



What are the Chinese Media Saying about Kosovo, Serbia and the Western Balkans?

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This report looks at how selected Chinese media have reported on Kosovo, Serbia, the EU-led normalisation dialogue and the wider Western Balkans. The sample covers 30 items from China Daily, Xinhua, Global Times and Ejani, published between 2020 and 2026. When examined together the articles seem to show a clear pattern. Kosovo is rarely treated as a full political actor with its own voice or agency. It is more often presented as an issue, a region, a flashpoint, or a test of Serbia's sovereignty. Serbia, by contrast, is presented as a trusted partner of China, a country under Western pressure, and a state that has the right to choose its own foreign policy path. The EU-led dialogue for normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia is accepted as useful, but mostly as a way to reduce tensions and protect Kosovo Serbs, not as a process that should lead to mutual recognition. The wider region is presented in more mixed terms. In this sense, still marked by the 1990s, but also useful as a strategic corridor, a market and a space for Chinese development projects. The main finding is that the Chinese media rely on a steady set of frames such as sovereignty, anti-NATO memory, support for Serbia, practical dialogue and economic connectivity.

Methodology

The analysis is based on a focused sample of 30 media items from four Chinese-linked outlets, which included: China Daily, Xinhua, Global Times and Ejeni. The items were selected because they mention Kosovo, Serbia, the Serbia-Kosovo relationship, the normalisation dialogue, the 1999 NATO's humanitarian intervention, the EU accession process, or the Western Balkans more broadly. The material covers 2020 to 2026, with most Kosovo-related items appearing between 2023 and 2026, when tensions in north of Kosovo and the EU-led dialogue were again high on the agenda of the EU.

The method used is qualitative discourse analysis. The paper looks at how reported articles in Chinese media made events meaningful. It looks at repeated words, labels, metaphors, quoted voices, silences and/or patterns of blame. During our analysis we asked who is given agency in the articles, who is treated as reasonable actor, who is presented as the source of tension, and which events are brought included in the story.

The articles were coded around several themes, such as: Serbia-China relations; Kosovo's status and statehood; the EU-led normalization dialogue; NATO and the memory of 1999; Western pressure and strategic autonomy; protection of Kosovo Serbs; EU enlargement; and economic connectivity. The coding began with the categories already included in the source list, then was refined by reading the excerpts and tracking recurring language. Phrases such as “territorial integrity,” “unilateral independence,” “Kosovo issue,” “practical and constructive dialogue,” “iron-clad friendship,” “Western pressure,” and “NATO aggression” were treated as important because they appeared across different pieces or carried strong political meaning.

Our sample however, has some limits. It is not a full database of all Chinese media coverage of Kosovo or the Western Balkans. It also mixes straight news, official statements, translated content and commentary. Xinhua usually follows a more official and restrained style. Global Times is

sharper and more openly political. China Daily often combines news with opinion and Serbian voices. Ejani, the Albanian-language China Radio International platform, often localises or republishes regional and international stories in a softer tone. For that reason, the paper does not treat all outlets as identical. It looks at the common frame, but also at the differences in tone.

Why this media coverage matters?

For China and its media ecosystem, Kosovo and our region are not just another story/news. It sits at the meeting point of issues that matter to China, such as sovereignty, NATO intervention, the role of the United States, the UN Security Council, relations with Serbia, and the wider contest over the international order. This is why Kosovo often appears in Chinese media reports as more than an issue or dispute in part of Europe. It becomes part of a bigger argument about who has the right to decide

The paper also uses public context from official EU, Chinese and other sources where needed, including, among others: the EU-led dialogue, the 2023 Agreement on the Path to Normalisation and its Ohrid annex, the EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, China's official position on Kosovo, and the International Court of Justice advisory opinion on Kosovo's declaration of independence.

on borders, when outside intervention is legitimate, and whether Western powers (EU and US) apply international law consistently.

China does not recognise Kosovo's independence. Its official line is that the issue should be handled within the framework of UN Security Council Resolution 1244, through dialogue, while respecting Serbia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. This position appears almost word-for-word in the media sample, especially in Xinhua and Ejani reports based on Chinese Foreign Ministry statements. In September 2024, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said that China respects Serbia's sovereignty and territorial integrity on Kosovo, that the lawful rights

and interests of ethnic Serbs should be protected, and that unilateral moves do not help regional stability. This is the backbone of the Chinese discourse on Kosovo.

At the same time, Serbia is one of China's closest partners in Europe, if not the closest. Chinese and Serbian leaders have described the relationship as an “iron-clad friendship” and, since 2024, as a “community with a shared future.” The relationship includes infrastructure, trade, technology, political coordination and strong symbolic memory around the 1999 NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. In this setting, support for Serbia on Kosovo is part of a wider exchange. China supports Serbia's position on Kosovo, while Serbia supports the one-China principle.

The EU-led dialogue adds another layer. The EU presents the normalization dialogue as a process meant to achieve a comprehensive, legally binding normalisation agreement between Kosovo and Serbia, with benefits for both countries and the wider region of the Western Balkans. Chinese media mention the normalization

dialogue, but usually in a narrower way. It is treated less as a path to normalization of relations and more as a practical channel to prevent escalation, protect rights of Kosovo Serbs and keep the issue inside a sovereignty-based framework.

Discussion of the main findings

Serbia is the main subject; Kosovo is the problem to be managed. The strongest pattern in the sample is the unequal treatment of Serbia and Kosovo as political actors. Serbia is usually named as a state, a partner, a government with choices, and a country balancing between the EU, China and other powers. Kosovo is often described through the language of dispute: “Kosovo issue,” “Kosovo region,” “temporary institutions in Pristina,” “flashpoint,” “unilateral independence,” or “Serbian province of Kosovo.” These terms keep Kosovo's statehood in question even when the articles do not argue the point directly.

In articles on China-Serbia relations, Kosovo appears mainly as

proof of political loyalty. China is said to support “Serbia's territorial integrity”, while Serbia is said to uphold the one-China principle. This dichotomy of political notions or pairing is repeated because it links Kosovo to Taiwan without always saying so openly. The message here seems to be that both China and Serbia reject “separatism”, both oppose Western-backed independence of an entity, and both present sovereignty as the core rule of international politics.

Kosovo's institutions are rarely treated as normal state institutions. In several articles, Kosovo government is described as taking unilateral actions and/or creating tensions in the north. The wording usually spends little time on Kosovo's legal or security reasoning. The focus is on the effect on Kosovo Serbs and Serbia's reaction. *This makes Kosovo look like the actor disturbing stability, while Serbia looks like the actor responding to pressure.*

This approach and pattern in the reporting in Chinese media crosses outlets. Xinhua uses official language, like China urges “practical and constructive

dialogue” and calls for the protection of the rights of the Kosovo Serbs. China Daily carries broader geopolitical interpretations, including arguments that Kosovo's independence was Western-backed and that NATO's 1999 intervention paved the way for it. Global Times goes deeper on this, presenting Kosovo as part of a longer story of NATO expansion and interventionism. Ejani is softer, but when it covers China's position, it uses the same language that is centered on sovereignty.

The implication of this discourse, is this that Kosovo is visible to China but not as a fully legible state. It is present in Chinese media as a dispute, as an issue that is up to Serbia “to solve”, not as a subject that has its own agency. If readers repeatedly meet Kosovo, in Chinese media, as an “issue” and Serbia as the “sovereign” actor, the political imagination that follows is clear. Kosovo's democratic institutions, security concerns on the north or over relations with Serbia, the fact that International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled in favor of Kosovo's independence, or that the independence of Kosovo was indeed a proposal stemming from the UN-

ed process of determining the future of Kosovo status, Kosovo's international partnerships and statebuilding experience are fully ignored and dismissed.

China's support for Serbia is presented as principled, not geopolitical. A second finding is that Chinese media frame China's position as a matter of principle. The repeated principles are sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-interference, equality among states and opposition to unilateral moves. These ideas are familiar parts of Chinese foreign policy language. In the Kosovo case, they also fit Serbia's political and diplomatic position. The result is a strong overlap between China's worldview and Serbia's preferred framing of Kosovo. The coverage in Chinese media rarely if ever presents China as supporting Serbia because Serbia is useful to China, but instead, China is presented as defending international law and fairness with respect to Serbia. Serbia is shown as a country that has suffered from Western double standards and therefore values a partner that does not lecture it. Phrases such as “mutual respect,” “sovereign choice,” “strategic

autonomy,” and “partnership, not asymmetry” help build a contrast between China as a respectful partner and the West as a demanding one.

This is especially clear in coverage of high-level China-Serbia meetings. Serbia is described as a politically trusted European partner, a gateway into the Balkans and a strategic corridor to the wider European market. China is presented as a reliable development partner that respects Serbia's independent policy choices. Important to note that in none of these articles Serbia's EU accession process is not questioned, but instead, they frame Serbia's relations with China as compatible with the EU accession process, as long as Serbia is allowed to decide for itself. Obligations that candidate countries have to align with EU's foreign and security policy are usually ignored or entirely dismissed in this discussion.

It seems that for China is important not to portray its relations with Serbia as detrimental to Serbia's EU membership aspirations. It avoids making the story look like a simple China-versus-EU choice. The

message then is rather subtle, that Serbia can seek EU membership and still deepen relations with China and that what matters is that Brussels and Washington should not dictate Belgrade's choices. This speaks directly to a wider frustration in the region, where EU accession process has been slow, unpredictable at times, and some governments want more room to manoeuvre. However, Serbia's relations with China have been an issue for the EU. The country report for 2025 for Serbia from the European Commission, says that Serbia's Free Trade Agreement with China is "a strategic concern", notes that Serbia has not aligned with EU's restrictive measures on China, and notes the joint military exercise with China in July 2025. Overall the EU questions Serbia's strategic direction in its analysis, under Chapter 31 - Foreign, security and defence policy.¹

Still, the "principled" framing hides the power politics underneath. Serbia matters to China because it is open to Chinese investment, does not recognise Kosovo, supports the

¹ See page 103 of Serbia 2025 Report by the European Commission, available at https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/6e68ce26-b95b-48e1-921a-c60c12da8f00_en?filename=serbia-report-2025.pdf

one-China principle, has not joined NATO, and has resisted full alignment with EU restrictive measures on Russia and China. For Serbia, China offers investment, diplomatic backing on Kosovo and an alternative source of international support. Chinese media rarely unpack this bargain directly. They present it as friendship based on shared values and loyalty.

NATO and 1999 are the moral anchor of the story for the Chinese media. The humanitarian intervention of NATO in 1999 to end the war and ethnic cleansing, is one of the most powerful frames in the sample. It both as a historical context, and as a moral anchor. Articles describe NATO's operation as a violation of sovereignty, a breach of the UN-centred order, and, in some cases, "aggression." What China fails to mention here is that the UN Security Council Resolution 1199 of September 1998 internationalized the Kosovo war and included a warning of intervention against Yugoslavia is the killings of civilians

[oad/6e68ce26-b95b-48e1-921a-c60c12da8f00_en?filename=serbia-report-2025.pdf](https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/6e68ce26-b95b-48e1-921a-c60c12da8f00_en?filename=serbia-report-2025.pdf)

did not stop.² Acting under Chapter VII, the Council said the situation in Kosovo was a threat to peace and security in the region, demanded that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia stop security-force actions against civilians, and warned that further measures would be considered if Belgrade failed to comply. China voted in favor of this resolution.

The bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade is treated as a shared wound between China and Serbia.³ This memory helps turn China-Serbia relations from a normal bilateral partnership into something deeper and more symbolic. This frame does several things at once. It “delegitimizes” NATO by placing Kosovo at the beginning of a longer story of Western military intervention. Kosovo is linked with Iraq, Libya and Syria as examples of Western-led action justified in the name of human rights or security. It casts Serbia as a victim of unilateral force. It also makes China's current

support for Serbia look morally consistent, because China also remembers itself as a victim of the 1999 embassy bombing. Global Times is the sharpest in this area. It presents NATO as a military instrument of US expansion and treats Kosovo as evidence of a wider interventionist pattern. China Daily also carries strong claims, including pieces that describe the intervention as illegal or based on false Western narratives. Xinhua is more restrained, but it still reports official Chinese positions that emphasise sovereignty and UN Security Council frameworks.

For Kosovo, this frame is difficult because it pushes the humanitarian and political context of the 1998-99 war into the background. The suffering of Kosovo Albanians, repression under Serbian rule, the ethnic cleansing, and the later international administration do not receive the same attention. Nor does the ICJ advisory opinion, which concluded in 2010 that Kosovo's declaration of

² See Resolution 1199 (1998) / adopted by the Security Council at its 3930th meeting, on 23 September 1998, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/260416?ln=en&v=pdf>

³ See for context of the bombing of Chinese embassy in Belgrade, this article from the BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-48134881>

independence did not violate international law. In other words, Chinese media show selective memory in their reporting on Kosovo. The memory of NATO's bombing is central but the memory of what led to the war or NATO's intervention is ignored.

That matters because memory is not neutral. By repeatedly returning to 1999 as NATO aggression, the coverage makes the Kosovo story mainly about Western wrongdoing. This leaves little room for Kosovo's own account of repression, survival, liberation and statebuilding. It also makes the EU-led normalization dialogue look less like a process between two countries with obligations, and more like another chapter in a long struggle over Western pressure and Serbian sovereignty.

The EU-led normalization dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia is accepted, but narrowed. Chinese media do not speak negatively or in rejection tone for the EU-led normalization dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. Several pieces we examined call for dialogue, restraint and a practical solution. Xinhua and Ejani

in particular use diplomatic language, calling on parties to avoid escalation, continue practical dialogue and seek a lasting solution. Some Ejani pieces even reproduce statements from EU and US, including the view that the EU-led normalization dialogue is the only sustainable path forward. But, what we saw in our analysis is that the meaning of the normalization dialogue in the coverage by Chinese media is narrow. The normalization dialogue is not framed as a process between two increasingly equal parties moving toward mutual recognition. It is framed as a mechanism to manage tensions, prevent “unilateral” actions by Kosovo, and protect the rights and security of Kosovo Serbs. When the Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities appears, it appears as an obligation Kosovo should fulfil. Other parts of the agreements produced from the normalization dialogue such as the 2023 Agreement on the Path to Normalization (APN) receive less attention. This matters because the EU's own language around normalisation is broader. The APN includes commitments that go beyond what one might describe as

crisis management, including normal relations, recognition of documents and symbols, and non-obstruction in international relations. The APN includes in article 1 includes the commitment for Serbia and Kosovo to “develop normal, good-neighbourly relations with each other on the basis of equal rights.” Article 2 of the APN solidifies the de-facto recognition as it states that “Both Parties will be guided by the aims and principles laid down in the United Nations Charter, especially those of the sovereign equality of all States, respect for their independence, autonomy and territorial integrity, the right of self-determination, the protection of human rights, and non-discrimination.”⁴

In the Chinese media sample, however, the crisis-management language is much stronger than the transformative normalisation language, that so clearly APN contains. This narrowing works in Serbia's favour. It keeps the focus on Kosovo's obligations and the protection of Serbs, while downplaying Serbia's obligations to

accept Kosovo's documents, avoid blocking Kosovo internationally, or the de facto recognition. It also makes the EU look useful when it pressures Kosovo to de-escalate, but less legitimate when it asks Serbia to change its behaviour.

At the same time, the coverage is not fully anti-EU. Articles on EU enlargement and the Growth Plan are often neutral or positive. They report EU funding, regional economic growth, reform agendas and statements that Western Balkan integration is important for EU security and prosperity. The EU is criticised less as an economic actor than as a political actor when it is seen as applying pressure over Kosovo or China. This split is important to notice because the Chinese media can support EU enlargement as development while resisting EU political conditionality when it conflicts with Chinese or Serbian positions.

The Western Balkans are seen or framed by Chinese media as both unfinished and useful.

When the articles move away from

⁴ Agreement on the path to normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia, 27 February 2023, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belgrade-pristina-](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-agreement-path-normalisation-between-kosovo-and-serbia_en)

[dialogue-agreement-path-normalisation-between-kosovo-and-serbia_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-agreement-path-normalisation-between-kosovo-and-serbia_en)

Kosovo and Serbia, the Western Balkans are framed in two main ways. The first is the familiar story of an unfinished region with a space still shaped by the wars of the 1990s, weapons, instability, slow reforms and difficult EU accession process. The second is a more forward-looking story, that of a region as a strategic corridor, a market, a connectivity space and a gateway between China and Europe.

The “unfinished region” frame appears in articles on security incidents, weapons in Montenegro, tensions in north of Kosovo and the legacy of the 1990s. This is not unique to Chinese media as Western media often use similar shorthand. But in this sample, instability often connects back to NATO, “Western intervention” and the “failure” of the West to create lasting stability. The “useful region” frame is more distinctive. Serbia is described as an entry point or a gateway to the Balkans and the wider European market.

Infrastructure projects, railways, roads, trade fairs, green energy, telecommunications and agriculture are presented as areas where China can contribute. The Belt and Road

Initiative is framed as practical development, not geopolitical expansion. *In one China Daily piece, the argument is that Chinese connectivity projects pushed the EU and the US to pay more attention to infrastructure after neglecting the Balkans for years.* This is arguably a clever narrative because it turns criticism of Chinese influence into “proof” of Chinese usefulness. If the EU now invests more in infrastructure, the implication is that China helped wake it up. If Serbia receives Chinese investment, Belgrade is acting in its own interest. If EU and US warn about dependency, they are portrayed as limiting the choices of smaller states.

The EU Growth Plan fits into this story in an interesting way. Chinese media report it as a serious economic package, including the EU's six-billion-euro Reform and Growth Facility for 2024-2027. But this does not remove China from the picture. It allows Chinese outlets to show the Western Balkans as a region where different development offers overlap. The question becomes more about whether the regio can use all available partnerships while moving

toward growth, whether the region is European or Chinese.

The tone differs by outlet, but the core arguments and frames hold throughout. The outlets in the sample do not all speak in the same voice. Xinhua is closest to official state language. Its Kosovo pieces are short, controlled and built around statements by Chinese officials or diplomats. The wording of the articles is careful and one that respects Serbia's sovereignty, protects Serbs, avoid unilateral moves, continue constructive dialogue. Global Times is more confrontational. It uses Kosovo to attack NATO and the United States, and it presents China-Serbia friendship as part of a wider struggle for a multipolar world. It is perhaps a more clearer example of Kosovo being (ab) used as a case in a global argument against Western military power. China Daily seems to be sitting in the middle of this. Some pieces are more straightforward in terms of the reporting news through the official Chinese and Serbian positions, while others are opinion-heavy. It gives space to Serbian voices and to the language of “iron-clad friendship,” “shared future,”

“mutual respect” and strategic cooperation. It makes the China-Serbia relationship look broad, normal and future-oriented, not only anti-Western.

Ejani is the most interesting from a regional information point of view. Because it is Albanian-language and aimed at local audiences, it often republishes or translates content in a tone that feels less ideological. It covers Blinken, Rama, EU funds, illegal migration and local/regional issues. But when China's position on Kosovo appears, the same core terms are included such as Serbia's sovereignty, territorial integrity, Kosovo Serb right, etc. In other words, localisation matters and changes the tone, but not the basic political line.

The shared frame in Chinese media is that Serbia is a sovereign partner, Kosovo is a contested issue, NATO is the original violator, normalization dialogue is needed but should not undermine Serbia's interests and China is a respectful partner offering development and political balance.

China's position also helps Russia's positions and there seems to be alignment from the distance

A further finding is that China's position on Kosovo does not only support Serbia, but it seems to indirectly strengthens Russia's position. Beijing and Moscow may not have to use the same language all the time for the effect to be the same. Both countries reject Kosovo's independence, both treat the issue mainly through Serbia's lens/position, and both keep open the possibility of blocking Kosovo's UN membership through their seats at the UN Security Council. This is important for Kosovo because it gives Serbia more room to resist the EU-led goal of full normalization of relations or legally binding comprehensive normalization of relations. Even when China presents itself as neutral and says it

supports normalization dialogue, its core position keeps Kosovo inside Serbia's legal and political frame. This is very close to Russia's position. The practical result is that Kosovo is not treated as a state that should be integrated into the international system, but as an unresolved dispute whose final status depends on Serbia's consent. In this sense, China's position helps preserve the same status quo that Russia has long supported.

The China-Serbia relationship has also become more important because Russia's full scale invasion of Ukraine has made Serbia's open reliance on Moscow more difficult. Serbia still depends on Russia on many fronts, including on Kosovo, but China now offers Belgrade another major power partner that is less exposed in the EU debate than Russia. Beijing supports Serbia on Kosovo, speaks strongly in the support of Serbian interests, and presents Serbia as an "ironclad friend." This gives Serbia another diplomatic shield, especially on questions linked to Kosovo's UN membership.

An article by Ilazi and Vladislavljev from 2023 posits that China's

relevance for Kosovo has grown mainly because of Serbia. China and Kosovo have almost no real bilateral relationship.⁵ China does not recognize Kosovo, keeps only a limited presence in Pristina, and does not include Kosovo in its regional cooperation formats. But because Serbia has deepened its ties with China, Beijing has become more relevant for Kosovo too. In practice, Kosovo has to deal with China not because of direct relations with Beijing, but because China has become part of Serbia's wider strategy to dispute Kosovo's independence. The same article also shows that China's position is not only about Serbia. It is also about Taiwan. Beijing sees Kosovo through the wider fear that it can be replicated or used to the detriment of China's own position on Taiwan. For Kosovo, this means that China's policy towards Kosovo is unlikely to change only because of potential better communication from Kosovo. It would likely change only if Serbia's own position changes, or if the EU-led normalization process produces a settlement that Beijing

can accept without fearing it can weaken its own Taiwan narrative.

Analyzing potential implications

The first implication is that Kosovo faces a serious narrative challenge or gap in Chinese-linked media spaces. Kosovo is not absent, but it is present in a narrow and undermining role. It appears mainly when there is tension, when Serbia reacts, when NATO history is discussed, or when China's official position is repeated. Kosovo's own perspective is entirely missing and not developed. For Kosovo, this means that diplomatic engagement with China may be limited by formal non-recognition, but public communication still matters. Kosovo's story cannot be left only to crisis coverage and Serbian discourse/language on the matter.

The second implication is for the EU-led normalization dialogue.

⁵ The Implications of China-Serbia Relations for Kosovo, By Ramadan Ilazi and Stefan Vladisavljev, December 28, 2023,

<https://thedi diplomat.com/2023/12/the-implications-of-china-serbia-relations-for-kosovo/>

Chinese media coverage does not directly undermine the dialogue, but it supports a version that is aligned to Serbia's reading. It accepts dialogue as a tool, but not as a process that should normalise Kosovo's relations with Serbia and consolidate its international position. China talks only about the parts related to Kosovo's role and protections for the Kosovo Serb communities, while staying quiet on Serbia's commitments.

The third implication is regional, for the Western Balkans. China is not presenting itself in the Western Balkans only through money. It is also presenting a political style or model of society and state, which is based on the premise that China as a partner offer no lectures, no conditions, respect for sovereignty, infrastructure, partnership and room for national choice. This can be attractive in a region that seems to become tired of slow and unpredictable accession process. Of course, what China preaches is not what we see in practice. China helps maintain corruption and captured state in the region by supporting autocratic leaders and undermining democratic norms, media freedom and accountability.

The fourth implication is for how we understand influence. The material in this sample is not best described as crude disinformation, but much of it is based on actual events with tensions in north of Kosovo, EU funding, Serbia-China agreements, NATO's 1999 intervention, China's official policy. The issue is selection and framing as some facts are repeated often while others are almost invisible. Some actors are quoted often while alternative voice are entirely absent. In this case Kosovo's voice. Some legal principles are treated as central while others are ignored. This is how influence often works in practice, to arrange reality in a way that makes one conclusion feel natural.

The fifth implication is for Kosovo and her allies. They should not assume that EU enlargement language alone will crowd out Chinese narratives. Chinese media can report EU enlargement positively while still questioning "political pressure", NATO legitimacy and Kosovo's statehood. The response therefore needs to move beyond "more EU messaging." It has to be more specific focusing on clearer

communication on the results of the normalization dialogue, more explanation of Kosovo's security concerns, more visibility for Kosovo Serb pluralism beyond Belgrade's line, etc.

Concluding note

The selected Chinese media coverage tells a consistent story. Serbia is a trusted partner that wants to keep its strategic autonomy. China is a respectful friend that supports international law, development and multipolar cooperation. Kosovo is a contested issue produced by the intervention of the West and kept unstable by “unilateral” moves from Kosovo’s institutions. NATO's 1999 intervention is the historical wound that explains much of the present. The EU-led normalization dialogue is useful, but mainly as a tool to manage tensions and protect Kosovo Serbs, not as a route toward recognition or full normalization between Kosovo and Serbia.

This does not mean every article is aggressive or openly anti-Kosovo. Some are neutral. Some report EU statements fairly. Some Albanian-language pieces on Ejani are mild

and factual. But the deeper pattern is still there. The language in Chinese media makes Serbia's position look like the natural defence of international law, and Kosovo's position look like the result of Western-backed exception. For Kosovo, the problem is both China's non-recognition but also how Kosovo is narrated in Chinese media. This can present an issue in parts of the world where Chinese media and narratives may travel, like in wider Asia and Africa, and this can challenge Kosovo’s outreach effort in countries in these areas. For the Western Balkans, the coverage shows how China links economic cooperation with political storytelling, and this includes roads, railways, trade and investment are not just development stories. They sit inside a wider narrative about choice and resistance to “Western pressure”.

The main takeaway is that the Chinese media coverage of Kosovo and the Western Balkans is not structured around a small number of strong ideas that are repeated across different outlets and adapted to different audiences. Those ideas are easy to understand, politically useful and emotionally anchored in

the memory of 1999. Any serious analysis of foreign influence in the region needs to take this kind of discourse seriously, not because it slowly shapes what sounds reasonable, what sounds legitimate and whose story gets heard.

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