



KCSS
Kosovar Centre for Security Studies

THREE SCENARIOS FOR KOSOVO BY 2028

*The Necessity for Strategic Foresight
and Adaptation for Integration
and Consolidation of the State of Kosovo*



About the Foreign Policy and Regional Security Cooperation Programme

Established in 2009, the Foreign Policy and Regional Security Cooperation Programme is one of the six programs of Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS). Its main goal is to cover a wide range of Kosovo's and Western Balkans foreign policy related topics the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, regional cooperation, reconciliation, peacebuilding, malign foreign influences, and foreign policy. This programme plays a pivotal role in navigating the intricate web of international relations and security challenges in the Western Balkans and beyond.

Since its establishment, this programme has continually adapted to the shifting geopolitical dynamics, focusing on critical areas such as unresolved bilateral disputes, transitional justice, public diplomacy, disinformation campaigns, and the nuances of migration. With a particular emphasis on the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, the programme underscores KCSS's dedication to fostering peace and stability through enhanced understanding, dialogue, and cooperation on pressing security and diplomatic issues.

This multifaceted KCSS's mechanism not only delves deep into research and analysis to inform policy and public discourse but also spearheads efforts in public diplomacy to bolster Kosovo's global standing and regional cooperation. Through targeted activities ranging from facilitating discussions for conflict resolution to advocating for justice mechanisms and addressing migration's root causes and consequences, the programme aspires to craft a more secure and just regional environment. The concerted efforts in security cooperation, peacebuilding, and combating disinformation further exemplify KCSS's commitment to contributing constructively to regional stability and cooperation, marking it as a vital player in shaping the security landscape of the Western Balkans.

The programme has a set structure that consisting of a coordinator, research and implementation staff. The KCSS has carried out various projects under this programme and has participated in various and European consortiums. The programme aims to further develop its expertise, network and partnerships. We invite any enquiry to the staff of this programme by emailing the following account: ForeignPolicy@gkss.org



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February 2024

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report, prepared by the research team at the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS), presents an analysis of Kosovo's potential trajectory through the year 2028, focusing on the interplay between internal dynamics and external influences. It outlines the critical challenges and opportunities Kosovo faces in its ambition to join the European Union, resolve the bilateral dispute with Serbia, and pursue regional cooperation.

The analysis is anchored around two key uncertainties: the level of alignment between the Kosovo government and the Western allies, particularly the quint countries, and the degree of commitment from the Trans-Atlantic community towards the Western Balkans and Kosovo. The report underscores the strategic importance of these uncertainties in shaping three potential scenarios for Kosovo by 2028. These scenarios reflect varying degrees of success in navigating the complexities of international politics, regional tensions, and domestic challenges. It highlights the necessity for Kosovo to pursue an adaptive policy-making strategy with respect to the normalization dialogue with Serbia coupled with a pro-active approach in implementation of agreements from the Brussels Dialogue and rational engagement with the quint countries. Compromise is not a concession.

Introduction

Kosovo's political landscape will be characterized by the delicate balance between its aspiration for EU integration and the realities of regional and global politics. The EU's internal cohesion regarding enlargement will directly affect Kosovo's European journey, with potential candidacy offering economic and legislative opportunities, yet also imposing stringent reforms and standards that Kosovo must meet.

The normalization dialogue with Serbia remains perhaps the most significant driving force, with outcomes affecting Kosovo's international recognition and domestic cohesion. Successful normalization may unlock international memberships and regional integration but will require significant compromise from both parties. Accordingly, the EU facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia will continue to remain a central feature of Kosovo's political landscape. Its progress or stalemate will have direct consequences on regional peace as well as ethnic relations within Kosovo. Successful dialogue, which at this stage would mean effective and full implementation of the Agreement on the Path to Normalisation of Relations that was agreed by both parties in February of 2023, could lead to recognition from non-recognizing states, enhancing Kosovo's legitimacy. The effectiveness of the dialogue extends beyond Kosovo's willingness to engage constructively. Notably, the Banjska terrorist attack in September of 2023 illustrate Serbia's role and efforts to prevent any meaningful process of integration of

the Serbian community in the north of Kosovo.

Kosovo's position over the next four years will be one of navigating a path through a thicket of complex and often competing internal and external pressures. The country's ability to maintain internal cohesion, secure international recognition, and integrate economically and politically into the region and wider Europe will be the ultimate test of its resilience and strategic diplomacy. In the next four years, Kosovo's fate will intertwine with the elections in the United States and the European Union (EU) during 2024 as well as extent to which Kosovo government can effectively coordinate and align with the strategic partners on matters relation to the normalization dialogue, integration of the Serbian community in Kosovo and regional cooperation.

The resurgence of far-right or far-right sympathizers in the EU could lead to a reevaluation of priorities, impacting Kosovo's international support. A potential change in the U.S. administration might too shift focus and even lead to diminished US presence in Kosovo. The war in Ukraine could continue to draw global attention and resources, potentially sidelining the Balkans unless Kosovo leverages its strategic significance, by fully aligning with the West. Progress on Kosovo's path to EU membership will continue to be determined by readiness of Kosovo's Government to take into consideration the advice from the international partners versus and the level of constructive engagement. Internal EU disagreements may continue to stall Kosovo's integration process regardless of its political landscape. Continued appeasement of Vucic – even after Banjska terrorist attack - by the West is even more daunting and can create deeper rifts between Kosovo and the international partners. This situation was further highlighted by the surprisingly mild response from the EU and the US towards Serbia regarding its role in the Banjska terrorist attack, despite compelling evidence of Serbia's involvement in planning and supporting the execution of the attack in September 2023.

Regional cooperation is essential and must remain a top priority for the Kosovo government. Prioritizing the implementation of the Common Regional Market (CRM) is a practical approach that the government should emphasize in its regional strategies. Kosovo must act constructively and work hard to proactively overcome political obstacles that hinder the CRM's implementation, as its successful realization is particularly beneficial for Kosovo.

Kosovo 2028 represents an intertwining of internal dynamics with external factors that will define Kosovo's path. Each cluster not only represents independent variables but also intersects with others, influencing the broader geopolitical, economic, and societal landscapes. Successful navigation through these driving forces will require strategic foresight, adaptive policy-making, and robust international engagement. The government's actions in relation to these intertwined clusters will collectively shape Kosovo's reality by 2028.

THE TWO KEY UNCERTAINTIES IN KOSOVO'S TRAJECTORY TO 2028

Over the past four years, developments in Kosovo have highlighted two key uncertainties that can significantly influence the country's trajectory. **These are, firstly, the degree of alignment and coordination between the Kosovo government and its Western Allies and secondly, the level of commitment and cohesion within the Trans-Atlantic community (comprising NATO and the EU) towards the Western Balkans.**

This includes their collective determination to integrate the region into the European Union and NATO. The interplay between these factors has profound implications for Kosovo's future. Specifically, a strong commitment from the Trans-Atlantic community towards the Western Balkans, coupled with a high level of alignment between the Kosovo government and West, bodes well for Kosovo. Conversely, a lack of cohesion and commitment from the Trans-Atlantic community, as well as poor alignment of Kosovo with West, could have detrimental effects.

Crucially, the extent to which the Kosovo government aligns with the West not only impacts Kosovo's own future prospects but also influences the level of resolve and support it receives from the Trans-Atlantic community. The dynamic interrelation between these uncertainties underpins the development of three potential scenarios for Kosovo by 2028, each reflecting different outcomes based on the interplay of these critical factors.

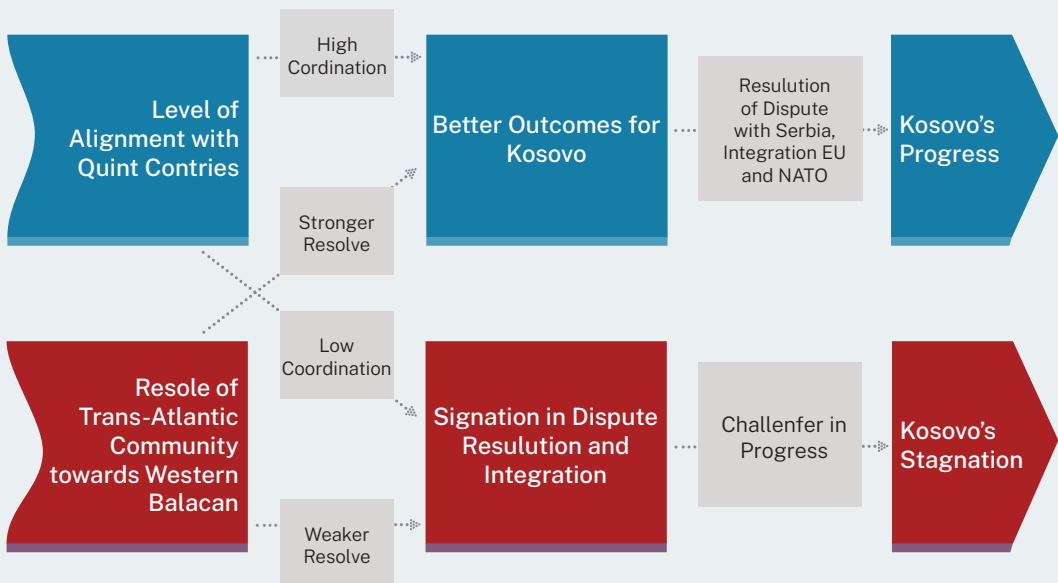
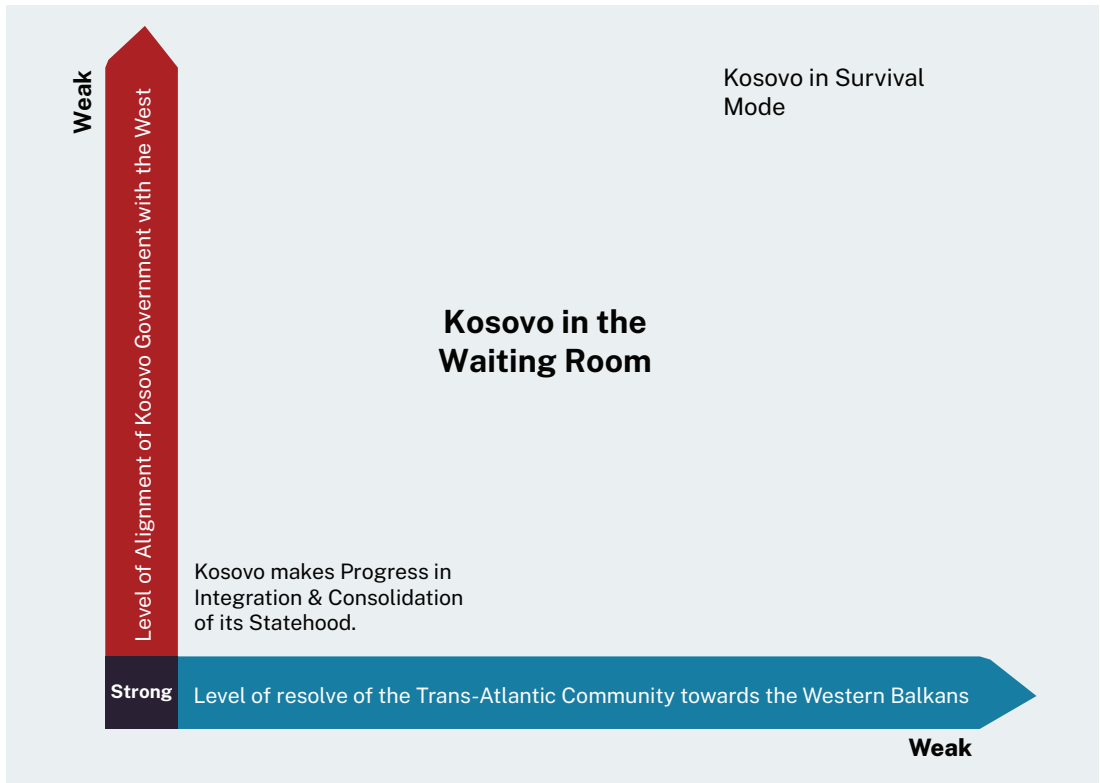


Figure 1: Outline of the two major uncertainties shaping Kosovo 2028



KOSOVO 2028 SCENARIOS

The three scenarios — **Worst Case: Survival Mode**, **Best Case: Integration and Consolidation**, and **Business as Usual: Waiting Room** — paint a diverse range of potential futures for Kosovo and its relations with Serbia and the broader international community. Each scenario hinges on various internal and external factors, including political will, international support, and regional dynamics, leading to distinct implications for the stability, security, and integration prospects of Kosovo.

The Worst Case: Survival Mode envisions a period of great instability and isolation for Kosovo, driven by a lack of support from Western Allies and the rise of nationalist and far-right politics in Europe and the USA. The scenario predicts further consolidation of authoritarianism rule in Serbia, diminished economic prospects in Kosovo, and a potential for violence, especially in the north of Kosovo.

The Best Case: Integration and Consolidation depicts an optimistic future where Kosovo aligns closely with Western partners, leading to significant progress in normalization with Serbia, recognition by non-recognizing EU states, and steps toward EU and NATO integration. Political cohesion within Kosovo and partnership with the Western Allies are key to this

scenario.

Business as Usual: Waiting Room portrays a stagnant landscape where minimal progress is made in normalization efforts, characterized by a lack of ambition from the EU and US, inward-looking domestic politics, and the potential consideration of controversial proposals such as border adjustments.

Implications and Driving Factors:

- **Political Will and International Support:** The commitment of Kosovo and Serbia, alongside the engagement of international actors like the EU, US, and NATO, is a critical determinant across all scenarios. The best-case scenario hinges on robust support and strategic alignment, while the worst-case scenario emerges from a withdrawal of this support.
- **Domestic Politics and Regional Dynamics:** Internal political cohesion and regional relationships play a significant role, especially in the best-case scenario where political unity within Kosovo strengthens its negotiating position. Conversely, the worst-case and business-as-usual scenarios are marked by inward-looking politics and regional tensions.
- **Economic Prospects and Security Concerns:** Economic stability and security arrangements, including Kosovo's relationship with NATO and economic integration into the EU, are key. The worst-case scenario highlights the detrimental impact of isolation, while the best-case scenario underlines the benefits of integration and stability. The EU has adopted restrictive measures against Kosovo, which are hurtful to economy and the overall perception of the country, especially among the five non-recognizers in the EU, as an irrational actor.
- **Normalization of Relations with Serbia:** The progress in the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia is a central theme. Effective implementation of agreements is crucial for the best-case scenario, while stagnation and limited implementation characterize the worst-case and business-as-usual scenarios.

The best-case scenario requires a concerted effort with the international community in Kosovo and for the Kosovo government to be more forthcoming and taking leaps of faith in implementing arrangements that foster integration of the Serbian community in Kosovo. Furthermore, this scenario also requires more efforts on the part of the government of Kosovo to foster political cohesion, engage constructively in dialogue with the opposition parties and the civil society. On the other hand, the worst-case scenario serves as a cautionary tale of the potential consequences of neglect, rising nationalism in Kosovo, and the potential erosion of democratic values in Kosovo, which are exacerbated by the growing influence of the far-right politics in the European Union (EU) member states, and potential isolationist policies in the US with the possible return to the White House of President Trump.

The business-as-usual scenario highlights the risks of complacency and the need for renewed ambition on the part of the Kosovo government to avoid stagnation and ensure that Kosovo does not remain perpetually in the “waiting room” of integration in the international democratic community, including the EU and NATO. It emphasizes the necessity of breaking the cycle of

inaction to move towards a situation where the government of Kosovo has greater confidence in the West and implements in good faith its obligations stemming from the normalization dialogue.

The overarching message of this scenario planning exercise is clear: the future of Kosovo and its relations with the European Union (EU) and NATO will be shaped by the interplay of domestic politics characterized by the extent of alignment of the Kosovo government with the West, especially when it comes to normalization dialogue with Serbia, and the level of commitment and engagement of the EU and the United States towards the Western Balkans.

Figure 2: Mindmap of Kosovo 2028



BEST CASE SCENARIO: INTEGRATION AND CONSOLIDATION

In the best-case scenario titled “Integration and Consolidation,” Kosovo undergoes a period marked by consolidation of itself as a rational actor, with important progress in regional cooperation, and Euro-Atlantic integration, such as securing the status of a candidate country for membership in the European Union (EU), membership in the Council of Europe (CoE), and at minimum becoming part of the NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP), which comes as a result of increased alignment with the West, and a fostered commitment towards liberal democracy and Western Balkans.

Scenario in Brief: Kosovo by 2028

- During 2024, the European Union removes the restrictive measures against Kosovo. During 2024, Kosovo government sends to Constitutional Court of Kosovo the draft decision and statute for the establishment of the Association/Community of Serb-majority Municipalities (ASM).
- During 2024/25 Kosovo government formally establishes the ASM following clearance from the Constitutional Court and implements the decision of the Constitutional Court on the Decani Monastery as well as formalizes the status of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo. Kosovo government engages constructively in regional cooperation initiatives in the Western Balkans, as obstacles from Serbia are completely lifted, influencing also Bosnia and Herzegovina to become more constructive.
- Kosovo becomes a member of the Council of Europe in 2024, the EU moves to grant Kosovo candidate status for membership, and Kosovo becomes part of NATO's Partnership for Peace program and instantly is granted with MAP. Furthermore, Kosovo applies for membership in other international organizations, and becomes part of INTERPOL, UNESCO, and other organizations by 2026/27.

This scenario is predicated on a series of interconnected factors and developments that reinforce Kosovo's trajectory towards integration, stability, and consolidation of its statehood.

Key drivers of this scenario include:

1. **Alignment and Coordination with the West:** The fundamental assumption for this scenario is Kosovo's full alignment and coordination with the Western Allies (in particular the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Italy as well as the EU), particularly concerning the normalization dialogue with Serbia. This alignment fosters a stronger commitment from the US and the EU towards Kosovo, enhancing its international standing and support.

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2. **Normalization of Relations with Serbia:** Central to this scenario is the effective implementation of the Agreement on the Path to Normalization of Relations reached between Kosovo and Serbia in February 2023 in Brussels, and the corresponding implementation annex that was negotiated in Ohrid/North Macedonia in March of 2024. This includes Kosovo's unobstructed membership in any international organization with simultaneous steps towards the establishment of the Association/Community of Serb-majority Municipalities. A balanced sequencing of implementation is crucial for moving towards a legally binding agreement on the comprehensive normalization of relations, as stipulated in the agreement.

 3. **EU Recognition and Integration:** A central aspect in this scenario is the change in stance by the five EU member states that do not recognize Kosovo, leading to either their recognition of Kosovo's independence or at least a combination of some of them (Greece +) moving towards recognition and the rest (Cyprus and Spain) moving towards the current position of Greece towards Kosovo. With recognition of Kosovo passports, Spain has already moved towards a de-facto recognition or a constructive approach towards Kosovo. This change in position of the five EU non-recognizers is vital as is the ability of the EU to deliver it, and convincing the Kosovo government that they can. If Kosovo government believes the West can deliver this it would significantly strengthen Kosovo's incentives for further alignment and coordination with international partners.

 4. **Political Cohesion within Kosovo:** The scenario also emphasizes strong political cohesion within Kosovo, with the government effectively consulting and coordinating with all parliamentary political parties and civil society on issues of national interest, including the normalization dialogue with Serbia. This internal unity ensures wide support in the Kosovo Assembly for the government's direction and decisions, fostering a conducive environment for the successful implementation of agreements and normalization of relations with Serbia.

 5. **Kosovo's Perspective to NATO Membership Cleared:** Another significant development in this scenario is Kosovo establishing contractual relations with NATO, the technical process towards its membership being defined; and no NATO members obstructing this process. This step not only enhances Kosovo's security outlook but also solidifies its position within the Euro-Atlantic community, providing further stability and support for its democratic institutions and reform processes.

Outcome:

The "Integration and Consolidation" scenario represents a comprehensive path forward for Kosovo, characterized by stronger alignment with the West, improved relations with Serbia, and significant steps toward the EU and NATO integration, as well as other international organizations. This scenario not only enhances Kosovo's security and economic prospects but also solidifies its sovereignty and international recognition. This scenario shows the power of diplomacy, rationality, political cohesion, and strategic partnerships in overcoming regional challenges stemming from bilateral disputes. The successful realization of this scenario would not only mark a significant success for Kosovo, but it would also shape the progress of the Western Balkans towards regional and European integration.

WORST CASE SCENARIO: SURVIVAL MODE

In the scenario we call “Survival Mode,” the political and security situation in the Western Balkans, and especially in Kosovo, sees a significant decline. This downturn is primarily driven by a lack of synergy and cooperation between Kosovo’s government and the Western allies (quint countries). Additionally, there’s a noticeable decrease in the commitment of the Trans-Atlantic community (EU and US) to support the region’s European integration efforts and to resolve bilateral disputes or push to some kind of conclusion the normalization dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia that has been going since 2011. This shift stems from a growing weariness within the EU and key member states like France and Germany towards the region. Moreover, potential changes in the US administration’s priorities in 2025, with a potential new President and the rising influence of far-right populism within the EU further exacerbate the situation. In this scenario, the United States potentially removes the US troops from KFOR in a potential disagreement with the Kosovo government. In this scenario Kosovo’s perceived lack of constructive engagement with the West leads to new sanctions imposed against Kosovo, including from the United States during 2024, increasingly isolating Kosovo.

Scenario in Brief

- The Trans-Atlantic community has limited engagement with the Western Balkans and focuses fully on containment policy and maintaining status-quo rather than on sustainable resolution of bilateral disputes and integration of the region. Kosovo government displays a lack of confidence in the West and fails to align on normalization dialogue and other issues pertaining to efforts to integrate the Serbian community in Kosovo. There is no interest and/or willingness either from the Kosovo government or the West to implement effectively the Agreement on the Path to Normalisation of Relations between Kosovo and Serbia from February of 2023. Accordingly, the Association/Community of Serb-majority Municipalities nor the decision of the Constitutional Court on the Decani Monastery are not implemented.
- There are heightened ethnic tensions between Albanian and Serbian communities, with occasional acts of violence, especially in the north of Kosovo, where attacks on Kosovo Police are frequent. KFOR increase presence, but with no mandate to engage on policing the north. Serbian community increasingly looks towards separation of the north as a solution, and the idea gains momentum in the trans-atlantic community .
- The enlargement process for Serbia and Kosovo comes to a halt, further empowering authoritarian tendencies in Serbia and nationalism in Kosovo.

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- The five EU non-recognizers and Serbia continued to oppose Kosovo's independence. None of the Brussels agreements were fully implemented, while the parties continue to blame each other. Both countries struggle with unemployment, partocracy, and weak democracy. » Opposition to nationalistic narratives is almost non-existent. Incidents in Serb-majority areas in Kosovo, particularly in the north of Kosovo, and the Presevo Valley occur frequently. With tensions high and only a few voices advocating a negotiated solution, a new war seems only a spark away.

Key drivers of this scenario include:

1. **Political Shifts in the West:** The election of Donald Trump as President of the United States and the rise of far-right politicians and political parties within EU institutions and member states mark a significant shift. The empowerment of parties such as France's National Rally and Germany's Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) signals a broader populist and nationalist surge across the West, leading to a more isolationist and inward-looking stance. This shift results in a decreased political will to engage with the Western Balkans and push for their integration into the EU.
2. **Regional Implications:** For Kosovo, these political changes in the West exacerbate existing vulnerabilities. The lack of strong support from traditional allies leaves Kosovo isolated on the international stage. The scenario sees NATO/KFOR adopting a hands-off approach towards the north of Kosovo, treating it as a special security zone but refraining from backing Kosovo institutions. This emboldens Serbia to bolster illegal structures within Serbian communities across Kosovo, further undermining Kosovo's sovereignty and stability.
3. **Economic and Social Deterioration:** The scenario predicts a bleak economic outlook for Kosovo, characterized by a decline in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and exacerbated by increased restrictive measures against Kosovo by the EU. The economic downturn, coupled with political instability, drives a significant increase in migration from Kosovo to the EU, as individuals and families seek better prospects.
4. **Stalled EU Integration and International Isolation:** With the EU and its member states distracted by internal politics and less inclined to expand, Kosovo finds itself with no perspective for EU membership or broader international integration. This isolation feeds into a cycle of economic decline and social unrest.
5. **Serbia's Authoritarian Drift:** Concurrently, Serbia moves towards greater authoritarian rule, further destabilizing the region. This authoritarian consolidation in Serbia, coupled with the empowerment of illegal structures in Kosovo, raises tensions and increases the likelihood of conflict.
6. **Security and Stability in the north of Kosovo:** The north of Kosovo becomes a flashpoint for instability and potential violence. With NATO/KFOR's neutrality to the status of Kosovo as an independent country and the absence of effective integration of the Kosovo Serbs in the system in the area, the potential for unrest and conflict escalates.

7. **Shifting Focus Towards Albania:** In response to the isolation, Kosovo may look towards strengthening its ties with Albania, focusing on bilateral relations to counterbalance the lack of progress in broader international integration efforts. However this will depend on Albania's prospective stance on the developments.

8. **Threats for partition of the north of Kosovo or Border Adjustment:** The scenario leaves open the possibility of revisiting contentious proposals, such as border adjustments between Kosovo and Serbia (e.g., swapping the north of Kosovo for the Preshevo Valley). Such proposals, while aiming to break the deadlock, risk reigniting tensions and undermining the multilateral dialogue process. In this scenario, the division of northern Kosovo becomes a more probable outcome than the renegotiation or swapping of borders. The increasing tensions and violence in the north lead to regular confrontations with the Kosovo police. This situation escalates into Serbia implementing a "Little Green Men Scenario," effectively establishing a *fait accompli* in the north. As a response, NATO/KFOR steps in to establish a buffer zone to mitigate the conflict, but does not engage with the Serbian troops.

Outcome

In this "Survival Mode" scenario, the Western Balkans, and Kosovo in particular, face a confluence of internal and external pressures that exacerbate existing fault lines and lead to heightened instability. The lack of international support and regional cooperation, combined with economic decline and political isolation, sets the stage for a crisis with potential implications for both regional and European stability. The challenge for policymakers and stakeholders is to recognize and mitigate these risks before they escalate into a broader conflict.

BUSINESS AS USUAL: THE WAITING ROOM

The “Business as Usual” scenario, that we call the “Waiting Room,” depicts a stagnant period where minimal progress is made in the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, and broader regional integration efforts. This scenario is characterized by a lack of decisive action and ambition from both Kosovo government and the international partners, leading to a perpetuation of the status quo. In this scenario “no solution, is solution” becomes the unofficial policy of the EU and quint countries with respect to Kosovo-Serbia relations and the situation in the north of the country. The mandate of Miroslav Lajčák the EU Special Representative for the normalization dialogue, ends in August of 2024, and in a context where both Serbia and Kosovo do not seem willing to move in the right direction, his mandate will most likely not be extended.

Scenario in brief:

- Relations between Kosovo and Serbia, as well as between the Albanian and Serb populations in Kosovo, continue to be strained. Kosovo Serbs are also fragmented, in the north of Kosovo the Serbian community is not part of the institutions, with segments of the Serbian community in the south of Kosovo being formally part of Kosovo’s system, but Belgrade exerts influence over them through political and economic means.
- Miroslav Lajčák’s tenure will conclude in August 2024, with no extension granted nor a successor designated. After the European Parliament elections in June 2024, there is an increase in far-right parliamentarians, accompanied by the election of a new European Commission. This change potentially leads to a shift in focus, affecting the Western Balkans in general, but especially the normalization of relations process between Kosovo and Serbia.
- Disappointed with the sluggish progress in implementing agreements and the frequent failures to meet commitments by both Kosovo and Serbia, the EU has effectively imposed a suspension or a moratorium on resolving the dispute between the two countries. This in turn effectively halt the path to any meaningful progress for both Kosovo and Serbia in the European integration process, however with potentially more far-right leaning EU parliamentarians following the June 2024 elections, there is greater engagement with Serbia.
- Engagement between Kosovo and the European Union is not as robust and largely is characterized by low level. Furthermore, the 2024 elections in Kosovo bolster ethnocentric policies and leaders
- Public discourse in both Kosovo and Serbia has been dominated by government narratives that perpetuate ethnic animosity based on historical grievances.

Key drivers of this scenario include:

- 1. Stalled Normalization Dialogue:** The normalization dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia remains largely unproductive, with both sides and international mediators “kicking the can down the road” rather than achieving substantive progress. This stagnation is symptomatic of a broader reluctance to tackle the underlying issues head-on.
- 2. Full Containment Policy:** International actors, primarily the EU and the US, adopt a full containment policy aimed at preventing the situation from deteriorating but without actively pushing for a resolution. This approach reflects a lack of ambition and commitment to fully resolve the Kosovo-Serbia dispute and integrate the Western Balkans into the European and Atlantic structures.
- 3. Limited Implementation of Agreements:** Any agreements that are reached, such as the Agreement on the Path to Normalization (APN), see limited implementation or no implementation at all. The lack of progress is due in part to internal resistance, a lack of political will, and an absence of pressure from international partners to enforce these agreements.
- 4. Inward-Looking Domestic Politics:** Both Kosovo and Serbia, along with other regional actors, become more inward-looking, focusing on domestic politics and issues. This shift further sidelines the urgency of normalization and regional cooperation.
- 5. Democratic Deficits:** A significant backdrop to this scenario is the continued absence of democratic reforms in Serbia, which further complicates dialogue and normalization efforts. The lack of democracy in Serbia poses challenges not only to bilateral relations but also to the region’s overall stability and European integration prospects.

Outcome

The “Business as Usual” scenario signifies a period of prolonged uncertainty and inertia. The focus on containment rather than resolution, combined with limited ambition from international actors, contributes to a cyclical pattern of negotiations without meaningful progress. The emphasis on bilateral relations and internal politics over comprehensive regional strategies leads to missed opportunities for integration and development. In this scenario, Kosovo and Serbia, along with their regional neighbors, remain in a metaphorical “waiting room,” anticipating developments that might never materialize without a concerted effort to break the cycle of stagnation. The potential exploration of controversial solutions like border adjustments reflects a search for alternative pathways, albeit fraught with risks and uncertainties.

CONCLUSION

Looking ahead to 2028, Kosovo faces two divergent paths: one leading to enhanced statehood, and greater integration into the global community; the other towards a state of survival marked by isolation, polarization, fragmentation, and an impending economic crisis. Recent years have seen a strained relationship between the Kosovo Government and key international stakeholders. Actions taken by Kosovo institutions in the northern part of the country, while perhaps rational from a narrow perspective, have largely been met with strong criticism from both the EU and the US, who have pointed out that such actions exacerbate existing tensions. The Banjska terrorist attack, seemingly supported by key Serbian institutions and authorities, has somewhat clarified the international community's understanding of the security dynamics in the north and Serbia's apparent disinterest in progressing the dialogue. However, despite this clearer insight into Serbia's disruptive actions in the dialogue with Kosovo and its destabilizing activities, the international response towards Serbia has been notably milder than that towards Kosovo. Kosovo remains under EU sanctions, while to much of a surprise, the international community has yet to take similar action against Serbia. Clearly, the main reason for this comparably different attitude of the international community towards Kosovo is related to the wider geopolitical situation, rather than a lack of interest in the Banjska terrorist attack. Nevertheless, the quint countries and especially the EU should have thought about promptly lifting the restrictive measures against Kosovo, maintaining its balance with both parties, given its role as a mediator in the dialogue. However, this has not happened so far.

Hence, taking into consideration these broader geopolitical implications surrounding the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, it is imperative for the Kosovo Government to approach its actions with greater mindfulness. The Government needs to adopt a wider perspective when strategizing and undertaking its steps. It needs to be cautious with its tactical choices to avoid being perceived by the international community as instigators, rather than problem solvers tackling the real issues faced by Kosovo Serbs, particularly in the northern part of Kosovo. In this sense, the Government should work harder in changing the perception that has often been linked with it up to this point.

The clock is ticking for Kosovo and the region, especially with critical elections on the horizon in June for the European Parliament and in November for the US Presidency. The anticipated results of these elections could unfavorably impact Kosovo's standing on the international stage. To mitigate these risks, the Kosovo government must act swiftly to implement measures that will facilitate the Serbian community's fuller integration within Kosovo. This means taking several important steps, such as holding new municipal elections in the four northern Kosovo municipalities as soon as possible; starting to implement the Agreement on the Path to Normalization of Relations in full, including the points that have been problematized so far, such as forming the Association of Serb-majority Municipalities according to the

Constitutional Court's decision, and following the Constitutional Court of Kosovo's ruling on the Deçani Monastery. These actions are not only crucial for Kosovo's immediate future but also for its long-term aspirations for EU and NATO membership.

The alternative presents a grim prospect. Should tensions in the north of Kosovo continue unabated, the West might eventually consider other less conventional options in the coming years. Furthermore, if Kosovo government continues with rushed and immature behaviors that have been problematic at times, may seriously risk jeopardizing the support of its most crucial ally, the United States. Already, there have been several public statements from senior US officials underlining the dissatisfaction with unilateral behavior of the Kosovo government, risking deterioration of existing mutual relationship which is essential for Kosovo beyond current Government's tenure.

For Kosovo, maintaining a strong partnership with the United States is not just a matter of foreign policy preference but a fundamental national interest. This is a stance that enjoys broad consensus across Kosovo's political landscape. The potential loss of US support would not only diminish Kosovo's strategic position but also weaken its ability to navigate regional challenges and pursue its aspirations for statehood and integration into the international democratic community.

In light of these stakes, it is imperative for Kosovo to undertake a strategic recalibration of its approach and change course. Strengthening ties with the United States and aligning more closely with Western expectations should be prioritized, because this means strengthening, and not weakening Kosovo's statehood.

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About KCSS

Established in April 2008, the Kosovar Center for Security Studies (KCSS) is a specialized, independent, and non-governmental organization. The primary goal of KCSS is to promote the democratization of the security sector in Kosovo and to improve research and advocacy work related to security, the rule of law, and regional and international cooperation in the field of security.

KCSS aims to enhance the effectiveness of the Security Sector Reform (SSR) by supporting SSR programs through its research, events, training, advocacy, and direct policy advice.

Advancing new ideas and social science methods are also core values of the centre. Every year, KCSS publishes numerous reports, policy analysis and policy briefs on security-related issues. It also runs more than 200 public events including conferences, roundtables, and debates, lectures – in Kosovo, also in collaboration with regional and international partners.

A wide-range of activities includes research, capacity-building, awareness raising and advocacy. KCSS's work covers a wide range of topics, including but not limited to security sector reform and development, identifying and analyzing security risks related to extremism, radicalism, and organized crime, foreign policy and regional cooperation, and evaluating the rule of law in Kosovo.

This year, KCSS celebrated its 15th Anniversary. For more details about KCSS, you can check on the following official platforms:



www.qkss.org
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