

**YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON WESTERN BALKANS
SECURITY – WBSB 2023 ESSAY SELECTION
BY STUDENTS FROM KOSOVO, SERBIA, AND
ALBANIA**



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The data presented in the report derive from the Western Balkans Security Barometer (WBSB) survey. WBSB is a new regional initiative launched by KCSS in 2020, implemented in cooperation with the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP) in Serbia and Center for the Study of Democracy and Governance (CSDG) in Albania, supported by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). WBSB serves as an instrument to measure public perceptions in Albania, Kosovo and Serbia on different security-related issues. The findings demonstrate how citizens percept or are informed about the issues presented in this report. As such, the views presented in this report do not necessarily represent the views of the KCSS, BCSP, CSDG or NED.

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About WBSB

The Western Balkans Security Barometer (WBSB) is a new regional initiative launched by KCSS in 2020, as a successor of KCSS's program Kosovo Security Barometer implemented in Kosovo for eight consecutive years. WBSB serves as an instrument to measure public perceptions in Albania, Kosovo and Serbia. The project focuses on a wide range of security, rule of law, justice, regional cooperation and peacebuilding issues and identifies various existing and emerging threats and challenges as perceived by the citizens of the three countries. The overall goal of the project is to utilize the public perception measurement into a credible accountability seeking and advocacy instrument, capable of positively influencing the trajectory of the key domestic and regional security, foreign policy and rule of law developments in the Western Balkans countries. Furthermore, the project aims to facilitate the regional cooperation and the rapprochement of WB societies by exposing, addressing, and combating inter-cultural stereotypes by providing concrete measurable and credible data in relevant topics. The project is led by KCSS and implemented jointly with Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP), and Center for the Study of Democracy and Governance (CSDG).

About the WBSB 2023 Essay Competition

The Western Balkans Security Barometer (WBSB) organized a competitive essay competition, drawing participation from numerous talented students and researchers in Kosovo, Albania, and Serbia. Recognizing the importance of fostering research and academic development, the competition offered the students the opportunity to develop their skills in quantitative research and research methodology through two training sessions. The training equipped participants with the necessary tools to further tackle complex security issues and present their findings in an essay format.

Following the training, the participants submitted their essays. Our teams evaluated and scored each submission, considering the depth of analysis, style, originality of thought, and adherence to research methodology. After careful review, the top three essays from each partner country were selected for publication in this joint document. By bringing together these outstanding contributions, we aim to create a valuable resource that offers diverse perspectives and stimulates meaningful discussions on regional security challenges. **It is worth noting that the views expressed in these essays are solely those of the participants and do not necessarily represent the views of KCSS, BCSP, CSDG, or NED.**

1. WHY CITIZENS OF KOSOVO ARE SO STRONG SUPPORTERS OF THE INTEGRATION OF COUNTRY INTO NATO?

Blenda Asllani

Introduction

NATO's purpose is to guarantee political and military security for member states, so new states have a constant tendency to join. This essay addresses the question: Why citizens of Kosovo are so strong supporters of the integration of country into NATO? I was prompted to address this question by the high percentage of positive responses in the Security Barometer for the Western Balkans (2021) to the question: Do you support your country's membership in NATO?

DO YOU SUPPORT YOUR COUNTRY'S MEMBERSHIP IN NATO,

I don't know/no opinion	0.3%
Yes	99.5%
No	0.2%



The methodology used to compose this essay is literature review (methodological review and context review). This essay presents an overview of my perspective regarding the overwhelming support that the citizens of Kosovo have towards Kosovo's NATO membership. The flow of this essay will be as follows: Introduction, NATO, function and member countries, Republic of Kosovo relations with NATO, Relations of Kosovo citizens with NATO, Kosovo's challenges towards membership in NATO, Conclusions and Bibliography.

NATO, function and member countries

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was established in 1949 that consists of 31 member states from Europe and North America; it was created to safeguard the people and territory of its members. "The purpose of NATO is to guarantee the freedom and security of its members through political and military means" (NATO, 2001).

According to the NATO Manual (2001), political means promotes democratic values and enables members to consult and cooperate on defense and security-related issues to solve problems, build trust and, in the long run, prevent conflict. Whereas, with military means is committed to the peaceful resolution of disputes. If diplomatic efforts fail, it has the military power to undertake crisis-management operations.

NATO member states (ordered according to the year of membership) are: Belgium; Canada; Denmark; France; Iceland; Italy; Luxembourg; The Netherlands; Norway; Portugal; United Kingdom; United States of America; Greece; Turkey; Germany; Spain; the Czech Republic; Hungary; Poland; Bulgaria; Estonia; Latvia; Lithuania; Romania; Slovakia; Slovenia; Albania; Croatia; Montenegro; North Macedonia and Finland.

The relation between Republic of Kosovo and NATO

The first contact of Kosovo with NATO was in 1999. "NATO has been leading a peace-support operation in Kosovo since June 1999 in support of wider international efforts to build peace and stability in the area" (NATO, 2022). KFOR was established when NATO's 78-day air campaign against Milosevic's regime. "KFOR's original objectives were to deter renewed hostilities, establish a secure environment and ensure public safety and order, demilitarize the Kosovo Liberation Army, support the international humanitarian effort and coordinate with the international civil presence." (NATO, 2022). According to NATO's official website, today around 3,800 troops provided by 27 countries help fulfill KFOR's objectives.

The Republic of Kosovo, as well as its citizens, since the humanitarian intervention in 1999, have a very sublime and special relationship with NATO, we can see this in practice when Kosovo was declared an independent and sovereign state in 2008, and in the same year it approved a plan for membership in NATO. Since then, Kosovo has made continuous efforts to join NATO, but despite the progress made, due to frequent political tensions, it has not yet managed to join. Although high-ranking officials and former NATO officials often literally say that we will not be able to join without the final resolution of political problems, such was the case with former KFOR General Ehad Bühler on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of Kosovo's independence, who, when asked about his opinion

regarding Kosovo's membership in NATO, told Ekonomika Online:

"I want to give you an honest answer. It will most likely happen only when a final political solution is found. Remember that we still have countries in NATO that have not recognized Kosovo."

Integration into NATO continues to remain a strong aspiration, however there are 3 main problems that hinder this path: 1. Some NATO member states have not recognized Kosovo independence yet; 2. NATO still refers to the state of Kosovo based on Resolution 1244 of the United Nations Security Council; 3. Political instability and non-recognition by the Republic of Serbia.

However, in an informal way, Kosovo continues to have cooperation with NATO member countries (e.g. the USA), while regarding the formal aspect the authors Maliqi and Qehaja (2020) stated:

"Kosovo's only achievement with NATO was in an exchange of letters in 2015 between NATO Secretary Stoltenberg and former Prime Minister Mustafa. This exchange of letters established a narrow framework of interaction between NATO and Kosovo, which is framed in areas such as: emergency response, building integrity, study visits, etc. This interaction as such has limitations and was almost only implemented in the first two years".

Kosovo maintains the status of "Provisional Committed Partner of NATO" and continues to remain committed to the work towards progressive advancement towards fulfilling the terms for integration.

Kosovo citizens relations with NATO

Citizens of Kosovo maintain a relationship of trust with NATO and its allies, and constantly glorify NATO's role in ending the armed conflict in Kosovo in 1999. According to the survey of Security Barometer for the Western Balkans, 99.5% of Kosovo's citizens support Kosovo's membership in NATO. In my view, this high percentage is not only related to the sentimental relationship we have with NATO, but to some extent it is also a consequence of the ongoing political tensions between Kosovo and Serbia, with special emphasis on the permanent tension in the north of Kosovo, e.g. after the recent tensions, we have experienced a period during which the idea of escalating the conflict into an armed war was constantly used in the public discourse of the state leaders of both countries. All this is after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which shocked humanitarian law and the whole world, certainly there was no way but to arouse fear among people whose memories of the war were still fresh. Therefore, firstly, the support comes from the need for security, namely the belief that NATO support would provide security in the state of Kosovo, which continues to be in the process of institutional consolidation. Secondly, the provision of political and military security would be a source of prosperity, because it would attract foreign investors to invest in Kosovo, consequently influencing economic growth. Thirdly, Kosovo's integration into NATO would inevitably help the process of integration into the structures of the European Union. And finally, but not least, Kosovo's integration into NATO would contribute the most to maintaining peace

and stability in the region and perhaps even serve as an impetus for dialogue between the Balkan countries.

Kosovo's challenges towards membership in NATO

As I have mentioned some of them so far, Kosovo is still in a not very promising phase in relation to NATO integration. Article 10 of the Washington Treaty, which states, regulates the requirements for membership in NATO: "the parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty".

However, I will continually list some of the main challenges that today Kosovo encounters on the way to NATO integration:

1. Kosovo is still in a situation of political instability, with an obvious lack of territorial sovereignty in the north of Kosovo;
2. Kosovo still remains a disputed independence because it has not been formally or informally recognized by the country, Republic of Serbia, from which it was separated after the armed conflict;
3. Kosovo is not yet recognized by Russia, China and 5 member countries of the European Union: Spain, Slovakia, Cyprus, Romania and Greece. "The biggest obstacle is the fact that NATO

continues to have a neutral if not passive approach in formal relations regarding cooperation with Kosovo, due to the fact that four NATO countries still do not recognize Kosovo and to be a member of NATO must necessarily be after full consensus, at least there should be no votes against", says the director of the Kosovo Center for Security Studies, Mentor Vrajolli (2020) for the Voice of America), as well as the authors of the text "Kosovo's membership process in NATO II", Maliqi A. and Qehaja F. state: "Overcoming the existing political barriers for non-recognition by 4 NATO states would nominally lead to the opening of the path for Kosovo's membership in NATO".

4. NATO maintains a neutral position towards Kosovo, and still refers to it based on resolution 1244 of the United Nations Security Council.;
5. Potential growing influence of China and Russia in the Western Balkans.

Nevertheless, can we anticipate the scenarios that could potentially happen, speeding up the integration process or enabling immediate integration? Of course, this question is complex and would be very problematic to answer, but we assume potential solutions that would help in that respect. Such could be: reforms in the justice system, contributing to the independent judiciary in particular; deep anti-corruption reforms; recruitment and involvement of experienced diplomats in the process; the normalization of Kosovo-Serbia relations; the increase of professional lobbying in countries that still do not recognize independence, etc. Firstly, as mentioned above, Kosovo, although a non-member

country, has close cooperation with the Euro-Atlantic allies, especially the United States of America in the field of military and security, and secondly, the history of NATO integration has shown many encouraging and inspiring examples, countries which for various reasons have been integrated with a swift and exceptional procedure, for example the case of the membership of Greece or Turkey (1952).

Conclusions

The statistics of the Security Barometer for the Western Balkans incited me to write this essay, through the facts on the relationship that the Republic of Kosovo has in the formal aspect and its citizens in the informal aspect with NATO and the challenges that Kosovo has on the way to NATO integration, asserts that the citizens of Kosovo almost unanimously support their country's membership in NATO, but, Kosovo's membership in NATO depends on negotiations and a potential agreement between the Republic of Kosovo and of Serbia and recognition by non-recognizing countries, which are members of NATO, the very achievement of these recognitions would pave the way towards the integration of Kosovo in both the European Union and NATO. This goal should continue to remain an unspoken aspiration as deeply embedded in our historical, political and security context, thus a potential agreement between Kosovo and Serbia would result in recognition by non-recognizing countries and integration into NATO. However, the citizens of Kosovo continue to demonstrate strong support for Kosovo membership into NATO, due to security, prosperity, European integration and maintaining peace and stability in the Balkan region.

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2. DOES DIGITALIZATION POSITIVELY AFFECT THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF CITIZENS TOWARDS PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS?

Rita Zhubi

Introduction

By the rapid development of technology, the process of digitization of services and access to information, whether public, private or governmental, has begun. Digitization is a process that aims to convert information into digital format by means of computers and the Internet. Today, digitalization impacts every area of life and has advanced to levels of performing services but not only providing data. In the public aspect, this has made the institutions to be more accessible, transparent and efficient in the work they do. This positively affected on the increase of the citizens' trust towards them. On the other hand, the effect of digitalization can cause concern in case of misuse of data, influence the progress of corruption and be a cause of information overload, which affects the decrease of security and trust in public institutions.

This essay is divided into three parts, each of which deals with an area where digitization affects reliability.

The first part discusses access to information and the importance of the source of information. **The second part** focuses on services and their efficiency, giving specific examples for Kosovo, while **the third part** discusses how digitalization has influenced the increase in citizen participation through different platforms.

Digitization has transformed the procedure of the function of public institutions, communication and interaction with citizens. This process is part of the medium-term strategy 2015-2020, but even today, many services and legislation intended for implementation are missing. The Kosovo eGovernment Strategy 2023-2027 focuses on attain the digital agenda for 2030 in the transformation of Kosovo in the field of digitalization.

Access to information

Digitization enables us to access information more easily. The design of websites and databases enables individuals to follow back the latest news, updates and chronicles through digital means by accessing the Internet. Initially, I will focus on the level of digitization that municipalities use, starting with websites. The websites of the municipalities are updated on daily basis and the new ones are released for use in social networks managed by the latter. To relate it to the issue of reliability, if we analyze the data in the barometer on the question of how much citizens trust the municipalities in general, we see that the level of trust is satisfactory, so this coincides with the high level of digitalization that they use.

Within the North Mitrovica Municipality, we have 50% of the answers that citizens do not trust it at all (Security Barometer, 2021) and if we search on Google the website of this municipality, we see that it is not functional and there is no posted information despite the fact that it exists as a domain and is operable. We cannot say that the website is the only factor related to trustworthiness, but considering that trust in the media is low, and based on the data in the barometer, then online information remains key for informing.

Another example is the low level of trust in the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption (ibid) whose website was updated with news for the first time in January 2022 and for the last time in December of the same year. The Agency for the Prevention of Corruption uses Facebook for various and sometimes daily updates regarding asset declaration in the form of statistics. However, not all individuals use social networks and when they want

to be informed about the work of a state institution, they go to the website and not to Facebook. Facebook can go out of business or encountering troubleshoots for a period of time as it often does and institutions remain heavily dependent on it. The website remains the main source of information and the first destination where citizens approach to be updated about the work of the institutions, which then dictates the credibility they have towards them. Social networks are loaded with non-credible details, fake news, news from showbiz and the very presentation of data on this platform gives a different format to the information. If we talk about reaching wider audience, social networks are quite favorable, but statistical data and information about work processes must necessarily be available on websites where the option of changing the language is also available for easier access to other social groups. Therefore, social networks should be complementary and not essential when it comes to information about public institutions.

However, access on many sources of information does not always positively affect the trustworthiness of citizens. This can be observed if we analyze the trustworthiness towards political parties. Political parties have an up-to-date website and practically they use all social media to promote their work. However, analyzing the statistics of the barometer for the year 2021, we observe low reliability towards these political entities. In reference to the question of how much do you trust political parties, it can be observed that with the answer "I have no trust at all" young citizens rated it with a higher percentage, while with aged persons this lack of confidence declines. Within the age group of 25-35 years, 50% answered that they do not trust political parties at all, while up to the age group of 65+ this percentage

drops to 31.4%. The reason for this trend is that with the mounting of information sources, individuals are overloaded with information and a kind of confusion is placed, especially when it comes to forming a personal opinion. This overload is often accompanied by biased or false information, which creates mistrust. Whereas for an individual who is informed from only one source of information, for instance a news report on television, the reliability should be higher. So, if we assume that older people use less of these alternative sources of information, then trustworthiness in political parties is related to "excessive" exposure about their work on other platforms.

Services and efficiency

Let's go back again with the municipalities, but this time in regards to the trustworthiness towards their administration. The administration of the municipalities in the Republic of Kosovo has been appraised with a high level of trust by the citizens due to the many offered online services and their efficiency. Administrations mostly use electronic services to meet citizens' demands through online platforms such as **e-Kosova**. This platform enables a large number of administrative procedures to be carried out online, hereupon saving time and costs. Some of the services provided by are related to civil status, tax, police, application for grants, subsidies, etc. In addition, it is equipped with the possibility to submit requests or complaints and information about the sectors of the state and the relevant links.

Around 54% of citizens responded with "I trust" or "I completely trust" the work

performed by municipal administrations (ibid 2022). Therefore, the services are efficient, time-saving and affordable, as well as positively affecting the trust of citizens.

Additionally, another digital service is the introduction of **E-kiosk**, which enables automatic issuance of Certificates, saving time and shortening waiting time at queue lines. Through this service, citizens are offered with up to 5 different certificates at the same price and for a shorter time, with a service that is offered 24 hours a day. The long queues at the counters have been replaced with a type of coin-operated machine that issues the certificate like a coffee vendor machine. This improvement in the service qualities further boost the trust that citizens have in these institutions. Digital services produce less error because the automated system can perform tasks with more precision and consistency, thus shortening the possibility of errors.

The public administration report for 2016, assessed that citizens have regained trust towards public institutions due to increased transparency and easier access to municipal services. UNDP has commended the municipality of Pristina with acknowledgment for the action against corruption as a result of the implementation of the **"Open Data"** platform. This platform enables the visualization of data and raising the level of transparency in the Municipality of Pristina.

Certainly, these benefits run in hand with the risk that citizens may not see the services as reliable or accessible due to their complexity. The online application in a way has penalized the age group over 70 years old who do not have the proper skills to explore these platforms, but they simply depend on the assistance provided by a second person. Citizens may see these services as a threat to

the protection of their data. The survey carried out by Blank and Dutton (2012), states that trust is a factor that is closely related to privacy concerns and that older people trust the Internet less than younger people. So, digitalization can shorten trust if citizens feel that their data is not protected or that their privacy is being violated, thus it can affect the reduction or boycott of these services.

Citizens' Participation

Digitization helps in rise of citizens' participation in decision-making processes. When citizens are engaged in processes that affect their lives, greater trustworthiness takes place towards the relevant institutions.

In recent years, many new platforms have been created that enable the participation of individuals in state processes. One of these is the platform for public consultations, which enables citizens or other actors such as: civil society or businesses to be involved in the process of policy-making and decision-making in the public interest, as well as enhancing the transparency and accountability of public bodies towards interested parties and the public. When individuals see that their opinions are heard and that they have an influence on the decisions that are adopted, they will consequently trust the institutions that are making these decisions.

Another digital platform is the one for public participation that offers citizens online access and the opportunity to propose projects for their neighborhoods and cast the vote for the realization of these projects. In terms of platforms for inclusiveness, the lobbying necessary

for their wider promotion seems to be lacking.

Although digitalization is promoting higher participation, it reduces the physical contact between public officials and citizens, which can negatively affect the rate of trust. The physical presence of officials can contribute to increasing the institution's credibility. This view is supported by the phenomenon that during electoral campaigns, candidates running for power always meet with citizens through visits, gatherings or participation in activities to increase their credibility in front of voters.

On the other hand, the lack of physical contact prevents the possibility of giving bribes and favoring relatives while waiting in queue lines at the counters. So, this attribute gives mixed results.

Conclusions

The relationship between digitalization and trustworthiness in institutions is complex.

Kosovo is still facing challenges in building trust in institutions. Digitalization has the potential to increase credibility in institutions by providing access to information and promoting citizen participation, but on the other hand, it can reduce trust if verbal communication is decreased and data security is compromised.

Enhanced transparency, accountability, access and involvement of citizens in local government are just some of the advantages of digitalization of services offered by institutions.

Access to information enhances the credibility that is presented best with the cases of municipalities. But in the case of political parties, the information

factor produces a low level of trust. It is important to analyze the source of the information as in the case of the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption.

Of course, citizens' opinions regarding trust in institutions are also related to their efficiency and performance. If digitalization enhance the efficiency of services as discussed above and increased efficiency increases reliability, then there is also a connection between digitalization and increased reliability.

The participation of citizens increases trust in institutions because they are engaged and involved in decision-making processes. If they are contributing in decision making and the effect of this is apparent, they will also increase trust in pro-active institutions.

Every strategy, project and legislation, aiming to develop the electronic system, correspondingly mentions the increase of the security factor which protects these services. Through the improvement of the legal framework for digitalization, the focus on data security is also growing and the provision of services and information to the public is being improved. Thus, digitalization can have a positive and relatively negative impact on the credibility towards public institutions, depending on how the system is implemented and managed.

Digitization has had a positive effect on increasing credibility and the only way for citizens to benefit more from this process and prove its efficiency is if the path towards advancement, development and improvement of services continues in the future.

3. DO THE CITIZENS OF KOSOVO WANT PEACE BETWEEN KOSOVO AND SERBIA?

Isra Bunjaku

The citizens of Kosovo want peace between Kosovo and Serbia?

The end of the armed conflict between Kosovo and Serbia in 1999 and the declaration of Kosovo's independence in 2008, although they should have been major steps towards achieving peace between the two neighboring countries, tensions and disagreements between them continue even in the year 2023.

During this time, through international mediators, there have been many discussions, proposals, agreements and conflicts of various natures, such as the non-recognition of Kosovo by Serbia, the inclusion of Kosovo in the constitution of Serbia, the north of Kosovo, the Serbian minority in Kosovo and the Albanian minority in Serbia, the trade sanctions and so on which have become an obstacle on reaching a final solution between the two states and above all their integration into the European Union. The main question is under what conditions will Serbia recognize Kosovo, and the latter under what compromise will act?

In addition to the government actors of as the key actors in this process, there is no doubt that citizens have also had their impact on the improvement or deterioration of relations between countries. The citizens of Kosovo, as the most affected by this situation due to the war, have marked more progress in increasing awareness of the importance of inter-ethnic cooperation and establishing peace for the common good. Civil society and many non-governmental organizations on both sides strive to influence the improvement

of relations and increase cooperation among citizens through various programs, correspondingly the European Union, as a facilitator in the dialogue, constantly calls on both countries to stabilize relations both at the governments and citizens level .

Among the negative consequences in social life due to the failure to reach an agreement between the two governments is the migration of citizens, especially in areas where we have a mixture of ethnicities that have remained less economically developed, where as a result young people do not see prospects in that country , then the non-liberalization of visas for Kosovo, an obstacle to integration in the UN and many other multinational organizations which bring many opportunities and open new paths towards integration in the Euro-Atlantic world. Although the final agreement has not yet been reached, dialogue continues to be a priority for governments and a very important topic for the media and public opinion.

Citizens of both countries support the dialogue despite the fact that they see it from different perspectives. The survey results of the study of the Kosovo Center for Security Studies (KCSS) as part of the Security Barometer in the Western Balkans in 2021, says that: "While the majority of Kosovo citizens believe that the purpose of dialogue is mutual recognition within existing borders (77%), in Serbia there is a perception that the purpose of this process is to return Kosovo to Serbia with wider autonomy (48%)". The data of this survey show us that the citizens of Kosovo are more optimistic in this process where (48.9%) think that the dialogue process is going in the right way, while the citizens of Serbia (47.9%) think the opposite, also both sides think more than reaching a final agreement will not happen in the near future (1-2 years). In the question: Do you think there is potential for a new war between Kosovo and Serbia, there

were big differences of opinion, where the majority of respondents from Kosovo (45.2%) answered that it is not likely at all, while the majority of respondents from Serbia (44.6%) think that it has little potential.

For the fact that there are big differences in the perceptions and perspectives of Albanian and Serbian citizens is confirmed in the question: Do you support the integration of your country into NATO, where (92.3%) of the respondents from Kosovo support it, while (83.4%) of the Serbian respondents do not support it.

Both the leaders and the majority of the citizens hereto are aware of the obstacle and isolation that is being caused to the countries due to their unsettled relations, this issue has become one of the main reasons for the pessimism of the citizens and their migration. But apart from that, nationalistic feelings and negative thinking about each other is still unfaded. This was expressed by the citizens of Kosovo through this survey in the question of how safe you feel traveling in Serbia where most of them (68.8%) answered that they feel unsafe, also in the question of what influence Serbia has in your country (82.7%) of Kosovar respondents answered that it has an extremely negative impact. (Kosovo Center for Security Studies, 2021).

The ethnic issue has been the core of the country's disputes over the years, especially in the north of the country, where there have been several unrests or hybrid war, as experts in international relations and security call it, but they do not see that the conflict can take military dimensions. According to the professor of international relations, Dritero Arifi "We can have tension or hybrid war only in the north part. Thus, a terrorist attacks against the police might take place, disobedience of Serbian civilians to the central institutions, sabotage, etc. A general unrest of the north of Kosovo can occur, and I think that

Serbia is only interested in this, feasibly in order to achieve some advantages in the dialogue process with aim get something more in the north of Kosovo" (Nacionale, 2022).

Whereas the Turkish political scientist Gamze Bal in her article within the Ankara Center for Crisis and Political Studies (ANKASAM), claims that the West is trying to start a civil war between Serbia and Kosovo in order to open a new front against Russia. "The West, on the other hand, does not want an ethnic conflict between Serbia and Kosovo in terms of its regional and global interests and tries to prevent Russia from being active in the region through Serbia, which has influence over Kosovo Serbs, by exercising restraint. For this reason, the West emphasizes the need for dialogue between the parties and states that the presence of KFOR is important both in terms of protecting the rights of Kosovo Serbs and preventing Serbian forces from entering Kosovo. It is also claimed that Russia wants to distract the West's attention from Ukraine by creating problems in the Balkans." (ANKASAM, 2022). So, the Albanian-Serbian conflict is also affected by the war between the external allies that are involved in the conflict.

The dispute as appears is not only diplomatic, over the years it has attracted many other issues, confusing people and even creating two opposite perceptions and two different stories. The article published on the BalkanInsight platform shows that according to a research conducted by the Belgrade University Center for Peace Studies, Serbian and Albanian children in Kosovo learn different versions of the same version of history, both of which are biased and inaccurate. "There is no direct violence and conflict between ethnic Serbs and Albanians [in Kosovo], but we are far from reconciliation. When you look at the history texts you see polar opposite views," says Goran Tepsic,

3. Do the citizens of Kosovo want peace between Kosovo and Serbia?

one of the researchers at the Centre for Peace Studies. Tepsic noted that one of the biggest curiosities of the research was the way that Albanians and Serbs use the same words to describe each other – accusing each other of being violent, robbers, and discriminator. According to research, Albanian textbooks have five times more stereotypes than Serbian ones, and with this kind of history teaching both sides are only legitimizing violence and conflict. The main difference is that “Serbian books describe Kosovo and Metohija as their holy land, where Serbs were the majority throughout history until they were expelled by the Ottomans and Albanian. Albanians textbooks say that their biggest enemies are Slavic people or as the textbooks describe it “their united chauvinistic neighbors “. Serbs are seen as the invaders, dictators and the nation that always terrorized the Albanians t.” (BalkanInsight, 2012).

This proves that the solution is not simply the signing of a formal and diplomatic agreement, it must incorporate a greater social will, bring about a change in the education and awareness of the citizens so that it really works. Regardless of the many efforts of actors trying to resolve relations between communities, if this nationalist and speculative history continues to be passed down through the next generations, the solution seems distant.

Although change takes time and depends on very complex factors, a possible solution is offered in an article on the BalkanInsight platform by journalist Milan Radonjic who claims that Kosovo Serbs and Albanians should speak each other’s language as a way to improve communication and trust between them. Ha says “What is needed is a bridge between the communities, and the best way to build it is by learning each other’s language. It is remarkable how few young people in the Albanian and Serb communities today understand

each other’s mother tongue. This has to change in order to start rebuilding what was destroyed during the war, but also in the years before it broke out.”. He qualifies the north of Mitrovica as the area where relations between communities can be built, suggesting that a language institute should be opened there. “This way, the two sides of the river would become closer and the bridge over the Ibar easier to cross, connected by young people who are willing to learn something positive about their neighbors, instead of those who only want to profit from the status quo”. (BalkanInsight, 2018).

The lack of citizen interaction, internal political actors, nationalism and social stereotypes are considered to be some of the internal factors that prevent the achievement of a final solution, but the political will of external allies is also seen as massive and most important factors in this process, as it plays the key role in the development of negotiations and promises the future of both countries. Although, with all the entanglements within the communities, part of the reason for the non-stabilization of relations after so many years can also be attributed to the international facilitators of this dialogue, or rather the European Union, which for the Senior policy fellow with the Program for Wider Europe in the Council European for Foreign Relations, Engjëllushe Morinën, the European Union still risks offering too little to each sides, she thinks that more can be done in this direction with a greater political will through cooperation with the public and citizens offering a clear perspective for the Western Balkans. “The experience of Russia’s war on Ukraine shows that it is possible for the EU to reach consensus on issues of political importance for it, if the political will is there. EU leaders should work to muster the same unity for the Western Balkans”. She thinks that a good idea would be to create an Albanian-Serbian institute, similar to that which

promoted Franco-German reconciliation after the end of the Second World War. "Real peace will require change in Serbia, although little of this is directly in the gift of EU policymakers". (EUROPEAN COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS, 2023).

Although both countries may want peace and work for it, but the problem is that in different ways and with completely opposite convictions, each state is defending its own arguments, which have created an unusual and difficult situation to be resolved even by international mediators.

The foreign policy of countries and the European Union have their own important tasks and their role is inevitable in guiding public opinion and determining the future of both countries. While the role of citizens

and civil society remains the cooperation among themselves, the exchange of cultural and educational ideas, common attractions and the change of educational curricula so that young people are educated about the importance of creating a global society.

The fact that both countries have a clear aim towards integration in the European Union should divert leaders and citizens from nationalist perspectives, dedicate themselves to the creation of democratic and transparent institutions for the common good, a long-standing conflict seems will take a long time to be resolved with an agreement satisfactory to both parties.

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4. WHAT ARE THE CHANGES IN THE TRUST OF CITIZENS OF KOSOVO AND SERBIA IN EUROPEAN INTEGRATION?

Eris Hasanaj

Introduction

The process of European integration is highly dependent on the support and trust of citizens in countries seeking membership. This is in particular for the countries of the Western Balkans, such as Kosovo and Serbia, where citizens' attitudes towards European integration have been influenced by a complex set of economic, political and social factors. This essay will examine changes in citizens' trust in Kosovo and Serbia towards the European integration process based on data from the Security Barometer survey conducted by the Kosovo Center for Security Studies.

The essay will cover by providing a brief overview of attitudes towards European Union (EU) integration in Kosovo and Serbia. Then will continue exploring and analyzing data from the Security Barometer survey to provide insights into citizens' current attitudes towards European integration and any tendency that have emerged over time in both countries. Furthermore, the essay will explore various factors that shape citizens' attitudes towards European integration, relying on existing research and theoretical frameworks. This will provide a deeper understanding of the complex interactions between economic, political and social factors that contribute to citizens' perceptions of the EU and its integration process.

In summary, this essay aims to contribute to the ongoing academic and political discourse on the process of European integration. By examining citizens' attitudes towards the EU in Kosovo and Serbia, the Security Barometer aims for this essay to provide new insights into the factors that shape these attitudes and to offer recommendations for policymakers and researchers seeking to promote greater trust and support for the

European integration process in these countries.

The attitudes of the two states towards EU integration

The Balkan region has encountered significant political and social changes in the last two decades, marked by the end of the war in Kosovo and subsequent efforts towards reconciliation and integration. Following the start of another chapter, Kosovo and Serbia expressed positive attitudes towards the perspective of EU integration. This optimism was rooted in the belief that EU membership would promote economic development, political stability and security in the region. The EU offered Kosovo and Serbia the prospect of increased trade, foreign investment and access to European markets. Furthermore, EU membership was seen as a path to facilitate the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, with the hope that this would help resolve some of the longstanding disputes between the two countries and also in the near future offer a final solution. However, progress towards EU membership was running slow and citizens' attitudes towards integration have changed over time.

The prospect of EU membership was also seen as a way to promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law in both Kosovo and Serbia. There was a feeling that the EU represented a beacon of liberal and democratic values and that EU membership would help transform the political culture in the Balkan region. This was seen as important in both countries, where the presence of organized crime and high levels of corruption had left

many citizens disappointed with political processes. Another important factor driving support for EU integration is the eagerness for political stability and security. Both Kosovo and Serbia have experienced periods of war rather than stability, and EU membership is seen as a way to anchor the region in a broader network of democratic and peaceful states. (Greiçevci et al., 2007) This involves promoting democratic values such as human rights and the rule of law, which are seen as essential to building a sustainable and just society. (Baracani, 2020) However, over the time, the high hopes and optimism for EU integration in Kosovo and Serbia have been tempered by a number of factors. In particular, slow progress towards EU membership has contributed to frustration in both countries. In Kosovo, the final agreement with Serbia and the lack of reforms necessary for EU membership have led to the stagnation of the country's progress towards membership. In Serbia, membership negotiations have begun where chapters have been opened, but progress has been slow due to disputes over Kosovo. Furthermore, in Serbia, there has been a perception that the EU is not a reliable partner and that its commitment to the region is uncertain. This has been prompted by the EU's response to the migrant crisis in Europe, which many experts in Kosovo and Serbia saw as indicative of a lack of commitment to the region. There has also been a perception that the EU has been too slow to act in response to political and social instability in the Balkan region, particularly in relation to the rise of authoritarian governments in neighboring countries. This has led to concerns about the EU's commitment to democratic values and the rule of law, which are seen as core principles of the integration process.

Citizen's perception in both countries towards European integration

The survey data of the Security Barometer in Kosovo and Serbia held by the Kosovar Center for Security Studies in 2022 show diametrically different and opposite between these two countries in the attitudes of citizens towards EU integration. In Kosovo, 94.3% of surveyed citizens expressed support for EU integration, while only 3.5% were in contrary. The remaining 2.2% were undecided. Contrary to, in Serbia, only 47.4% of surveyed citizens expressed support for EU integration, while 44.5% expressed opposition. The remaining 8.1% were undecided. These data from this survey show significant differences in the attitudes of citizens towards EU integration between Kosovo and Serbia. While most Kosovars support their country's EU integration, less than half of Serbs are in favor of their country's EU membership. This divergence in attitudes can be attributed to a number of factors, which will be elaborated below, including historical and political contexts, as well as economic ones. (Gashi, 2021) This survey reflects the geopolitical views of the citizens of both countries. The high level of support for EU integration in Kosovo may be due in part to the country's history and unique circumstances. Kosovo has been an independent country only since 2008, after a period of war and instability in the region. (Baracani, 2020) Since then, the country has worked to create a functioning democracy and market economy, and EU membership has been seen as a key factor in promoting these

4. What are the changes in the trust of citizens of Kosovo and Serbia in European integration?

goals. In addition, Kosovo is one of the poorest countries in Europe and EU membership is seen as a way to promote economic development and improve living standards for citizens.

In Serbia, on the other hand, there are likely several factors that have contributed to lower levels of support for EU integration. Serbia has a longer history of independence and statehood, and there may be a feeling among some citizens that EU membership would require surrendering a degree of sovereignty. Withal, there is a significant minority in Serbia that opposes EU integration on ideological grounds, seeing the EU as a threat to traditional values and national identity. (Tzifakis, 2013)

This analysis is supported by some other questions in the survey, which clearly show the civic differences between the two countries. In Kosovo, the majority of citizens support EU integration and see it as the main option for their country. Out of 84.5% of Kosovar citizens believe that the EU will accept Kosovo as a member state, while only 11.8% do not believe this. This suggests that most Kosovar citizens have a positive view of the EU and believe that EU integration is the best way forward for their country. A possible explanation for this positive perception of the EU among Kosovar citizens is the historical and cultural ties between Kosovo and Western Europe. (Greiçevci et al., 2007) Kosovo has a predominantly Muslim population, but has a tradition of secularism and European values. Many Kosovar citizens see EU integration as a way to strengthen these values and promote the rule of law, democracy and human rights. Likewise, Kosovo has a young and dynamic population that is eager to participate in the global economy and take advantage of the opportunities offered by the EU. On the other hand, the perception of citizens in Serbia towards EU integration is more complex and divided compared to

Kosovar citizens. According to data from the same survey, only 46.6% of Serbian citizens believe that the EU will accept Serbia as a member state, while 46.5% do not believe this. Moreover, 56.7% of Serbian citizens believe that their country has other alternative rather the EU membership, while only 20.4% do not believe that there is another alternative. These findings suggest that there is less assurance among Serbian citizens about EU integration and whether it is the best alternative for their country. A possible explanation for this negative perception towards the EU among Serbian citizens is the historical and political context of the region. Serbia has a complex relationship with the EU, dating back to the breakup of Yugoslavia and the wars of the 1990s. Many citizens of Serbia still nurture negative feelings towards the EU, which they see as biased towards Serbia and its interests. Moreover, Serbia has strong economic ties with Russia and China, which are seen as alternative partners of the EU. (Tzifakis, 2013) This has led to a more pragmatic and skeptical approach to EU integration among Serbian citizens, who believe that their country has other alternatives instead than EU membership. Differences in the perception of citizens in Kosovo and Serbia towards EU integration may have important implications for the future of the Western Balkans. EU integration is seen as a way to promote stability, democracy and economic growth in the Western Balkans, and enlargement policy is one of the principle tools used by the EU to achieve these goals. However, if citizens' perception of EU integration is negative or divided, this may lead to a lack of political will and support for EU integration, which may delay or disrupt the accession process. A possible solution to address these differences in perception is to promote a more inclusive and participatory approach towards EU integration. This could

include engaging citizens in a dialogue about the benefits and challenges of EU integration, and addressing their concerns and doubts. Furthermore, it could include strengthening civil society and media freedom, which are essential for promoting transparency and accountability in the accession process. Moreover, it can include supporting economic development and create new employment opportunities, which are important factors for reducing poverty and social inequality, and increasing support for the EU. (Gashi, 2021)

The EU has played an active role in Kosovo since the end of the war, providing significant financial and technical assistance to the country. This aid has helped in support to the development of democratic institutions, the rule of law and economic growth in the region. (Gashi, 2021) The EU has also been involved in efforts to normalize relations between Kosovo and Serbia, including a series of agreements between the two countries. All these investments made in Kosovo can be a factor, which affects the citizens' perception towards the EU.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the European integration process for the countries of the Western Balkans, particularly of Kosovo and Serbia, depends a lot on the support and beliefs of their citizens. This essay has analyzed and examined the differences in attitudes towards European integration, both in Kosovo and Serbia, using data from the Security Barometer conducted by the Kosovo Center for Security Studies. The essay has provided an overview of attitudes towards European Union integration in Kosovo and Serbia and has analyzed the data from this survey to provide insight into citizens' actual attitudes towards European integration and any tendency that have emerged

over time in both countries. The essay's findings have shown that attitudes towards European integration in Kosovo and Serbia have changed over time and have been influenced by a complex set of factors, including economic conditions, political stability and social issues. Although, citizens of both countries have expressed diametrically opposite attitudes towards European integration, there have been visible convergences in their perceptions of the EU and the integration process. For example, while citizens in Kosovo are generally more positive about EU integration, Serbian citizens have shown a more skeptical attitude towards the EU, partly due to their political and historical ties to Russia. However, citizens of both countries blame the respective governments for advancing the integration process within the EU.

This essay will contribute to the ongoing academic and political discourse on the process of European integration. By examining citizens' attitudes towards the EU in Kosovo and Serbia through the Security Barometer, this essay has provided new insights into the factors that shape these attitudes and offered recommendations for policymakers and researchers seeking to promote greater support and confidence in European integration. Ultimately, it is essential to recognize that the success of the European integration process in Kosovo and Serbia depends not only on political will and economic conditions, but also on the beliefs and attitudes of citizens towards the EU and its institutions.

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5. INTEGRITY OF PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS IN KOSOVO – CITIZENS' TRUST TOWARDS INSTITUTIONS

Eneda Deliu

Introduction

Institutional integrity is crucial for the normal functioning of society and maintaining trust in public institutions. Institutions are the structures and organizations that shape our lives, including government agencies, businesses, educational institutions, and nonprofit organizations.

When institutions are with integrity, they are seen as trustworthy by the public. This leads to increased confidence in their decision-making processes and actions, which can have a positive impact on society. In contrary, when institutions are with deficiency of integrity, this can lead to a breakdown in trust, cynicism and apathy among the public. This can cause significant harm to individuals and society in general, as people are less likely to participate in civic life or follow laws and regulations.

If citizens do not have a rational basis for trusting their public institutions, then the legitimacy of those institutions fades and may even collapse. In fact, integrity is an essential characteristic of institutions. It is essential that institutions maintain their integrity to ensure that they can fulfill their purpose and meet the needs of their stakeholders effectively. Effective governance, a culture of integrity, transparency and accountability are all essential elements in maintaining the integrity of institutions. As emphasized by the World Bank, "integrity is the cornerstone of sound governance and essential to achieving sustainable development". (World Bank, 2013)

To ensure effective anti-corruption measures, institutional and political rhetoric about good governance must be maintained by tangible actions that corroborate institutional independence, transparency and steadiness in

addressing issues of public interest. Only by taking concrete steps towards these goals we can achieve better results in the fight against corruption.

According to a report of the Kosovo Democratic Institute, the institutions of Kosovo have been successful in establishing adequate jurisdiction in terms of the integrity system in the country (Sutaj & Canhasi, 2015). However, the level of practical implementation of legislation and strengthening of institutional integrity is not satisfactory.

This essay aims to present a general overview of the level of integrity of public institutions in the Republic of Kosovo, as well as an analysis of citizens' perception of the integrity towards the institutions of the Republic of Kosovo. So, is there a causal connection between the integrity of institutions and the trust that citizens have in these institutions? This analysis will be based mainly on data obtained from the Security Barometer of the Western Balkans, collected in the last two years 2021-2022, as well as on the legal framework of the Republic of Kosovo against corruption.

Institutional integrity

Prior talking about institutional integrity, the concept of integrity in itself must be clarified. Integrity refers to principled behavior.

"Dictionaries define integrity as uncompromising adherence to a code of moral values and principles, truthful and sound fairness and honesty, as well as consistency between one's actions and principles, methods and measures. Integrity is said to have 'a clear intrinsic value – it is inseparable from the idea

that it is better in any walk of life, including life serving others, to act reliably and with virtue, with fidelity and honesty, responsibly and appropriately, with a clear sense of proper, legitimate purpose and unaffected by the corruptive and perverse” (Gurzawska, 2015).

Thus, integrity is an essential aspect of personal and professional ethics and is often considered a key trait of effective leaders. It is a critical component in building trust, fostering strong relationships and maintaining a positive reputation.

As such, integrity is of great importance for the public sphere as well. Institutional integrity refers to the preservation and promotion of ethical and moral principles within an organization or institution. It includes creating a culture of transparency, accountability and responsibility, and ensuring that the organization’s actions are compatible with its stated values and goals.

A report from the University of Oxford defines Institutional Integrity as follows: “Public Institutional Integrity is the robust disposition of a public institution to legitimately pursue to its legitimate purpose, to the best of its abilities, consistent with its commitments” (Blavatnik School of Government)

The legal framework

When talking about the adequate legislation of the Republic of Kosovo, there are involved a number of anti-corruption mechanisms that affect a large number of institutions. Kosovo has adopted the Law on the Anti-Corruption Agency, the Law on the Declaration of Assets and other laws as part of the anti-

corruption strategy. The report published by the Kosovo government on the Anti-Corruption Strategy for the years 2021-2023 (Anti-Corruption Agency, 2020). It describes the legal framework as follows:

Law no. 03/L-159 on Anti-corruption Agency

This Law defines the status and responsibilities of the Anti-Corruption Agency in the field of combating and preventing corruption, especially in the area of reporting, detection and investigation of corruption, the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan against Corruption.

Law no. 04/L-050 on the Declaration, Origin and Control of the Property of Senior Public Officials and the Declaration, Origin and Control of Gifts for all Officials and Law no. 04/L-228 on the amending and supplementing of Law no. 04 / L-050.

This Law defines obligations of senior public officials to declare their property, revenues and the origin and obligation of Agency to control declared property and origin of property as well as obligations of all public senior officials to declare gifts and the origin of gifts.

Law NO. 04/L-051 on Prevention of conflict of interest in discharge of public functions

The purpose of this law is to prevent the conflict between public interest and private interest of senior officials in discharge of public functions.

Law no. 06/L-085 on Protection of whistleblowers

The purpose of this Law is to enable the whistleblowing of violations in the public and private sector and the protection of whistleblower

In general, the purpose of anti-corruption laws is to promote transparency,

accountability and integrity in government and business, and to prevent the negative economic and social effects of corruption. Based on the legal framework introduced in the government report, the Republic of Kosovo actually has a rich anti-corruption legislation, but these laws in practice continue to fall behind.

In the Anti-Corruption Strategy, as a result of the need of the relevant state institutions to prevent and fight corruption, several objectives have been set. It involves the development of the “zero tolerance” approach to corruption; Building integrity, responsibility and transparency in the work of public administration bodies and strengthening citizens’ trust in public institutions; Improving legislation and strengthening institutional capacities for preventing and fighting corruption; Awareness and education of the general public in the field of anti-corruption.

Institutional integrity in Kosovo – citizens’ perceptions

The integrity of institutions is often measured by the level of corruption within the institutions. Kosovo continues to encounter problems such as corruption. Kosovo is not a member of most international conventions against corruption, including the United Nations Convention against Corruption, due to issues related to its status. Progress reports, over the years, have emphasized that Kosovo is at an early stage/there is a level of preparation in the fight against corruption and little progress has been achieved

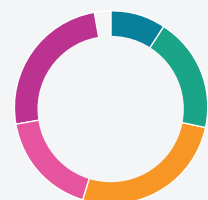
In the background section of the Anti-Corruption Strategy report, among others, it is stated “Out of 42 countries participating in the World Corruption Barometer 2016, Kosovo ranks the third place with 65% of respondents claiming that corruption is one of the biggest problems facing our country”(2020). Corruption can have a major impact on citizens, affecting their economic, social, political and psychological well-being.

Corruption can lead to a breakdown of trust in institutions and a sense of disillusionment among citizens. It can also lead to social unrest and instability as people become frustrated with the lack of progress and development. Corruption can also exacerbate inequality, with the rich and powerful benefiting at the expense of the poor and marginalized, corruption can undermine democratic institutions and processes.

Based on data from the Security Barometer of the Western Balkans, for Trust in institutions, while asked about trust in the Anti-Corruption Agency, 9.1% of citizens trust it, while only 9.4% of them fully trust this institution. 26.4% trust to some extent, while 25.1% do not trust this institution at all.

HOW MUCH DO YOU TRUST THE ANTI-CORRUPTION AGENCY

I fully trust	9.4%
I trust	19.1%
Somewhat	26.4%
little trust	17.3%
No trust at all	25.1%
I don't know/ no opinion	2.6%



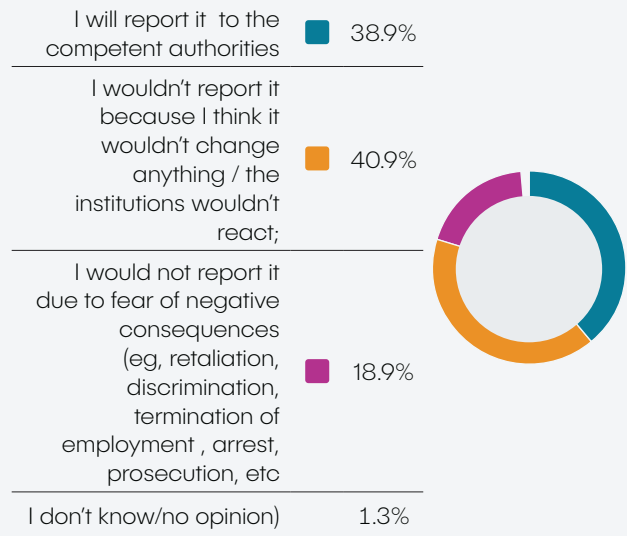
Referring to the graph above, it can be concluded that 42.4% of citizens have little or no trust in the Agency which

deals with the imposition of measures and sanctions, which aims to prevent corruption, strengthen institutional integrity and transparency in the Republic of Kosovo, as and monitoring the implementation of the state strategy. This percentage shows that the citizens of the Republic of Kosovo have not trust the transparency of the country's institutions.

This can be supported by other data in the Security Barometer of the Western Balkans, in 2021 47.5% of citizens answered “very much” when asked “To what extent do you think corruption is present in tenders/procurements in security institutions”. To some extent, we can find the same trend of answers in other questions about the level of corruption of other institutions of the Republic of Kosovo. This further supports the argument that the trust of the citizens of Kosovo in the country's institutions has been damaged.

If citizens do not trust institutions, this can dilute the legitimacy of those institutions and undermine their capacity to function effectively. This can lead to a breakdown of the rule of law, reduced economic growth and other negative consequences. The 2022 data from the Security Barometer of the Western Balkans show more about the state of institutions and citizens’ trust in them. When asked how they would act if they witnessed corruption, 40.9% of the respondents answered “I wouldn’t report it because I think it wouldn’t change anything / the institutions wouldn’t react.”

IF YOU WERE WITNESSING CORRUPTION, HOW WOULD YOU ACT?



If citizens do not report corruption because they do not believe that institutions will take action, this suggests a lack of effectiveness and integrity of those institutions. This lack of trust can be due to a number of factors, including a history of unpunished corruption, a perception of bias or incompetence within institutions, or a lack of transparency in how corruption cases are handled.

Conclusions

Integrity is a key factor in building trust between institutions and citizens. Institutions that are perceived to have a high level of integrity are more likely to gain the trust of citizens. In contrary, institutions perceived to lack integrity are less likely to be trusted by citizens.

Integrity refers to respecting the ethical and moral principles of the institutions and the continuous adherence of these principles in their function. When institutions demonstrate integrity in their actions, they are seen as trustworthy,

stable and fair by citizens. This perception of integrity helps build trust in the institution.

Contrary to that, when institutions are perceived as lacking integrity, citizens may lose trust in the institution. This can happen when institutions are seen as unstable, biased or corrupt in their actions. In such cases, citizens may feel that the institution is not working in their best interest and may be more likely to question the institution's legitimacy.

In general, there is a strong bond between institutional integrity and citizens' trust in institutions. Institutions that prioritize integrity are more likely to gain and maintain the trust of citizens, while institutions that lack integrity may

struggle to build and maintain trust with citizens.

In the Republic of Kosovo, although there are continuous efforts to fight corruption, for institutional transparency, for improving the integrity of institutions, the country is still far from achieving full institutional integrity. As a result, citizens do not fall trust to the country institutions.

The Republic of Kosovo must continue the fight against corruption. Inter-institutional cooperation in the fight against corruption must be strengthened. It happens that the courts misinterpret the law and impose fines instead of imprisonment, this should be eradicated. Institutions should implement the law, and the level of transparency should increase.

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6. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PUBLIC'S PERCEPTION OF NATIONAL SECURITY THREATS IN SERBIA AND ALBANIA

Andrijana Ristić

Introduction

Today's challenges demand a new and broader understanding of national security - one that includes traditional national security, economic security, health security, and environmental security. Burdened by civil wars during the 1990s, most Western Balkan countries still think about security in a traditional, military way and value national security more than human security. The fear of a new conflict in the region continues to exist and is accompanied by numerous security challenges as a result of the decline of democracy and the rule of law.

Both Serbia and Albania play a significant part in shaping the region through their contribution to security, stability and overall development. Serbia, as the largest country by territory and population with a vast economic potential, and Albania, through its close cooperation with NATO and its committed involvement in regional initiatives. The status of Kosovo remains a source of tension in the region, and due to their involvement, Serbia and Albania are important for keeping peace and avoiding conflict through de-escalation. The two vital regional actors share a complex history and comparing them could offer better insight in to their relations. The aim of the essay is to compare the public's perception of national security threats and different approaches to national security strategies in Albania and Serbia and to analyze how it influences their mutual relations.

This essay is divided into three distinct parts. First, I will explain the differences in strategic thinking that are reflected in national security strategies of Albania and

Serbia. In the second part I will compare the public's perception of national security threats, as well as community and personal safety. Lastly, I will analyze whether threat perception affects relations between Albania and Serbia.

National security objectives and threats in strategic documents

Strategic thinkers of Albania and Serbia have different views of what needs to be protected from various security risks and threats. According to the second national security strategy of Albania, the primary goal of its national security is to "guarantee an environment that provides security and freedom for citizens"¹. On the contrary, Serbia defines its national security as "an objective state of protectedness of its national values and interests against all forms of threats, and a subjective feeling of security of the citizens"².

Albania's national security strategy was adopted almost ten years ago, following the annexation of Crimea, and doesn't reflect the current security environment. Still, the document itself has a clear structure with list of threats being rated by severity and a tier threat system. The first tier focuses on three threats in detail such as corruption and organized crime, cyberattacks by state and non-state actors and environmental degradation, while tier two and three threats are terrorism, global pandemic, regional

1 The National Security Strategy of The Republic of Albania (2014)

2 National Security Strategy of The Republic of Serbia (2019),1. https://www.mod.gov.rs/multimedia/file/staticki_sadrzaj/dokumenta/strategije/2021/Prilog2-StrategijaNacionalneBezbednostiRS-ENG.pdf

tensions and espionage³. The later lack of additional measures, which could be interpreted as if the legislators did not consider these threats to be significant.

Compared to Albanian national security strategy, Serbia's national security strategy was adopted more recently (2019). However, some global challenges, such as the pandemic and Russia's aggression on Ukraine, have drastically changed the security landscape, and it requires updating. Unlike the Albanian, the Serbian strategy doesn't rate its perceived threats, but merely lists them in no particular order. However, the authors of the NSS place a special emphasis on security threats arising from the political sector, such as separatist tendencies, terrorism, armed aggression, armed rebellion, ethnic and religious extremism.⁴

Different perception of security threats may be the result of different political and historical legacies. Serbia actively participated in the wars on the territory of SFRY and was affected by the NATO intervention in 1999, while Albania was affected by civil war in 1997 after the transition from an internationally isolated country under the regime of Enver Hoxha to a market economy.

The current security environment in a changing geopolitical context differs greatly from both national security strategies. National security strategies are not helpful in explaining the trend of increasing defence budgets and spending that has led to a kind of arms race. According to the 2023 Balkan Defence Monitor, Serbia is in a leading position with a projected defence budget

of around 2,3% of its GDP in 2023, while Albania's defence budget is likely to reach 2% of its GDP. Apart from the obvious and continued increase, Albania has the least transparent defence budget with little information on where taxpayers' money is being spent⁵. Furthermore, there is a significant gap between Albania's national security strategy, which is more focused on potential internal threats, and the steady increase in defence spending, suggesting a certain degree of wariness of external threats. There is a similar situation in Serbia – too many lucrative arms deals and too little information without an explanation about the threats that endanger Serbia's national security. The increase in defence budgets could directly be linked to the ongoing war in Europe which has a major effect on the strategic thinking as well as public perception of national security.

BALKAN DEFENCE MONITOR

DEFENCE EXPENDITURE (% GDP)	2012	2019	2020	2021	2022p	2023p
Albania	1.2%	1.3%	1.3%	1.4%	1.7%	2.0%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.8%	0.8%	0.9%	0.8%	0.7%	0.7%
Croatia	1.1%	1.2%	1.2%	1.7%	1.5%	1.4%
Montenegro	1.5%	1.6%	1.3%	0.9%	0.7%	1.1%
North Macedonia	0.9%	1.0%	1.1%	1.7%	1.7%	2.0%
Serbia	1.6%	1.9%	2.0%	2.4%	2.0%	2.3%

3 Dafa, Alban, Strategic uncertainty: A review of Albania's National Security Strategy and Policy, Institute for Democracy and Mediation, <https://idmalbania.org/strategic-uncertainty-a-review-of-albanias-national-security-strategy-and-policy/>, published October 2021

4 National Security Strategy of The Republic of Serbia (2019), 11-14. https://www.mod.gov.rs/multimedia/file/staticki_sadrzaj/dokumenta/strategije/2021/Prilog2-StrategijaNacionalneBezbednostiRS-ENG.pdf

5 Balkan Defence Monitor, <https://balkandefencemonitor.com/>

Public perception of personal and community safety including national security threats in Albania and Serbia

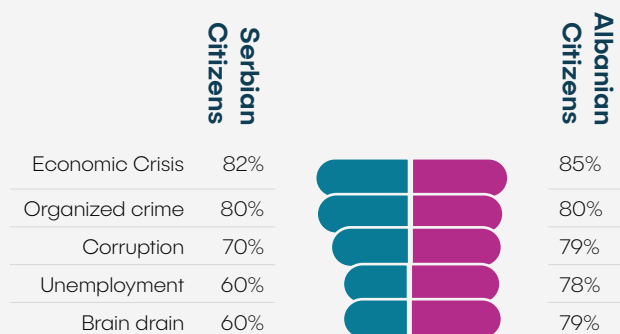
The perception of personal safety of the Albanian and Serbian citizens does not differ. In general, citizens from both countries feel safe in their homes, settlements and countryside/cities as well as on the Internet.⁶ The difference is observed in the perception of community safety and threats from criminal activities (for example, theft, illicit arms possession, drug addiction etc.).

Data from the Western Balkan Security Barometer survey from 2022 show that Albanian citizens are little less concerned about fake news, violence in schools and shortages of electricity, fuel, medicaments and food than Serbian citizens. For example, 80% of Serbian citizens are worried about fuel and electricity shortages, while fuel shortage worries around 75% of the Albanian population and electricity shortage nearly 69% of Albanians. Still, there is a time gap between the results of the public survey and current public safety in Serbia. At the beginning of May 2023, there were two multiple shootings in Serbia that disturbed the public widely and produced mass protests "Serbia against

the violence". Therefore, it may be assumed that results would be somehow different if public polling had been conducted after the tragic events.

Despite the fact that economic crisis, organized crime, corruption, unemployment and brain drain worries citizens of both countries, it is evident that the Albanian citizens are more concerned about the aforementioned threats⁷.

SERBIAN AND ALBANIAN CITIZENS THAT CONSIDER THESE PROBLEMS AS THREATS OR HIGH THREATS



Some similarities between the Serbian and Albanian citizens can be observed in the perception of external threats. The biggest threats according to the public in both countries are inflation, energy crisis, war in Ukraine and potential conflict in the region⁸. As for the latter, Serbian citizens believe a potential conflict could break out over the status of Kosovo⁹. The fear of the potential conflict in the Balkans in the next five years has almost tripled in Serbia, from 28% of the citizens worried about this issue in 2020 to 63% in 2022. However, the public support for mandatory military service decreased

⁶ Western Balkans Security Barometer, <https://securitybarometer.qkss.org/te-dhenat>

⁷ Ibidem

⁸ Western Balkans Security Barometer, <https://securitybarometer.qkss.org/te-dhenat>

⁹ Pebić, Gorana, Ivana Ranković and Luka Šterić, War echoes intensify fears - views of Serbian citizens on relations in the region, BCSP, <https://bezbednost.org/en/publication/war-echoes-intensify-fears-views-of-serbian-citizens-on-relations-in-the-region/>, published February 2023

by nearly 20% to a shaky majority in 2022¹⁰. This may be a consequence of the Russian aggression against Ukraine and now the real danger of an armed conflict.

Unlike citizens of Serbia, 62% of Albanian citizens consider threats on the Internet (cybersecurity) to be a (big) threat to national security¹¹. The main difference in the public perception of security threats is that the Serbian citizens are especially worried about separatist aspirations, which is also represented in strategic documents and reinforced by ruling politicians through the media.

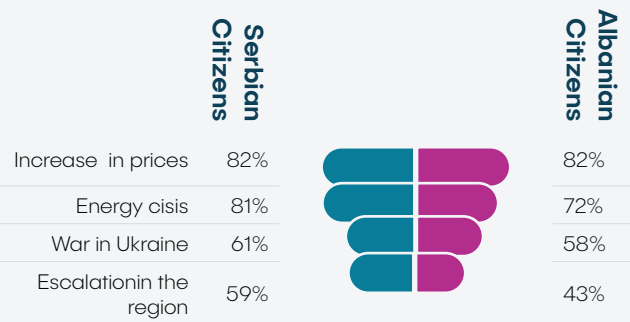
Albanian and Serbian government officials and the media play an important role in shaping the public's perception of security threats, as well as who is friend or foe, which has a great impact on bilateral relations.

Security threat perception: an obstacle or an opportunity to improve Serbian-Albanian relations?

Bilateral relations between Albania and Serbia are to a certain extent influenced by historical events and grievances that go back generations. The unresolved status of Kosovo is the main cause of disagreements between two countries. Regardless, citizens of Albania and Serbia perceive that bilateral relations have improved over the past two years.¹²

The improvement of relations is mainly related to three factors: trade and economic cooperation, facilitation of contacts among people and implementation of infrastructural projects¹³. The leaders of Serbia and Albania, together with the leader of North Macedonia, launched the Open Balkan initiative, previously known as Mini Schengen, with the aim of achieving deeper political and economic ties between these countries¹⁴. The majority of citizens in Albania and Serbia support this initiative and believe it could lead to better bilateral relations¹⁵.

SERBIA AND ALBANIA CITISENS THAT CONSIDER THESE PROBLEMS AS THREATS OR HIGH THREATS



¹⁰ Ibidem

¹¹ Hallunaj, Mirsada and Nino Strati, Public perception towards public safety, internal and external threats in Albania, Western Balkans Security Barometer, <https://csdgalbania.org/report-2-public-perception-towards-public-safety-internal-and-external-threats-in-albania/>, published January 2022

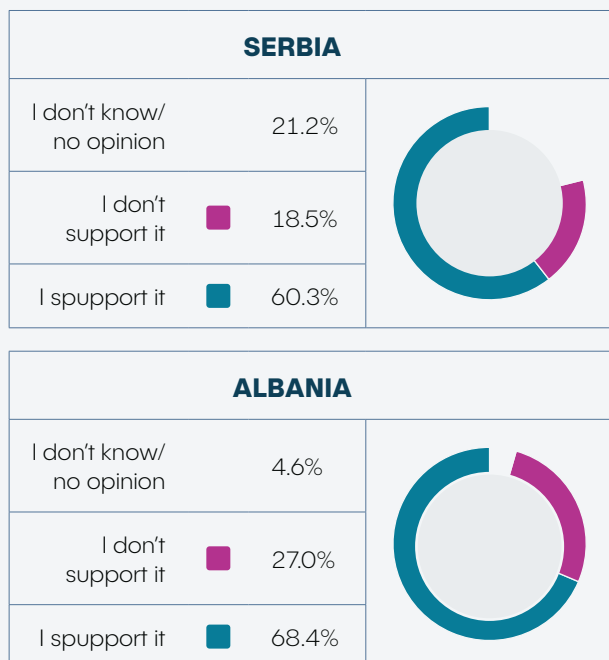
¹² Western Balkans Security Barometer, <https://securitybarometer.qkss.org/te-dhenat>

¹³ Dyrmishi, Arjan, Public Perceptions towards bilateral relations, cross border cooperation and identity issues in Albania, Western Balkans Security Barometer, <https://csdgalbania.org/western-balkans-security-barometer-public-perceptions-towards-bilateral-relations-cross-border-cooperation-and-identity-issues-in-albania/>, published March 2022

¹⁴ Ristić, Dušan, Open Balkan Initiative, European Policy Centre, <https://cep.org.rs/en/blog/open-balkan-initiative/>, Accessed May 15. 2023.

¹⁵ Western Balkan Security Barometer, <https://securitybarometer.qkss.org/te-dhenat>

DO YOU SUPPORT THE IDEA OF CREATING THE SO-CALLED "WESTERN BALKANS MINI-SCHENGEN" RECENTLY RENAMED TO "OPEN BALKAN"?



Apart from vastly different views on the status of Kosovo, largest differences in the public perception of national security threats appear to be related to external actors. Albanian citizens believe that actors like the United States, Turkey and NATO have a positive influence, while others such as Russia and Serbia have negative influence on their country¹⁶. Majority of Serbian citizens perceive the United States and NATO in a negative light, while countries like Russia and China are considered as Serbia's closest allies¹⁷. Differences in foreign policy and main foreign policy partners could be a point of tension in Albania-Serbian relations,

16 Dyrmeshi, Arjan, Public Perceptions towards bilateral relations, cross border cooperation and identity issues in Albania, Western Balkans Security Barometer, <https://csdgalbania.org/western-balkans-security-barometer-public-perceptions-towards-bilateral-relations-cross-border-cooperation-and-identity-issues-in-albania/>, published March 2022

17 Vuksanovic, Vuk, Luka Steric and Maja Bjelos, Public perception of Serbian foreign policy in the midst of the war in Ukraine, BCSP, <https://bezbednost.org/en/publication/public-perception-of-serbian-foreign-policy-in-the-midst-of-the-war-in-ukraine/>, published December 2022

18 Vuksanovic, Vuk, Luka Steric and Maja Bjelos, Public perception of Serbian foreign policy in the midst

because they pull the countries in different directions.

While analyzing the public perception of national security threats in both countries, it's clear that there are a number of similarities that could potentially have a positive effect on mutual relations. First of all, a large amount of threats such as climate change, pollution, illegal arms and drug trafficking, organized crime, appear to be cross-border, which means that cooperation is needed for eliminating them. Secondly, some of the greatest fears of citizens of both states are economic (economic crisis, unemployment), which means that cooperation through initiatives like Open Balkan, are invaluable in improving standards of living on both sides. Thirdly, both Serbia and Albania wish to become a part of the European Union, which means that they share a similar goal. Good relations with neighbors represent one of the main conditions of an EU membership, and so it is in the interest of both countries to further their bilateral relations. In this case, above mentioned similarities could be a good opportunity for the change of the current dynamic.

Better relations between the states or political leaders have not been translated at the level of citizens. When asked if they would accept a Serbian citizen as a friend, 72% of Albanians answered that they would accept, while only around 42% of Serbs said the same. Ethnic distance is even more visible in the case of intimate relationships between members of the Albanian and Serbian populations, as well as the acceptance of an Albanian or Serb as a school teacher¹⁸.

Conclusion

Outdated national security strategies of Albania and Serbia do not fit the current security environment. The post-pandemic situation and the war in Ukraine have significantly influenced the public's perception of threats to national security of Serbia and Albania. The war increased the fear of negative effects on the economic and security situation in both countries. However, citizens of Serbia and Albania are mostly concerned about internal threats coming from poor governance and weak rule of law. Finally, although bilateral relations have improved in recent years thanks to some regional initiatives, there is a need to reduce ethnic distance between Albanians and Serbs.

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4. Dušan Ristić. European Policy Centre. "Open Balkan Initiative." Accessed May 15, 2023. <https://cep.org.rs/en/blog/open-balkan-initiative/>
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9. Vuk Vuksanovic, Luka Steric and Maja Bjelos. Public perception of Serbian foreign policy in the midst of the war in Ukraine. BCSP. <https://bezbednost.org/en/publication/public-perception-of-serbian-foreign-policy-in-the-midst-of-the-war-in-ukraine/>, published December 2022
10. Western Balkans Security Barometer. <https://securitybarometer.qkss.org/te-dhenat>

7. DRAWBACK OF BELGRADE PRISTINA DIALOG: CASE OF YOUTH (IN)SECURITY

Marko Žunjić

Introduction

The dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, which was launched in 2011 with the aim of normalizing relations between Serbs and Albanians, as well as resolving the issue of the final status of Kosovo, faces a number of obstacles and shortcomings. From the very beginning of the talks, with the mediation of the European Union, efforts were made to comprehensively normalize political and economic relations and to establish cooperation between the two sides. As a result of the initial “technical dialogue”, freedom of movement across administrative borders was agreed upon, along with the acceptance of the seal and other markings of Kosovo, the establishment of trade relations between the two sides. However, the implementation of the agreement was largely absent in practice and certain points lost their importance relatively quickly. A significant milestone in the dialogue was the achievement of the Brussels Agreement (The First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations) in 2013. By signing the Brussels Agreement, Serbia, for its part, de facto legitimized the authorities of Kosovo and its existence in international relations as part of its aspirations for membership in the European Union.¹⁹

Although the Brussels Agreement at the time of its signing was significant for the continuation of negotiations, stability and cooperation in the region, as well as for accelerating the flow of European

integration processes, during the dialogue from 2014 to 2022, both sides constantly called for its non-compliance, complicating and occasionally stopping the process. From today's perspective, the Brussels Agreement had certain results, but also very large shortcomings, which the European Union and other interested parties tried to supplement with additional agreements and discussions.²⁰ The course of the talks resulted, with the mediation of the United States, in the Washington Agreement in 2020, which mostly concerned the normalization of economic relations and the infrastructural connection of Serbia and Kosovo. In line with the EU's efforts to reach a final solution, the latest meeting in Ohrid in 2023 resulted in a controversial “agreement” according to which both sides mutually recognize the documents and undertake to build good neighborly relations based on equal rights, whereby Serbia will not block Kosovo's membership in international and regional organizations, and Kosovo will establish a system of self-government for the Serbian community in Kosovo.²¹ Although these are very important points for negotiation, there are a number of unresolved issues that are not being discussed at the “high level dialogue”²², and which are crucial for a successful normalization of relations.

One of the most significant drawbacks of the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina is the impact it has on youth and individual security in Kosovo, especially for young Serbs. This essay will examine the case of youth (in)security as a result

19 Plänitz, E. 2018. Towards a Comprehensive Framework of Mediation Success: EU Mediation in the Belgrade–Pristina Dialogue. *Journal of Regional Security* 13:1, 65–96. Belgrade Centre for Security Policy. p. 68

20 Stojanović, M. 2021. [Da li je Briselski sporazum mrtav?](#) Web page Danas. Retrieved: 28. 4. 2023.

21 [“Teksti i propozimit “evropian” për “marrëveshjen bazë mes Kosovës dhe Serbisë” 2022.](#) Web page Koha Ditore. Retrieved: 28. 4. 2023.

Jozwiak, R. 2023. [Wider Europe Briefing: Will Kosovo And Serbia Finally Make A Deal? Plus, The Nitty-Gritty Of EU Enlargement.](#) Web page Radio Slobodna Evropa. Retrieved: 28. 4. 2023.

22 Plänitz, E. 2018. Ibid. 82

of the Belgrade–Pristina Dialogue and its implications for the long-term peace and stability in the region. Attention will be focused on the increased vulnerability and marginalization of young people in Kosovo, and the consequence of this can be seen in the ways of conducting dialogue, which fails to meet the specific needs of young people. The essay will also examine the broader implications of this issue for the future of the region, highlighting the urgent need for greater youth participation in the dialogue and other forms of interethnic communication in the political aspect. The importance of this issue is reflected in the fact that the safety of young people as future bearers of political power, economic activity and ideas is an important part of any form of comprehensive agreement between two parties/two nations.

Youth in Dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina

It is rightly pointed out in academic discussions that when talking about the issue of political relations between Serbia and Kosovo, most of the attention is focused on the identity and territorial issue. As a consequence of this fact, the daily reality in Kosovo is neglected and the needs of people, among which one of the most vulnerable and security-sensitive groups are young individuals. This leads to a situation where relations between citizens, including young people, of Serbia and Kosovo are academically and politically neglected and marginalized²³

as part of the wider “comprehensive” dialogue process. Although it can be argued that the dialogue includes all areas of political-economic relations, which in the last case would also concern the safety and well-being of young people, in practice this is not the case. In order to represent interests of young individuals in the negotiation process, it is necessary to lower the level of dialogue from the mentioned “high level of representatives” to representatives on local levels, which include youth. In the official political-economic dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, young people are *de facto* absent. What’s more, in the media discourse, there is a representation that young people should leave the framework of politics and focus on a common future – which is also a form of political narrative.²⁴ This indicates two phenomena, firstly, that young people are excluded from the political decision-making process and that they have space to “distance” themselves from politics, and secondly, that they are politically instrumentalized in the discourse by the political elites during the Dialogue.

Young people from Kosovo are most often represented in the relations between Belgrade and Pristina through the activities of NGOs based in these two cities. In addition to informal seminars and trainings, young people are also connected through structured dialogues organized with the aim of discussing issues important to them regarding the future of relations between the two ethnic groups. However, connecting young people without political power from the region does not provide a permanent solution to their problems and does not meet their needs. This especially applies to the dialogue between Belgrade and

23 Fridman, O. 2013. Structured Encounters in Post-conflict/Post-Yugoslav Days: Visiting Belgrade and Prishtina. P. 143

24 “[Dijalog mladih iz Beograda i Prištine](#)” 2010. Web page RTS. Retrieved: 28. 4. 2023.

Pristina, since young people from Serbia in most cases do not have direct experience of the war in Kosovo, unlike their peers from Kosovo, both Serbs and Albanians. Additionally, communication between young Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo is almost non-existent and is limited to a few workplaces that foster an international and multi-ethnic work environment. During the dialogue between the two parties, the fact that the Serbian community in the North of Kosovo lives separately and unconnected from the rest of the territory, especially in terms of interethnic interactions, is ignored, which has a special impact on the well-being of young people, and above all Serbs, whose opportunities are very limited in such closed environment.²⁵ As a general assessment of the progress of the dialogue, a number of achievements are cited, but with very limited success in the areas of youth and people-to-people contact.²⁶

One of the motives of the dialogue is the improvement of the lives of people in Kosovo, the economic aspect of the relationship is primarily being thought of. Although important, economic progress and connectivity are not a sufficient condition for development for the well-being of young people. However, it can be argued that the areas discussed in the official political dialogue, such as education, are of great concern to young people and that the mutual recognition of diplomas – one of the successes of the dialogue²⁷ – is a clear indicator of concern for young people. In essence this achievement does not mean much in an environment where young people, especially Serbs, do not feel safe, which can be confirmed by a number of

examples of attacks on them in previous periods, which are connected to tensions during the dialogue.

Youth Views on the Belgrade–Pristina Dialogue

Data from research conducted in Kosovo and Serbia during 2021 and 2022, which were published as part of the Security Barometer, show perspective of young people that reflects marginalization and lack of concern for their needs during the dialogue, but also the importance of the process for this group. According to data from 2022, 69.3% of young people (age 18-29) in Serbia support the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. The percentage of young people who support dialogue in Kosovo is higher than that in Serbia and follows a slight growth trend from 78.4% in 2021 to 78.9% in 2022. However, what is worrying is that 52.3% of young people in Serbia are not informed, and 28.4% do not know what the goal of the dialogue process between Belgrade and Pristina is. The data shows the reflection of the fact that for young people in Kosovo dialogue is a significantly more important issue, which potentially hinders them from achieving personal progress and well-being, since due to the undefined position of Kosovo, they do not have many opportunities available like their peers in European countries. The data that stands out is that 40.3% of young people in Kosovo are informed about the goal

25 Fridman, O. 2013. Ibid. p. 145

26 Beshku, K. 2021. [The Belgrade–Pristina dialogue ten years on: What's next for Kosovo and Serbia?](#) Web page EUIdeas. Retrieved: 28. 4. 2023.

27 Gray, A., Vučković, A., Bytyci, F. 2023. [Analysis: No big deal: EU's Kosovo pact loses some sheen.](#) Web page Reuters. Retrieved: 28. 4. 2023.

of their country's dialogue, while in the Republic of Serbia that percentage is only 19.3%. The inclusion of young people in the dialogue requires the transparency of the process itself, since research data shows that young people believe that communication about dialogue is not transparent: 36.4% of young people in Kosovo believe that the process of dialogue is non-transparent, and 46.8% that it is partially transparent, while in Serbia 27.5% of young people believe that the dialogue is non-transparent, and 31.2% say that it is partially transparent. The research data from 2021 is worrying, in which 95.7% of young people from Kosovo believe that they did not benefit from the dialogue process, while this percentage for young people in Serbia is 77.1%. Additional sources based on research point out that 18,6% of young people in Serbia thinks that relations with Kosovo improved from 2011, and 29,6% thinks they are worse than before, however, related to previously stated data about benefits of the dialogue to the youth, 35,5% of young people in Serbia consider that relations remained the same. Data that should be pointed out in particular is the percentage of young people in Serbia who believe that Kosovo is a very important foreign policy priority of Serbia - 50.1%, while 51.4% of them believe that the protection of Serbs in the region is extremely important in Serbia's foreign policy.²⁸ These figures are in correlation to general rise of violence against young people, especially Serbs in Kosovo. The emphasis placed by younger generations on the Kosovo issue demonstrates their political maturation and political socialization within a context where Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in 2008

significantly influenced Serbia's domestic and international priorities.²⁹

Through the analysis of the data, it becomes evident that youth participation and representation in the dialogue process are very limited, although the views of young people are very important. This exclusion not only undermines the results of the dialogue but also hinders the potential for achieving sustainable outcomes. Data also reflect the disconnection between needs of the young people, and the form and topics of the dialogue, as they believe that they didn't have any use of the process. This lack of youth engagement in the process not only perpetuates a sense of exclusion among the younger generation, which is a special challenge in the Balkans, but also undermines the long-term prospects of achieving lasting peace, stability, and reconciliation in the region.

The vulnerability of youth as the result of political negotiations

The mentioned data also shows that the approach used in resolving disputes and during the dialogue between Albanians and Serbs is state-centric, since the practice of international interventions is most common in the form of political dialogue at the highest levels of administration.³⁰ The exclusion of young people from the official political

28 Data available on: QKSS Western Balkans Security Barometer. 2021/22. WBSB. <https://securitybarometer.qkss.org/te-dhenat> retrieved: 2023.

29 Vuk, Vuksanović, Sterio, Luka & Bjeloš, Maja. 2022. [Public Perception of Serbian Foreign Policy in the Midst of the War in Ukraine](#). WBSB survey in Serbia - Prishtinë : QKSS. p. 13

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8. Drawback of Belgrade Pristina Dialog: Case of Youth (in)security

dialogue does not leave much space for representing their interests and fulfilling their needs, however, it opens numerous opportunities for the instrumentalization of young people for political purposes, which has the effect of jeopardizing the security situation of young people in Kosovo. Within civil society, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of involving young people, resulting in various initiatives aimed at fostering connections between youth from the Balkan states that were once in conflict, including Kosovo and Serbia. Young people are important for process of reconciliation and dialogue for two reasons: the first is that they are potential victims and witnesses of conflict, but they are also among the biggest initiators and bearers of major social changes, such as conflict resolution.³¹ However, as the dialogue between the two sides continues, political and interethnic tensions have occasionally arisen. This can be seen in the earliest examples of attacks on the territory of Kosovo, whose victims were young people. Three incidents occurred in Strpac³², Klokoč³³, and Suvi Do³⁴, involving young victims, with the first taking place on the eve of Orthodox Christmas and the second on Christmas Day, followed by the third a few weeks later. Analysts and media have attributed the escalation of

violence to the increasingly hostile rhetoric of Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić towards Kosovo and the tensions arising from the erection of barricades by Serbs in the North of Kosovo.³⁵

These examples highlight a problem that arises when two groups, such as Serbs and Albanians in this case, perceive their interaction as a threat. This can lead to conflict, as evident in the incidents, which have altered the nature of interethnic relations in Kosovo and made them less secure for young people of both communities.³⁶ The fear of being threatened can be especially pronounced among young Serbs in Kosovo, who may view any new contact with Albanians as risky, hindering their participation in even the most basic activities in ongoing dialogue. During a short period of political tensions, which resulted three young Serbian men to be attacked, the incidents were exploited by both Serbian authorities and opposition groups either with the aim of proclaiming patriotic intentions or political promotion.³⁷ This type of instrumentalization of young people further marginalizes their potential as actors who can significantly contribute to the process of dialogue and cooperation, while also threatening their well-being. In addition, such abuse of young people, who are direct victims

Peacebuilding, 3:2, 115-125. p. 116.

31 Bennett, Ryan; Karki, Sameer & Nepal, Nitu. 2012. Youth and Peacebuilding in Nepal: The current context and recommendations. p. 8.

32 „[Dečak ranjen kod Štrpca na Badnji dan, danas pušten na kućno lečenje](#)“. 2023. Web page KoSSev. Retrieved 28. 4. 2023.

33 „[Napadnut još jedan srpski mladić na Kosovu Stefana \(18\) pretukla grupa Albanaca dok se vraćao sa Božićne liturgije!](#)“ 2023. Web page Blic. Retrieved 28. 4. 2023.

34 „[Slike povrede glave dečaka Lazara \(15\) kojeg su pretukli odrasli Albanci](#)“. 2023. Web page Telegraf. Retrieved 28. 4. 2023.

35 [Uklanjanje barikada sa severa Kosova kreće 29. decembra, izjavio Vučić](#). 2022. Web page Radio Slobodna Evropa. Retrieved 28. 4. 2023.

36 Mac Ginty, R. 2014. Everyday peace: Bottom-up and local agency in conflict-affected societies. Security Dialogue, 45(6), 548-564. p. 6.

37 „[Vučić koristi Kosovo za političku dobit, a sada preti i ratom*: Pukovnik SAD o tome kako Zapad treba da postupa sa Srbijom](#)“ 2023. Web page Danas. Retrieved 28. 4. 2023.

of the dialogue driven political process in which they are excluded, deepens the interethnic conflict. As the result young people have become victims of the conflict and tensions, without being asked or involved in dialogue process. In addition to being used for political purposes without constructive proposals for providing security and protection to young people from both groups, one of the biggest challenges is the fact that the needs of young people are neglected and subordinated to other, usually state-oriented, goals. Because young people are not adequately represented, their needs are frequently ignored and not immediately apparent to decision makers and negotiators, making youth in dialogue practically invisible.³⁸

Conclusion

The issue of youth inclusion in the political dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina is often overlooked, with attention focused primarily on the identity and territorial issues. This has effect on political and public discourses regarding young people in that way that it is "advised" to them to stay out of political debate and search other ways to enable coexistence with the burden of the past. In this way, the needs of young people, who are dragged into the conflict without being asked for their opinion on its resolution, are marginalized. While the dialogue has achieved some progress in areas such as education, the exclusion of young people from the process hinders their development and undermines their security. The state-centric approach to resolving disputes and negotiations between Albanians and Serbs leaves little space for representing the interests of young people and fulfilling their needs, which can result in their instrumentalization for political purposes, jeopardizing their security in Kosovo. This additionally has the effect of spreading fear of future contacts between members of the two nations.

38 [„Dug spisak problema mladih koji veruju da ni o čemu ne odlučuju i da se ništa ne pitaju“](#). 2021. Web page RTS. Retrieved 28. 4. 2023.

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8. BEYOND BORDERS: ANALYSIS ON THE EFFECT OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN KOSOVO

Vesa Kroçi

Beyond Borders: Analysis on the effect of Violent Extremism in Kosovo

Kosovo, a small country in Southeast Europe, has faced many difficult challenges throughout its history. From a long-standing fight for independence, to economic and societal concerns, Kosovo has had to overcome different obstacles. More recently, one of those obstacles is violent extremism, which has posed a serious threat to Kosovo's stability. In order to address the roots of violent extremism in Kosovo and improve the country's capacity to protect itself against and respond to extremist threats, continuous efforts from a variety of actors are needed.

It all started in 2011, when the Arab Spring uprising began as a result of unrest against Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria. Tens of thousands of people would die as a result of what began as a protest escalating into full-fledged warfare for years to come. Two years pass and it is in 2013 when ISIS starts to unleash its attacks. The goal of ISIS was to create an Islamic State ruled by the Shariat Law. The Shariat Law which, as stated by the Encyclopedia of Islam, is a legal framework that is based on the directives and prohibitions of God as they are stated in the Quran as well as the customs and practices of Muhammad and his followers as they are mentioned in the hadith (Campo,2016).Therefore, they began spreading their ideology whilst expanding their territories.

In the Balkans, violent extremism has grown in popularity due to a variety of factors, including political unrest, economic hardship, and a violent past. Thus, nations

like Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Albania have developed into hotspots for extremist organizations that can gather and mobilize supporters. Extremist movements have risen as a result of the region's chaotic political past, which included devastating wars in the 1990s, which left lasting wounds and led to social and economic problems. Additionally, the region has been a breeding ground for the growth of extremist ideologies due to its ethnic and religious variety. Even though thousands of foreign fighters from across the world joined terrorist groups such as ISIS, according to Speckhard & Shajkovi 875 are thought to have originated from the Balkans, 800 of whom are from the western Balkan countries of Kosovo, Albania, Bosnia, and Macedonia (2018). As stated by the Italian Institute for International Political Studies, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Western Balkans are particularly vulnerable to the recruitment of individuals into jihadi groups. Together, they account for almost two thirds of known Western Balkans foreign fighters and their family members. In terms of population size, they have experienced some of the highest rates of mobilization into terrorist organizations in Europe (2020).

There are a number of underlying issues that have made Kosovo one of the afflicted nations. Since 95.6% of the population is Muslim, there have been judgments that have led some people to believe that this is the only reason why people are more likely to get involved. This is frequently fueled by outside propaganda that tries to portray our country as dangerous. It is crucial to remember that the vast majority of Muslims do not endorse radical viewpoints or practice violence. Furthermore, almost all Muslims in Kosovo live peaceful, law-abiding lives.

ISIS and other extremist organizations have attempted to disseminate their ideology within Kosovo's Muslim community. This

is where young people who have felt alienated from society or that they do not fit in with its norms struggle. It is true that some people in Kosovo may be more likely to hold extreme beliefs as a result of their lack of education. Education can assist people defend themselves against radical propaganda by fostering critical thinking abilities, exposure to various viewpoints, and chances for personal and professional advancement. People who have experienced trauma or violence earlier in life are more prone to join terrorist organizations, in addition to not having a high level of education. The war that took place in 1999 had a significant impact on many foreign fighters. Because of their personal experiences with oppression, many people who traveled to Syria felt compelled to aid others in need.

Media is one of the biggest threat and igniter for extremist propaganda. For law enforcement authorities and decision-makers, the dissemination of terrorist propaganda in Kosovo is a serious challenge. Extremist messages are easily spread through a variety of media, which promotes the glorification of violence and the radicalization of individuals. Terrorist organizations have found it easy to attract new members and disseminate their propaganda by using social media platforms, and websites. Desensitization to the severity of terrorism and increased susceptibility to extremist ideas are two goals of the use of graphic visuals and violent videos. We have an infamous case here in Kosovo of a foreign terrorist fighter spreading violent extremism propaganda and his name was Lavdrim Muhaxheri. From working in KFOR to later promoted at NATO training camp, to becoming the Albanian mujahideen leader. He has made several videos calling upon Albanians to join the "jihad". A young man in Iraq was seen being beheaded by Muhaxheri in a video that was published online in 2014 after the IS accused him of espionage for

the Iraqi government. Another depicted him using a rocket-propelled grenade to murder another individual. (Bytyci, 2017). The number of supportive remarks and words of encouragement that he was receiving raises the most alarm because it demonstrates the truth and the brainwashing effect that these people have, especially on marginalized groups.

Media outlets such as television or radio are examples of media that have been used to promote terrorist propaganda in Kosovo. Some extremist organizations have even started their own media companies, which disseminate propaganda and praise bloodshed. These media organizations are frequently supported by outside funding, and they are employed in the promotion and recruitment of extremist views. The security of the country is at risk due to the proliferation of terrorist propaganda in Kosovo. The promotion of violent ideologies has the ability to fuel radicalism and encourage individuals to join terrorist groups. The planning of terrorist acts through the media can also increase their effectiveness and make it more difficult for law enforcement to put an end to them.

It is highly challenging to control this phenomenon, and numerous institutions must collaborate and take the necessary steps to do so. Why is it so challenging to rehabilitate and reintegrate these individuals into society? There are actually a few reasons. First, it may be difficult for individuals to adapt in a nonviolent culture as a result of being exposed to violence, extremist perceptions, and warfare. Additionally, they will experience social stigmatization, which is likely to occur in our very judgmental society. The effects of social stigmatization on those who are subjected to it can be rather harmful. It may result in violence, prejudice, and social exclusion. Furthermore, it can make it harder for people to find necessities such as employment. In order to address the

issue of societal stigmatization suffered by former foreign fighters in Kosovo, it is crucial to promote communication and understanding across every demographic. Community outreach efforts, educational programs, and other initiatives can be necessary to promote tolerance and appreciation for diversity.

Despite having the highest rate of foreign fighters per capita, Kosovo is one of the only countries in the Balkans that has taken serious actions towards this issue. Kosovo has improved its legal framework and international cooperation to prevent and counter terrorism. They passed new legislation in 2015 that prohibits joining foreign conflicts, with a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison. They also created strategies to prevent violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism, which align with the EU's counterterrorism strategy. The latest action plan, from 2018 to 2023, emphasizes reintegration and rehabilitation programs that cover detention, counseling, and rehabilitation (Avdimetaj & Coleman, 2020). However, Kosovo is not part of international organizations that deal with such cases such as Interpol making it difficult to completely eliminate this issue. As a result of Kosovo's exclusion from these organizations, international cooperation on security and rule of law cannot move as quickly or as effectively as it would (Avdimetaj & Coleman, 2020). Nevertheless, our institutions and organizations are making significant efforts to avoid this problem in the future. The Kosovo Police is among the organizations that have had a notable impact on addressing this problem. They have prevented many of what could have been potential terrorist attacks. The latest case was in 2021, authorities detained five people who were accused of organizing terrorist attacks against the country's constitutional order and security. The operation, which was carried out following several months of covert investigation

and monitoring, resulted in the seizure of explosive devices, firearms, drones, and anti-tank weapons, according to the prosecution (Isufi, 2021). The close collaboration between organizations and the correctional service and probation service has proven to be stable and very effective.

Furthermore, it is crucial to raise awareness among citizens about the extremist foreign fighter's phenomenon. Educating young people and letting them know what they can encounter in a society where a former extreme combatant resides is also crucial. The Western Balkan Security Barometer has undertaken numerous surveys that have allowed us to look through citizens' perspectives on this subject. When posed the question "Do you think that citizens that took part as combatants in the foreign conflicts (e.g. Syria, Iraq, Ukraine, etc...) pose a threat to national security now that they are returned? The answers were 36.8 % high threat, 37.4% somewhat of threat and 20.7 % no threat at all which is quite concerning since it is a high number that do not believe that they are a threat (Data from Security Barometer, 2022). Moreover, when asked the question "Would you let your children associate with children and family who has returned from the war zones? 57.1% answered with no (Data from Security Barometer, 2022). It is important to bear in mind that some of these families entered these conflict areas against their will. By gradually rehabilitating these children, we may provide them with a future full of prospects, and reintegration may occur provided they receive the proper therapy and care. The government and proper institutions must make an effort to reintegrate these kids. These kids have experienced trauma and a lot of violence, which results in emotional and mental damage. They might have a harder time reintegrating and adapting to a new society. The chances of them becoming marginalized are very high. It is significant

that proper attention needs to be given to these children. They should not be penalized for their parents' wrongdoings because they were inadvertent victims of such activities.

In conclusion, as a result of our institutions' strong collaboration and constant observation by the special force and police, religiously motivated violent extremism in Kosovo has decreased. The media should be able to maintain control of the situation and stop it from

getting out of hand. Giving a platform to violent extremism is particularly difficult because it can have advantages as well as disadvantages. Globally, violent extremism is a challenge, and each country needs to take precautions to stop its citizens from emigrating to those countries that endorse violent crimes. If they are prosecuted and returned to their homeland it is important to deal with them and try the best to reintegrate them into society. And Kosovo is on the right path of doing so.

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