

Kosovo Relations in the Regional Context

Besnik Murati¹ , Vjollca Salihu^{2*} 

¹ Faculty of Law, University 'Isa Boletini' in Mitrovica, St. 'Ukshin Kovacica', Mitrovica, 40000, Republic of Kosovo.

² Government Building, "Mother Teresa", Square 10000 Pristina, Republic of Kosovo.

Received: 3/6/2022
Revised: 7/12/2022
Accepted: 30/03/2023
Published: 30/1/2024

* Corresponding author:
<mailto:vjollcasalihu73@gmail.com>

Citation: Murati, B., & Salihu, V.
(2024). Kosovo Relations in the
Regional Context. *Dirasat: Human
and Social Sciences*, 51(1), 373–381.
<https://doi.org/10.35516/hum.v51i1.1153>

Abstract

Objectives: This study examines Kosovo political and economic relations with neighboring countries. It highlights the role Kosovo plays and the challenges it faces in consolidating these relations and in achieving cooperation. The study focuses on Kosovo gains from establishing its identity as an independent country and joining regional, European, and international organizations.

Methods: Using the deductive approach, this study aims to explore Kosovo relations and politics in the regional context. Hence, it investigates Kosovo role, expectations, and aspirations when it comes to regional and international integrations.

Results: The inferential approach is used to show that Kosovo has constructive bilateral relations with neighboring countries as it ultimately seeks a better future for these countries and their peoples.

Conclusions: Kosovo role to ensure stability in the regional context is crucial. Therefore, the study shows that cooperation and normalization of relations among the Western Balkans countries (especially after the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the nineties of the last century) is a prerequisite for integration into the European Union and Euro-Atlantic organizations. That is, to achieve regional stability, countries should develop better neighborly relations.

Keywords: Cooperation, regional integration, relations, security.

علاقة كوسوفا في السياق الإقليمي

بسنك موراتي¹، يولسى صالح^{2*}

¹ كلية الحقوق، جامعة عيسى بولتيني في متروفيتسي، ش: اكشين كوتشيسي، 40000 جمهورية كوسوفا.
² مبنى الحكومة، ش: ننا تيرسي، 10000 بريشتينا جمهورية كوسوفا.

ملخص

الأهداف: تتناول هذه الدراسة علاقة كوسوفا السياسية والاقتصادية مع الدول المجاورة والتحديات التي تواجهها ودورها في ترسيخ هذه العلاقات وهذا التعاون. وتركيز هذه الدراسة يكون حول الأهداف التي تسعى كوسوفا من أجل تحقيقها في سبيل تثبيت هويتها كدولة مستقلة وللانضمام إلى المنظمات الإقليمية والأوروبية والدولية.

المنهجية: تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى النظر في علاقات كوسوفا وسياساتها في السياق الإقليمي والدور الذي تلعبه وما تتوقع من الأهداف من انضمامها على المنظمات الإقليمية والدولية، ناهجا المنهج الاستنباطي.

النتائج: ولقد نهجنا في هذه الدراسة المنهج الاستدلالي وأما ما يتعلق بنتائج الدراسة فهي تؤكد أن دولة كوسوفا تعامل جيرانها بصدق وإخلاص وأن هدفها الوحيد هو المستقبل المشرق لهذه الدول وشعوبها.

الخلاصة: وبالتالي فما دور كوسوفا في السياق الإقليمي لضمان الأمن والسلام؟ وتصوير دول البلقان الغربي أنها مركز الأزمات تصوير صحيح، خاصة بعد التسعينيات من القرن الماضي حيث انفكت جمهورية يوغسلافيا الأمر الذي يتطلب نهجاً آخر في العلاقات بين هذه الدول التي تعمل من أجل الانضمام إلى المنظمات الأوروبية والأورو أطلسية. وقضية كوسوفا لتحقيق هذا الهدف المشترك بين هذه الدول هي بمثابة مفتاح أساسي لأن تطبيع العلاقات بين هذه الدول هو شرط للانضمام على الاتحاد الأوروبي.

الكلمات الدالة: العلاقات، الأمن، التعاون، الانضمام الإقليمي.



© 2024 DSR Publishers/ The University of Jordan.

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC) license <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Conceptual overview in the regional context

Kosovo when it comes to relations with neighboring countries is the youngest state and being as such differs in its political, economic and geostrategic power, however, in terms of geostrategic and geopolitical importance, Kosovo undoubtedly plays a major role especially in the issues of security and stability of the Balkans. "The solutions provided by international diplomacy for the dissolution of Yugoslavia inspired by the international principle of *uti possideti* and the principle of territorial sovereignty were challenged by the conflict for self-determination in Kosovo". (ENIKA ABAZI, 2013, p. 187). "In the Western Balkans, the political and ethnic factor has been proven constantly to be an obstacle to regional cooperation and integration. Southeast European expert Franz Lothar Altmann states that intensified cooperation with each other is still considered the Trojan horse in order to restore the previous situation" (Hajrullahu, Arben, 2015, p. 165). Kosovo undoubtedly supports initiatives that would contribute to the resolution of international disputes in favor of peace, at the same time considers that there is no alternative to peace and its commitment in this regard is constant. "Developing relations based on good neighborhood and cooperation with the countries of the region, in particular with the countries of the Western Balkans is one of the requirements in the Stabilization and Association Process with the EU". (Republic of Kosovo, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.).

"In 1999, in Cologne, Germany, the Stability Pact was initiated, which intended to strengthen the Balkans countries' efforts to consolidate peace and democracy. This pact had the intention to prevent conflicts by providing a framework for closer cooperation and relations with European and Euro-Atlantic structures". (Manuela Riedeland & Marnix Eichelberg, 2009, p. 2). Also, "in Albania, the Conference of the Security Committees of the Adriatic Charter Parliaments was held, in which the importance of the region countries being integrated in NATO and the EU was emphasized, so that the peace of the region could be sustainable". (Edlira Osmani & Jurgis Čyrbja, 2014, p. 54). "The Stability Pact for Southeast Europe is preceded by numerous regional co-operation initiatives. Among them: The Central European Initiative (CEI); Good Neighborhood Conference; The Royaumont Process (RP, 1995); Southeast European Cooperation Initiative (SECI, 1995); EU regional approach (RA-EU, 1996); Stability, Security and Cooperation in SEE (CSEE, 1996) and the SEE Cooperation Process (SEEC, 1996)". (Manuela Riedeland & Marnix Eichelberg, 2009, p. 2)

"Kosovo does not have any territorial claims against any of the neighboring countries, a characteristic that is a significant element of citizenship". (KIPRED-KOSOVO INSTITUTE FOR POLICY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT, 2007, p. 14). "The quality of relations between Kosovo and the region countries that did not recognize the independence of Kosovo remains poor... Relations between Kosovo and those who do not recognize its independence are weak having in mind the fact that Serbia does not recognize the independence of Kosovo and therefore actively engages into challenging its international legitimacy". (KIPRED-Kosovo Institute for Policy Research and Development, 2014, p. 10).

1.2 The main aim of this study

The main purpose of this study is to address the relations of Kosovo in the regional context as well as in the legal, political, economic and security context. In order to achieve the main goal of this study, it is inevitable to create good relations between states and respect bilateral and multilateral agreements as a guarantee of applicability in practice.

1.3 Objectives raised in the study

The main objective raised in this study is to analyze the reports of Kosovo in the regional context.

1.4 Research questions

The question that is posed and requires an answer in this paper is, what has been the role of Kosovo in the regional context for a stable peace in the Western Balkans? With special emphasis on the reports: Kosovo-Albania, Kosovo-Macedonia, Kosovo-Montenegro and Kosovo-Serbia.

1.5 Literature Review

Based on the theoretical published reports, there are a number of authors who have investigated Kosovo relations with neighboring countries, especially relations between Kosovo and Serbia.

In this point of view NATO's humanitarian intervention in Kosovo bypasses Russia as a key factor in international

relations, affects a negative perception in further international cooperation, thus involving Russia in the Kosovo conflict and relations Serbia (Regina Heller, 2014). Serbia is considered as a historical ally of Russia, in this context Russia usually not been constructive when the solution of the Kosovo issue was in question, supporting Serbia even then when it acted contrary to international law. Putin many times mentions Kosovo as an analogy for the recognition of the right to secession of the "Self-proclaimed People's Republics" of Luhansk and Donetsk in eastern Ukraine. This analogy fails due to the fact that Kosovo in almost all processes has been considered a sui generis case, therefore, such claims do not coincide either with international law or with the reality between Kosovo and the "self-proclaimed People's Republics" of Luhansk and Donetsk in eastern Ukraine.

While another publication reported by (Ronald H.Linden, 2007, p. 344), among other things, deals with the importance of countries' membership in the North Atlantic Organization (NATO), as a prerequisite for their security, especially from Russian influence. The countries of the Western Balkans, such as Albania, Macedonia, and Montenegro, are now part of NATO, Kosovo has serious claims for membership, while Serbia has continuously stated that it does not want to join NATO because of its alliance with Russia. Also, Russia uses Serbia to destabilize the Western Balkans.

Other published reports state that (Edward Newman&Gëzim Visoka, 2018) "Kosovo has received wide recognition from most of the countries belonging to the Euro-Atlantic community, and no recognition from other developing powers that have positioned themselves in favor of Russia on the issue of Kosovo independence", but also the fact that "Russia's international support for Serbia is in the interest of Russia and Serbia" (Hasan ACAR&Serhat BULUT, 2022, p. 82). This affects especially when Kosovo relations with Serbia are in question, consequently Russia's powerful influence both in the UN Security Council and with its destructive approach in all the processes that Kosovo has gone through. Consequently, even in the process of negotiations for a comprehensive agreement between Kosovo and Serbia, Russia's influence on Serbia has made it unconstructive in reaching an agreement between the two countries.

1.6 Methodology

The deduction method is used in the article, the purpose of which is to elaborate the problem from general to specific arguments. Analysis method as research methodology, qualitative research method, chronological event research method, historical and comparative method.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2.1 Kosovo - Albania relations

Relations between Kosovo and Albania were and remain good, also Albania's contribution in relation to Kosovo is great with special emphasis related to the Kosovo war period. With the declaration of independence by Kosovo, this cooperation between these two countries shall be multiplied and shall provide help in terms of economic growth as well as accelerate the Euro-Atlantic integration process. "The presence of the two countries constitutes a great capacity in order to build a common Euro-Atlantic future". (Republic of Albania, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Priorities). "The quality of relations between these two countries may be observed based on the fact that Albania recognized the Independence of Kosovo immediately, whereas diplomatic relations were established on the day of recognition, unlike some other region countries that have postponed these two aspects in the development of bilateral relations. Albania already had a diplomatic presence through the Liaison Office, even before Kosovo declared its independence, and therefore had raised its diplomatic status at the Embassy level". (KIPRED-Kosovo Institute for Policy Research and Development, 2014, p. 8). "Albania and Kosovo have entered a new phase of cooperation that is concretized with the signing of bilateral agreements such as that of 2013, the signing of the Intergovernmental Protocol for Cooperation, Albania-Kosovo. "This Protocol is the most comprehensive document in terms of bilateral relations, which is considered to be a development plan in order to make more complementary all sectors of cooperation, with the intention of creating a wider market in the region." (Edlira Osmani & Jurgis Çyrbja, 2014, p. 53). "This cooperation is guided by the national interest as well as by political, economic, social and cultural interaction". (Republic of Albania, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Priorities).

Bearing in mind the geopolitical circumstances in the Western Balkans and the delay in the European Union integration

process, the idea of national unity has been revived once again, claiming that now it seems more likely to occur. "According to a survey funded and supported by the Soros Foundation, which indicates that national unity enjoys the support of the majority in both countries. In case of a referendum, 75% of Albanians in Albania and 64% of Kosovo Albanians would vote in favor of national unity. If this survey is read in rational terms, especially by having in mind the recent reports between the two Governments, Kosovo and Albania, a YES answer is very significant as an articulation of political aspirations, to some extent it also comes more as a reflexive answer. But when it comes to political reality, the answer YES faces numerous unknowns, including here a lack of clarity about the true meaning of union, as well as the price that should be paid in order to achieve it". (Sbunker Online Portal). Albania and Kosovo fortunately have no open issues and Kosovo stands at the top of Albania's foreign policy agenda.

Another document published on Balkan web informs us regarding a joint Declaration on cooperation and strategic partnership between the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania and the Government of the Republic of Kosovo. "Among the points of this statement is also the Foreign and Security Policy point where the respective states are engaged, in addition to other things, in consulting, coordinating and adopting the EU positions concerning foreign and security policy issues, human rights and sustainable development". (Edlira Osmani & Jurgis Çyrbja, 2014, p. 53). "The National Center for Security and Defense of Albania has compiled a document titled "Project Cooperation in the field of Defense Albania-Kosovo". Based on this project, three proposals are presented, as following: "A Joint Military Academy, a civil-military port for Kosovo in Albania, as well as a Task Force for coordinated NATO integration". Areas of joint cooperation projects:"1. Education and training project for military and civilian personnel and master and doctoral studies. 2. Project in the field of Civil Emergencies. 3. The project of a joint unit for peace missions. 4. Joint training project between peace support operations units / teams. 5. Joint project for conducting joint procurements. 6. Joint project in the field of equipment and systems maintenance. 7. Joint project in the field of destruction of old and surplus ammunition. 8. Project in the field of airspace surveillance and policing capacities. 9. Joint project on building a maritime capacity of Kosovo in the territory of the Republic of Albania. 10. Project for participation in regional initiatives, such as SEDM / SEEBRIG, the A5 initiative, the Balkan Battlegroup of the EU, and the NATO Centers of Excellence. 11. The project for the establishment of a joint Institute of Strategic Studies based on the experience of the National Center for Security and Defense of the Republic of Albania. 12. Establishment of a joint Task Force team to support Kosovo in the NATO integration process. 13. A Joint Group on Strategic Documents, Standardization, Doctrines and Joint Manuals for Peace Support Operations". (Gazeta Express). "Another significant area for cooperation is that of customs, where Albania and Kosovo with their respective governments have expressed initiatives for integrated border management and for shortening the transit procedure. This joint commitment brings facilities to the movement of people as well as to the economic development of these two countries, which should not affect the security standards of citizens but only strengthen them." (Edlira Osmani & Jurgis Çyrbja, 2014, p. 53).

Although Kosovo and Albania have good relations, not always such relations have passed without problems and mutual barriers. A brief summary of the most important trade disputes between Kosovo and Albania in recent years: "Potato exports from Kosovo to Albania have been hindered in many cases during the period 2009-2012 due to high customs duties imposed on this product by Albanian authorities. During 2012, the Kosovo authorities imposed high taxes on Albanian cement exports (35% of the value) to Kosovo, in order to protect the domestic cement industry. In February 2013, the Kosovo Food and Veterinary Agency withdrew from the market for security reasons a significant amount of milk imported from Albania. In March 2013 (as a countermeasure) the Albanian National Food Authority (AKU) confiscated more than 74 tons of wheat flour at the border with Kosovo, due to the fact that the flour shipment was not accompanied by the relevant certificate identifying the afflation level". (Dritan Sulçebe, pp. 36, 37, 38, 39).

2.2 Kosovo-North Macedonia relations

North Macedonia is among Kosovo first neighbors however it is not one of the first countries to recognize Kosovo Independence. "This neighboring country decided to recognize the independence of Kosovo on October 9, 2008, however, North Macedonia made significant efforts to condition the recognition of Kosovo independence with the demarcation of

the border between these two countries. Apart from the delay in recognition of Kosovo independence, the North Macedonia also did not establish diplomatic relations with Kosovo for a long period of time, which again tried to condition it with the border demarcation. After being successful in the Border Demarcation Agreement, North Macedonia established diplomatic relations with Kosovo on October 18, 2009, a year after the recognition of the Kosovo independence". (KIPRED-Kosovo Institute for Policy Research and Development, 2014, p. 25). "On January 1, 2010, Macedonia decided to appoint its first Ambassador to Pristina. North Macedonia had maintained its presence in Kosovo even before it recognized Kosovo, and even before Kosovo declared independence, through the Trade and Economic Office, and then through its Liaison Office of the Republic of Macedonia in Kosovo". (KIPRED-Kosovo Institute for Policy Research and Development, 2014, p. 25). "North Macedonia ranks second among Kosovo neighbors, and third in the region with the number of bilateral agreements that it has signed with Kosovo. The nature of these agreements is diverse, the agreements related to economic cooperation, as well as those concerning security and the rule of law, are the ones that largely characterize the nature of agreements between Kosovo and North Macedonia. Agreements in the field of culture and medicine are also present. Finally, among neighboring countries, North Macedonia is the second largest investor in Kosovo after Albania, and is the fifth largest investor among other countries in the region". (KIPRED-Kosovo Institute for Policy Research and Development, 2014, p. 26)

In the first joint meeting which was held on September 16, 2021, between these two governments of the Republic of Northern Macedonia and the Republic of Kosovo, in addition to confirming good and friendly relations, for the realization of common interests intended at EU and NATO integration, among others, they signed various Cooperation Agreements. "Memoranda of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Northern Macedonia and the Government of the Republic of Kosovo in order to determine the general scope of cooperation related to the feasibility study for the road Prizren - Tetovo and the rehabilitation of the Bllacë buffer zone between the two border facilities of both countries, the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of the Diaspora, the Agreement on the Status of Members of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Northern Macedonia and the Security Forces of the Republic of Kosovo (SOFA), Protocol on the Implementation of the Agreement on Implementation of the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Northern Macedonia and the Government of the Republic of Kosovo on Border Regulation of Railway Traffic, Memorandum of Cooperation in the Energy Sector, Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Tourism, Memorandum of Cooperation in the Field of Innovation and Technological Development and Entrepreneurs, Partnership Agreement, Memorandum for Bas Cooperation between the Ministry of Local Self-Government of the Republic of Northern Macedonia and the Ministry of Regional Development of the Republic of Kosovo and the Memorandum of Cooperation between the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy of the Republic of Northern Macedonia and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Development of the Republic of Kosovo". (Government of the Republic of Northern Macedonia). "Relations with Kosovo are not emphasized in the Policy Goals and Priorities of North Macedonia, and these relations are in the context of relations with the countries that North Macedonia calls "direct neighborhood". By this is promoted the good neighborhood and friendship, as well as the willingness for general cooperation in various areas of common interest. Good neighborly relations are one of North Macedonia's foreign policy priorities". (KIPRED-Kosovo Institute for Policy Research and Development, 2014, p. 80)

2.3 Kosovo-Montenegro relations

"In terms of bilateral relations with Kosovo, Montenegro is ranked third among Kosovo four neighbors, and only seventh in the region. Unlike other countries where most of them immediately recognized Kosovo Independence, Montenegro recognized it on October 9, 2008, eight (8) months after Kosovo declared its independence. Montenegro, similar to North Macedonia, is one of the last countries in the region to recognize Kosovo. Apparently, the recognition by these two countries has been coordinated, due to the fact that both countries faced a "crisis of relations" with Serbia. Serbia threatened these two countries with deteriorating relations if they recognize the independence of Kosovo. Montenegro had good relations with Serbia, as it had seceded from Serbia only two years before recognizing the independence of Kosovo". (Ibid, p. 26)

After the recognition of Kosovo independence by Montenegro, Serbia withdrew its ambassador and then the Serbian Foreign Minister said that the Montenegrin Ambassador to Belgrade “was no longer welcome”, as well as the pro-Serbian opposition in Montenegro organized protests against the government, which responded that the recognition of Kosovo independence “it is not against Serbia, but it is for our future”. (Ibid, p. 26) “It took more than North Macedonia for Montenegro to establish diplomatic relations with Kosovo, which did it on January 15, 2010, a year and a half after recognizing the independence of Kosovo. Montenegro has not conditioned the recognition of Kosovo independence or the establishment of diplomatic relations, however, it has conditioned the appointment of its Ambassador to Kosovo, which has been pending since the establishment of diplomatic relations with the recognition of Montenegrins living in Kosovo as a community with full constitutional rights just like those enjoyed by other communities in Kosovo”. (Ibid, p. 27)

When it comes to the priorities of the Montenegro's foreign policy, Kosovo is in the category entitled “Improving and maintaining good neighborly relations and regional cooperation”. However, Kosovo is not mentioned among the neighboring countries with which Montenegro claims to have in common the same geographical area, as well as the same foreign policy goals. (Ibid, p. 81) “Kosovo and Montenegro, on August 26, 2015 signed in Vienna the agreement on the state border between Kosovo and Montenegro”. (Republic of Kosovo, Government, State Commission for Demarcation and Maintenance of the State Border, 2015-2016, p. 84). The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kosovo, Hashim Thaçi, after the signing of the agreement said that it is “in full compliance with the Constitution of 1974, the Document of President Martti Ahtisaari and the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo”. (Republic of Kosovo, Government, State Commission for Demarcation and Maintenance of the State Border, 2015-2016, p. 84). The signing of the border demarcation agreement with Montenegro has been supported by the former US Administration and President Obama who stated: “The signing of the historic border demarcation agreement between Kosovo and Montenegro on August 26, 2015, demonstrated the determination of Kosovo for having a good neighborly relations and the determination to address regional issues in a spirit of dialogue and cooperation. Kosovo determination to address the above-mentioned challenges responsibly and constructively has put Kosovo on a solid path towards increasing stability, security and prosperity in a full, free and peaceful Europe”. (Ibid, p. 85).

However, the signing of the demarcation agreement between Kosovo and Montenegro, had induced numerous reactions in Kosovo, both from opposition parties, civil society and residents of the municipalities of Peja, Istog and Deçan, pretending that with this agreement Kosovo loses 12 thousand hectares of its territory. The border demarcation agreement between these two countries as such has been ratified by the Assembly of Montenegro, however, it has not been ratified by the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo until three years after the signing in Vienna, Austria. However, after the change of government in Kosovo and great international pressure, the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo on March 21, 2018, ratified the agreement on the demarcation of border with Montenegro.

2.4 Kosovo-Serbia relations

Recalling the past between Kosovo and Serbia, the occupation by the latter, the war of 1998/1999, and relations between them still remain tense in terms of politics and security issues. Serbia does not recognize Kosovo as an independent and sovereign state, on the contrary it still considers it a territorial part of it. “Due to this reason, Serbia and Kosovo have no bilateral relations and the quality of relations between them remains fragile. The current Constitution of Serbia, adopted in 2006, after Montenegro seceded from it, still has Kosovo as its province, and according to this Constitution, the substantial autonomy of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija shall be regulated by a special law which shall be ratified in accordance with the discussions foreseen for the amendment of the Constitution”. (KIPRED-Kosovo Institute for Policy Research and Development, 2014, p. 27). “Following Kosovo declaration of independence, Belgrade adopted the view that it could pursue in parallel its uninterrupted battle related to ambitions for Serbia to join the EU along with Kosovo. This implies that the insistence when it comes to not accepting Kosovo citizenship would have resulted in an immediate blockade of Serbia's progress towards the EU”. (Ibid, p. 52) In this regard, “Belgrade's political leadership had the attitude that efforts to maintain Kosovo and EU integration efforts are two separate objectives that may be pursued in parallel”. (Dr. Filip Ejodus & Dr. Jelica Minić & Vjosa Musliu, 2014, p. 10).

“The Parliament of Kosovo on March 10, 2011, adopted a resolution which in addition to mandating the Government of Kosovo to commence negotiations with Serbia, at the same time obliges it to report continuously on the progress achieved concerning the course of this process”. (Kosovo Democratic Institute, 2018, p. 5). “The dialogue commenced on the basis of Resolution 64/298, intending to resolve technical issues and normalize interstate relations between Kosovo and Serbia, as well as their integration into the EU.” (Republic of Kosovo, 2011, p. 18). “This period is characterized by dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, which resulted in reaching several agreements. Most of these agreements have not been implemented yet, especially the 'footnote agreement' which aimed to remove obstacles that Kosovo faced in its membership and representation in regional initiatives”. (KCSS-Kosovo Center for Security Studies, 2014, p. 12). “Both sides entered into the dialogue because of the common goal (EU integration) and different benefits that await them (Kosovo, on the one hand, wants to increase its international legitimacy, using the dialogue as an example of a responsible international participant, whereas Serbia, on the other hand, has entered into this dialogue to challenge the international legitimacy that Kosovo is making efforts to achieve it, or that possibly, to defer its gains)”. (KIPRED-Kosovo Institute for Policy Research and Development, 2014, p. 15)

The key focus of dialogue lies on three main issues: 1) regional cooperation, 2) freedom of movement, and 3) and the rule of law. (Dr. Filip Ejduš & Dr. Jelica Minić & Vjosa Musliu, 2014, p. 10) “There are various scenarios in relation to the outcome of the next process. The first possible scenario is the continuation of the *status quo*. This can be manifested in the 'wait and see' version. The second scenario involves the signing of a comprehensive agreement on the full normalization of Kosovo-Serbia relations. The third scenario foresees full normalization of relations, including mutual recognition, through border reorganization”. (RIDEA-Research Institute of Development and European Affairs & BPRG-Balkans Policy Research Group, 2018, p. 7).

“Kosovo and Serbia have not engaged in bilateral activities however, they have managed to maintain contacts at the multilateral level. The Prime Ministers of these two countries have met many times and both sides have also engaged at all other levels of government in order to coordinate activities concerning the agreements reached as part of the dialogue that commenced on 8 March 2011”. (KIPRED-Kosovo Institute for Policy Research and Development, 2014, pp. 10,11) “The governments of these two countries undertook a step forward when the Prime Ministers of Kosovo Thaçi and Serbia Đajić, on April 19, 2013, in Brussels under EU supervision, signed the “First Agreement on Principles for the Normalization of Relations”. (Dr. Filip Ejduš & Dr. Jelica Minić & Vjosa Musliu, 2014, p. 11). “Although the agreement has been opposed, both in Serbia and in Kosovo, it has been subsequently ratified by both parliaments, Kosovo and Serbia”. (KIPRED-Kosovo Institute for Policy Research and Development, 2014, p. 51) This agreement has been considered as a major step towards the normalization of relations between the parties, although this agreement does not imply the recognition of Kosovo independence by Serbia. (Dr. Filip Ejduš & Dr. Jelica Minić & Vjosa Musliu, 2014, p. 11). A number of other agreements have been signed between them, however the problem has been and continues to be the non-implementation of most of these agreements reached in practice. “In the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue process, constructive ambiguity provided space for the parties to interpret the agreements according to their version and for both sides to declare victories in the talks.” (Kosovo Democratic Institute, 2018, p. 14). Also, “the vast majority of the signed agreements, being as such, have been characterized by a lack of clarity concerning their legal nature, either in the absence of a standardized legal form, or in ambiguities regarding their authorship, or the signing in numerous cases by the parties which were not authorized according to the legislation in force, or even in the absence of their enforcing mechanism”. (KOSOVO ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS, 2020, p. 8) Whereas recently, in particular with the change of leadership in Kosovo, dialogue between the parties has taken a completely different direction, barricading each party in their positions that at first glance seem unsurpassed. The epilogue of the already prolonged EU-mediated negotiations has lost its meaning and such a format of negotiations shall only prolong political instability in this part of the Balkans.

Kosovo when it comes to foreign policy with countries in the region such as; Turkey, Croatia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the relations between them depend on the views, political, economic and geostrategic developments conducted separately with each country. Any agreement concluded with Kosovo is presented as

a basis for the implementation of certain policies between two or more states, this cannot be changed without the given consent and prior notification of the Kosovo competent bodies and any agreement concluded between states, must be based on respecting the will of parties involved, and consequently cannot be changed without their will.

3. CONCLUSION:

Kosovo relations in the regional context, with the exception of Serbia, with which it has open disputes, with other neighboring countries has a relationship on the basis of cooperation as independent and sovereign states. The establishment of bilateral relations, apart from Albania, has been accompanied by numerous obstacles, especially when it came to mutual recognition by both North Macedonia and Montenegro, bearing in mind the influence that Serbia has had on these states. In this context, Serbia has constantly tried to prevent the recognition of Kosovo independence by these two countries. A great contribution to this whole process has undoubtedly been given by the US and the most powerful EU countries, where in addition to political assistance they have made an extraordinary contribution to the establishment of peace in the Western Balkans, even though peace it is still considered to be unfinished and fragile.

The context of mutual recognition between Kosovo and Serbia, even after numerous negotiations and efforts, in particular by the international community, still seems far away from reality, especially when the diametrically opposed positions between the parties are highlighted. Since the end of the war period, Belgrade's policy in relation to Kosovo has been almost unchanged in terms of final status, but also regarding the case of Kosovo, especially in the last three years with the frequent change of governments, it has been created a gap in terms of continuity of negotiations. The frequent change of governments in Kosovo has occurred precisely as a result of their controversial policies concerning relations with Kosovo friendly states as well as negotiations with Serbia.

Following the change of government, from Albin Kurti to the Government of Abdullah Hoti in 2020, the latter took a step towards in terms of unblocking the process by lifting the economic tax on Serbia, which then made it possible the signing of the agreement in the White House in the presence of President Donald Trump on September 4, 2020. This agreement contained a commitment from both parties that points of the agreement should be respected for at least one year from the date of its signing, especially when it comes to lobbying for membership in International Organizations from Kosovo and the stopping of lobbying by Serbia against recognitions of Kosovo. Upon request of the LDK Parliamentary Group in the Assembly of Kosovo in 2021, a Resolution was proposed for the implementation of the Agreement by the Kurti Government, but which did not pass as a result of abstention by the parliamentary majority, which according to many critics, this action calls into question the view and the sustainability of the existing Government itself.

The idea and initiative for the "Open Balkans", supported by the three Leaders of three countries, Albania, Serbia and Northern Macedonia, has aroused controversy and objections between the Prime Minister of Kosovo Albin Kurti and the Prime Minister of Albania Edi Rama, where these clashes have gone even further, in the weakening of relations between these two states in many areas of life. This clash, more ideological than substantive, has affected and unfortunately is negatively affecting the relations between these two countries, which are reflecting in the regional and international aspect. The "Open Balkans", which was originally initiated as the "Mini Balkan Schengen" has now been turned into an initiative, supported by only three countries and opposed by other countries, yet in the international community there is not unanimity regarding this initiative, and in particular when the most Balkan countries are aspiring for membership in the European Union.

Consequently, Kosovo in the regional context generally has good relations with all neighboring countries, except Serbia with which it has an open contest in terms of mutual recognition, as well as with Bosnia and Herzegovina, but the political nature is different having in mind the status of Bosnia itself which consists of three republics. Although Kosovo has made significant progress in many areas in terms of the regional context, it still encounters numerous problems as a result of successive obstacles from Serbia, and in this regard the resolution of the dispute between Kosovo and Serbia is now considered to be urgent and indispensable by all international community who have been and still continue to be engaged in the Western Balkans. Apart from Serbia, none of the countries in the region perceives Kosovo independence as a threat, and Kosovo even presents the case where independence has been supported by the vast majority of countries in the region.

REFERENCES

- Ejdus, F., Minić, J., & Musliu, V. (2014). *INDEP- Institute for Development Policy Kosovo - Serbia: The potential for cooperation and the key challenges of the common perspective*. Prishtina.
- Sulçebe, D. (n.d.). *Albania and Kosovo-In Search of a Common Future*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. Tirana.
- Osmani, E., & Çyrbja, J. (2014). Albania and Kosovo: security cooperation and challenges towards Euro-Atlantic integration, ALBANIAN DIPLOMATIC ACADEMY, CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL AND DIPLOMATIC STUDIES, GLOBAL CHALLENGE, Periodical Scientific Journal, ISSN 2227-8540 ISSN 2312-5748 (online). Nr.8, Tirana.
- ABAZI, E. (2013). *CENTER OF ALBANOLOGICAL STUDIES, INSTITUTE OF HISTORY, HISTORICAL STUDIES 3-4, THE KOSOVO ISSUE AND INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY (1991-1999), A PARLIC CONFLIC*. Tirana.
- FRIEDRICH EBERTO STIFTUNG. (2012). Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue, away from the Citizen Close to the EU, Pristina.
- Gazeta Express. (n.d.). *The document for military cooperation Albania-Kosovo is revealed*. <http://www.gazetaexpress.com/lajme/zbulohe-dokumenti-per-bashkepunim-ushtarak-shqiperi-kosove>
- Government of the Republic of Northern Macedonia. (n.d.). *Joint Meeting of the two governments, the Republic of Northern Macedonia and the Republic of Kosovo is a confirmation of the excellent relations and realization of common interests for the Western Balkans as a region of lasting peace*. <https://vlada.mk/node/26556?ln=sq>
- Hajrullahu, A. (2015). *Long-term peace in the Western Balkans through EU integration, The EU integration process as an opportunity to overcome the Kosovo-Serbia conflict*. Prishtina.
- KIPRED-KOSOVO INSTITUTE FOR POLICY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT. (2007). *Political Analysis Series, POLITICAL ANALYSIS 6, KOSOVO: STATE OF UNPRECEDENTED*. Prishtina.
- Newman, E., & Visoka, G. (2018). The foreign policy of state recognition: Kosovo diplomatic strategy to join international society. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 14(3), 367-387.
- Hasan, A. C. A. R., & BULUT, S. (2022). The Issue of Political Recognition in International Policy: The Case of Kosovo. *International Journal of Politics and Security*, 4(1), 58-85.
- KCSS-Kosovo Center for Security Studies. (2014). *Kosovo Membership and Representation in Regional Security Initiatives*.
- KIPRED-Kosovo Institute for Policy Research and Development. (2014). *Kosovo in Regional Context: Bilateral Political Relations, POLICY ANALYSIS, Nr. 3/14 MAY*.
- KOSOVO ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS. (2020). *KOSOVO-SERBIA DIALOGUE (Dilemmas and Contradictions)*. Prishtina.
- Kosovo Democratic Institute. (2018). *KOSOVO-SERBIA DIALOGUE: CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD*. Prishtina .
- Riedeland, M., & Eichelberg, M. (2009). *Regional Cooperation in Southeast Europe - Post-Stability Period*. Skopje.
- Heller, R. (2014). Russia's quest for respect in the international conflict management in Kosovo. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 47(3-4), 333-343. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2014.09.001>
- Republic of Albania, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Priorities. (n.d.).
- Republic of Kosovo, Government, State Commission for Demarcation and Maintenance of the State Border. (2015-2016). Summary of basic documentation in determining the territory of the Republic of Kosovo, Signing of the border demarcation agreement between the Republic of Kosovo and Montenegro in Vienna, Pristina.
- Republic of Kosovo, M. (2011). *STRATEGY FOR ACHIEVING FULL INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO*.
- Republic of Kosovo, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (n.d.).
- RIDEA-Research Institute of Development and European Affairs & BPRG-Balkans Polici Research Group. (2018). *SCENES OF THE 'GREAT FINAL' BETWEEN KOSOVO AND SERBIA*.
- Linden, R. H. (2007). Balkan Geometry: Turkish Accession and the International Relations of Southeast Europe. *Orbis*, 51(2), 331-348. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2007.01.010>
- Sbunker Online Portal. (n.d.). *What does the new survey on Albania-Kosovo relations tell us*.