an abstract policy debate, but

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as a direct and urgent threat to public health, human dignity, and the future of younger generations. The most supported recommendation from the consultation, and across all the thematic areas, was a call for the drafting and implementation of a comprehensive plan for environmental infrastructure in Kosovo, modelled on EU standards. This recommendation would provide strategic direction and coordination between ministries and line ministries and could help attract donor support and funding for long-term investments. Another high-priority and tangible intervention prioritised by participants was a set of concrete projects for sewage networks and sustainable drinking water access in municipalities where these basic needs remain unmet. Citizens also recommended the creation of incentive schemes and certification programmes that would encourage and reward businesses to green their practices, thus linking environmental reform with economic competitiveness. In short, citizens made clear that without such steps, environmental neglect would continue to undermine public health and Kosovo's credibility as a future EU member.

In their recommendations, participants expressed a clear sense of how they perceive interconnections between the different thematic areas. The rule of law was described by citizens as a necessary foundation on which other areas can build: without independent courts, environmental laws cannot be enforced, and EU benchmarks would lose their meaning. European integration was also frequently described as a driver that can incentivise and speed up reforms in governance and sustainability, if used strategically and correctly. The environment was both framed as an urgent priority but also a key test of institutional credibility: citizens want to see whether laws can be enforced and infrastructure actually delivered in a way that tangibly improves their lives. Citizens did acknowledge that there are trade-offs involved, and some reforms would come at a cost to institutions and citizens in the short-term. They were also under no illusions about the fact that most of their recommendations would require time, political will, and financial resources. Environmental reforms, for example, were acknowledged to carry short-term costs such as potentially higher energy prices. However, citizens felt that these costs are far outweighed by the longer-term benefits of clean air, healthier communities, and sustainable development.

The final set of ten recommendations adopted during the national consultation reflected a balance between ambition and pragmatism. Some are systemic in nature and require long-term reforms and investment. For example, harmonising legal codes, or investing in wastewater infrastructure. Other recommendations are more immediate and more feasible in the short- to medium-term, such as the introduction of translators in multiethnic courts, mandatory training for officials, or the building of digital platforms. This mix of recommendations reflects the balance of ambition and pragmatism but also an acute awareness of both the limits of Kosovo's institutions and the need for change to be visible. The citizens participating in the consultations were neither naïve nor overly idealistic; they demonstrated an impressive understanding of sequencing and the financing of reforms, as well as the need for realistic and strategic communication.

Equally, if not more, important is what the process itself revealed. In an environment in Kosovo where there is limited trust in the institutions, the consultations showed that citizens are not passive recipients of governance or bystanders to decision-making but can be active contributors if provided with the right channels for inclusion in structured, respectful, and constructive dialogue. Many participants described the experience as the first time they felt they were having their voices heard and that they could have an impact on shaping national priorities. This sense of ownership is a democratic gain in itself, as it strengthens civic awareness and helps create expectations of accountability. By connecting citizens' local experiences to national-level policymaking, the consultation showed that participatory models could bridge the gap between institutions and communities, increase transparency, and foster a more responsive and inclusive form of governance. The big question now is how to translate these recommendations into action and policy. Kosovo's state institutions are facing a host of challenges in this regard. These include resource constraints, competing institutional priorities, and political volatility. However, it is important to note that the consultation has also identified and highlighted a range of opportunities for moving ahead with reforms. These include international partners, especially the European Union, as natural allies in supporting the government in a range of areas: from environmental infrastructure and legal reform to

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promoting transparent governance. Civil society organisations will also have a crucial role in monitoring progress and maintaining accountability pressure. But most importantly, the process itself has shown that citizens are ready and willing to participate, deliberate, and make contributions when given the opportunity. Their continued engagement in the years ahead will be crucial to ensuring that reforms can be implemented in a legitimate and sustainable way.

For the government of Kosovo, citizens' recommendations highlight reforms that are necessary for democratic consolidation and the country's European integration path. For international partners, the recommendations point to areas where support can have the biggest impact on directly meeting citizens' priorities. For citizens themselves, the experience of the consultations has shown that they have the power to shape the future through an inclusive, participatory process. The message from Kosovo, then, is a clear and strong one. Kosovo's future will be stronger, more credible, and more European when it is built together with its people. These recommendations from Kosovo can and should contribute to a broader European debate. From the Western Balkans to the Nordic region, societies across Europe are grappling with similar questions of justice, trust in institutions, environmental sustainability, and what integration means for citizens on the ground. The voices of Kosovar citizens, as distilled in these recommendations, are therefore relevant not only to national debate and policymaking in the country, but also to Europe more broadly. The recommendations contribute to shaping Europe's future by reminding policymakers that democracy is strongest when citizens are active participants, and that Europe's own credibility as a shared project is only as strong as its willingness to listen to and include diverse voices from across the continent.

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