



The Kosovo-Spain Bilateral Relationship: How to Improve the Relationship?

By Yerai Dheur¹

The unique challenge of Spain's continued non-recognition is a significant hurdle for Kosovo on the path toward Euro-Atlantic integration. Madrid's long-standing opposition to recognition, characterised by concerns about setting a precedent in Catalonia and the Basque Country, further complicates the situation. Despite the complex bilateral relationship, recent developments, including Kosovo's visa liberalisation, progress in the Council of Europe, and the appointment of a new EU Special Representative, present opportunities for a promising way forward that can reshape historical attitudes and enhance practical cooperation.

This brief, following the line of thought from [Kosovo–Spain Relations: How to Move on in 2025](#), outlines several practical ideas on how Kosovo can engage with Spain in 2025 and beyond. The objective is to identify status-neutral avenues, people-to-people ties, and parliamentary initiatives that can normalise Kosovo as a European partner. While recognising that a sudden reversal of Spain's stance on recognition is unlikely in the short term, these strategies, if implemented, hold the potential to significantly improve Kosovo-Spain relations.

1 **Breaking the “Kosovo taboo” in Spain.** Kosovo remains a marginal and often sensitive topic in Spain, frequently met with silence or avoidance rather than open debate. Overcoming this dynamic is essential. The first step should be to gradually foster greater openness and normalise the discussion of Kosovo, not only within government circles but also across Spanish public discourse. To achieve this, Kosovo can

make constructive use of multilateral platforms such as NATO, the OSCE, the UN, the EU, and even foreign embassies, where encounters with Spanish officials already occur. By encouraging informal yet consistent contacts on the margins of these forums, Kosovo can begin to build familiarity and trust. At the same time, parallel initiatives outside the diplomatic sphere can play an equally important role. Tourism campaigns, cultural and academic exchanges,

¹ Yerai Dheur is a research intern at the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS), and is a recent graduate on Global Studies at Maastricht University.

joint economic and business forums, and people-to-people cooperation can help bring Kosovo into Spain's everyday awareness in a positive and non-confrontational way. Taken together, these multilateral and societal channels can chip away at the silence surrounding Kosovo in Madrid and gradually open space for a more constructive relationship in the future.

2 Linking Dialogue Progress with Societal Engagement. Spain's evolving position on Kosovo remains closely tied to developments in the EU-facilitated Dialogue with Serbia, where progress and credible implementation of agreements create the necessary political space for Madrid to adjust its stance cautiously. By supporting the efforts of the newly appointed EU Special Representative, Peter Sorensen, and demonstrating commitment to previous accords, Kosovo can encourage Spain to align with the broader EU consensus on Kosovo.

At the same time, the 2024 milestone of visa liberalisation presents an unprecedented opportunity for deepening engagement beyond traditional governmental channels. Greater mobility enables the expansion of joint academic initiatives, youth and cultural exchanges, professional networks, and tourism links, all of which contribute to fostering societal understanding and reducing existing taboos. When political progress in the Dialogue is strategically linked with the expansion of people-to-people ties, Spain faces a dual dynamic: growing pressure at the institutional level to recognise Kosovo as a legitimate EU partner, and a societal environment in which contact with Kosovars can become routine and normalised. This combination increases the likelihood that Madrid will gradually adapt its position consistently, aligning with broader

European trends and a growing acceptance of Kosovo.

3 Adopt a "do not harm" approach and address Spanish sensitivities directly. Kosovo must carefully distinguish its statehood from separatist movements within Spain and reinforce, in both substance and style, that Madrid's central government is the only legitimate and decisive counterpart for engagement. Recognition or meaningful policy shifts will not emanate from Catalonia or the Basque Country, despite their active political agendas, because foreign policy authority rests exclusively with Spain's national institutions. Direct or symbolic outreach to regional authorities or secessionist parties risks entangling Kosovo in Spain's internal constitutional disputes, which could prove counterproductive. Therefore, an approach that directly addresses Spanish sensitivities is crucial. Any perception that Kosovo is aligning itself with, or being instrumentalised by, separatist narratives would only sharpen Madrid's sensitivities, harden its non-recognition stance, and reverse recent signs of flexibility.

A clear example of this risk is reflected in statements made by Catalan figures such as Carles Puigdemont, the former regional leader now living in exile in Brussels, who has repeatedly invoked Kosovo in advocating for Catalonia's independence, even calling on Spain to recognise Kosovo in order to bolster his cause ([example here](#)). While such declarations are outside Prishtina's control, they underscore the importance of disciplined and proactive communication. In these circumstances, Kosovo should make clear that while it respects freedom of expression, its case is fundamentally different: independence emerged from the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia, extended UN administration, NATO intervention, and a supervised international process, none of which are present in Spain's internal disputes. Proactive communication is key to managing such situations and ensuring that Kosovo's

unique circumstances are effectively communicated.

Public diplomacy should therefore continue to prioritise Spain-wide initiatives, such as cultural diplomacy, academic exchanges, and economic cooperation, rather than relying on regionally sensitive political channels. That said, selectively addressing separatist comparisons to underline the sui generis nature of Kosovo's independence can also be beneficial. By using such moments to draw a clear legal and political boundary between Kosovo and movements like the ones in Catalonia or the Basque Country, Prishtina can both deflect instrumentalisation and reassure Madrid that recognition does not put Spain's constitutional order at risk.

4 Advancing Parliamentary, Expert, and Direct Diplomatic Channels.

Kosovo should open a combined parliamentary and expert diplomacy track as an entry point to improve relations with Spain. This could involve inviting Spanish Members of Parliament, ideally those serving on foreign and European affairs committees, to visit Kosovo's multi-ethnic municipalities and witness firsthand the implementation of the Ahtisaari Plan, including safeguards for minority rights and ongoing rule of law reforms. Such visits would provide tangible evidence that Kosovo's independence case is legally and politically distinct from Spain's internal regions, thereby weakening the perception of a precedent-setting nature.

In parallel, Kosovo should strengthen partnerships with Spanish universities, research centres, and think tanks in order to embed the sui generis narrative in Spain's intellectual and policy communities. Joint academic seminars, expert panels, and legal dialogues with ICJ and EU law specialists would help reinforce the differentiation between Kosovo and secessionist movements, such as those in Catalonia or the Basque Country. These

parliamentary and academic channels offer credible, depoliticised platforms through which to shift perceptions in Madrid and progressively broaden engagement.

These efforts can complement the equally important task of establishing direct channels for diplomatic communication, rather than relying exclusively on informal contacts or third-party frameworks, such as EU or NATO meetings. Kosovo should aim towards Spain's eventual formal recognition by first encouraging practical steps, including the potential opening of a liaison office in Prishtina or the accreditation of a representative tasked with bilateral contact. The aforementioned mechanisms can serve as a way to reduce the misinterpretation that arises when communications are filtered through intermediaries, build confidence, and enable a channel for continuous dialogue. By following these steps, Kosovo creates a comprehensive framework that will enhance a gradual shift in normalising relations with Madrid.

5 Building Societal Bridges Through Civil, Cultural, and Economic Diplomacy.

When recognition is absent and official diplomacy remains constrained, civil society, cultural, and economic avenues become essential tools for sustaining dialogue and shaping perceptions. Kosovo and Spain have the opportunity to utilise status-neutral avenues to maintain channels of communication and foster trust between the two parties. Areas such as think tanks, NGOs, universities, or research centres are emerging as a growing opportunity to enhance bilateral communications. Joint roundtables, symposia, and policy dialogues allow for ongoing engagement that does not directly address recognition but still embeds Kosovo into Spain's intellectual and policy discourse.

At the same time, cultural and economic diplomacy provide powerful bottom-up means of fostering familiarity and positive sentiment in Spanish society. Initiatives such as art exhibitions, film festivals, literary exchanges, and diaspora-led cultural programs not only humanise Kosovo but also situate it in Spain's public imagination as a regular match for cooperation. Parallel to this, joint business forums, trade delegations, and sectoral partnerships, particularly in areas such as technology, renewable energy, and tourism, can demonstrate mutual benefit and create constituencies within Spain that favour expanded ties with Kosovo.

Civil society, cultural, and economic engagement thus operate on multiple levels: they keep dialogue alive when political channels are blocked, they reduce the taboo that continues to surround Kosovo in Spain, and they generate social and economic networks that gradually soften the political environment in Madrid. For these reasons, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora should prioritise such initiatives as complementary to official diplomacy, recognising that shifts in public narrative and elite discourse can, over time, ease the constraints that have long defined Spain's cautious stance on Kosovo.
