

Forum: United Nations Membership Council (UNMC)

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TOPIC 2: On the Membership of Kosovo

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I. Introduction to the Topic

Kosovo, self-identified as the Republic of Kosovo and acknowledged as the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija by Serbia, is a disputed autonomous region located in the heart of the European Balkan region. Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008 and has since been recognized by many sovereign states including the United States and a majority of the European Union (EU). However, Serbia as well as Russia and some other EU members denied Kosovo's independence, which hindered its acceptance into the United Nations (UN) (Lampe et al.).

Kosovo was reclaimed by the Serbians after the First Balkan War (1912-1913) from the Ottoman Empire and integrated into what eventually became Yugoslavia. After World War II, Kosovo was recognized by Serbia as an autonomous region/province: a decision constitutionalizing Kosovo as a "Socialist Autonomous Province" in the 1974 Yugoslav constitution. During the 1980s, violent dissent started to rise from the Kosovar Albanians (Kosovo's ethnic majority) as they demanded their independence from Yugoslavia. Their dissent was repressed by the Serbians and their autonomy was stripped in 1989. During this time, many Kosovar Albanian government officials were replaced with Serbians and other officials from Belgrade (the Serbian capital). In the 1990s, the Kosovar Albanians initially tried a peaceful approach with the creation of a Kosovar Albanian-funded government, but it ultimately fell through and thus the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was established to continue Kosovo's mission for independence instead (Office of the Historian).

The KLA targeted mostly Serbian law enforcement officials and political officials in response to its loss of autonomy, in hopes of completely regaining it as well as its sovereignty. The violence the KLA exacted within Kosovo (mostly targeted at Serbs) led to a point where Yugoslav forces were deployed to intervene. Beginning in 1998, what became known as the Kosovo Conflict ended with a ceasefire in 1999 with intervention from an informal coalition known as The Contact Group (includes the US, Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy, and Russia) due to the intense violence carried out. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) itself had to step in and fend off the Yugoslavian forces due to their continued violence against and the displacement of the Kosovar Albanians after the initial ceasefire. Eventually, NATO and Yugoslavia signed a treaty agreeing on the withdrawal of Yugoslavian forces from Kosovo. A withdrawal of Serbs from Kosovo followed this, and violent conflicts were dampened for the most part since. Both NATO troops (Kosovo Force, KFOR) and UN Peacekeepers (United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, UNMIK) have since been deployed to maintain peace in Kosovo (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica). The deployment of officials from the EU (the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo or EULEX) was also facilitated to preserve peace.

Sporadic riots by Kosovar Albanians advocating for the autonomy of Kosovo have sprung up since (some violent). Separatist sentiment lasted all throughout the breakup of Yugoslavia, the Federation of Serbia and Montenegro, and even through the modern existence of Serbia to today. High tensions between Kosovar Albanians and Serbians remain still, standing as a major ethnic cleavage within Kosovo. Until today, Kosovar Albanians adhere strongly to their separatist movement (Lampe et al.).

The region of Kosovo has been historically significant to the Serbian identity. Kosovo was an integral region to the Ottoman Empire, and as it was reaped from the Ottomans during the First Balkan War, Kosovo became more and more relevant to Serbian history and national identity as it was part of the original Serbian territory. Additionally, Kosovo was the seat of the Serbian Orthodox church for many years, and thus the separation of Kosovo from Serbia would disconnect a key cultural site from the Serbians. As of currently, Kosovar Albanians, who are Muslim, are the primary occupants of this region instead of the Orthodox Serbians.

The Kosovar Albanians, leaders of the separatist movement, wish to separate from Serbia because of the ethnic difference. The Kosovar Albanians see independence as independence from Belgrade (capital of Serbia), and a right to self-rule over their own nation. This is where the resentment of Serbians comes from—a desire to self-rule (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica).

Internationally, Kosovo has reached widespread recognition from many member nations of the UN over the years, but a consistent opposition force has been Serbia. In total, Kosovo has received roughly over 120 country's recognition (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora), but 18 countries have withdrawn their recognition (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia). International intervention from the UN, EU and NATO have been primarily to support Kosovo's mission for democratization as well as to preserve peace in Europe. Thus far, Kosovo has been able to develop proper governmental institutions with the help of these international organizations as well as some recent support from Serbia in the 2010s (Lampe et al.).

Despite tensions, Kosovo-Serbia relations have significantly improved in the past decade. Not particularly healed, but still greatly improved compared to the frequency of violence during the 20th century. Part of Kosovo's autonomy has been re-granted and Kosovo has received support from Serbia regarding its autonomous status (energy and telecommunication independence). However, Kosovo continues to reach for full independence and recognition as an independent and sovereign state (Lampe et al.).

II. Definition of Key Terms & Concepts

Separatist movement: A separatist movement is a group of people, usually of a nation (group of people with common ethnicity, culture and/or descent) who wish to separate from their mother state and gain independence (Oxford English Dictionary). Although Kosovar Albanians do not have any organizations or groups specifically oriented as of currently to the separatist agenda, Kosovar Albanians carry the sentiment of a separatist movement—to secede from Serbia (Lampe et al.). A previous separatist movement was the KLA (disbanded 1999), followed by the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) which was

replaced by the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) in 2009. Many personnel from the KLA carried over to the KPC, so on and so forth (Sullivan).

Political cleavage: A political cleavage refers to a conflicted division between two groups within a state or region. Some examples of political cleavages include ethnic cleavages, religious cleavages, regional cleavages, economic cleavages, rural-urban cleavages and more (International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences). In relation to Kosovo, the divide between Serbians and Kosovar Albanians can be considered an ethnic cleavage, as the conflict stands on the conflict between the ethnic difference between Kosovar Albanians and Serbs. This is a major issue in the membership of Kosovo, as this cleavage facilitates most of the tensions between Serbia and Kosovo.

Autonomous region: An autonomous region is a region within a sovereign state that has been granted the right to self-rule (Collins Dictionary). Some examples of autonomous regions include Inner Mongolia (China), Hong Kong (China), and Puerto Rico (USA). The concept of an autonomous region also partially applies to Kosovo, depending on who is asked. For member states that deny Kosovo's independence like Serbia, Kosovo is officially recognized as an autonomous region of Serbia. However, Kosovo is trying to break away from Serbia. Kosovars, specifically Kosovar Albanians, would likely consider Kosovo an independent state instead of an autonomous region.

Sovereignty: Sovereignty refers to a state's right and ability to independently govern itself, without external influence (Cambridge Dictionary). Kosovo's sovereignty is relatively strong, but it is still heavily influenced by Serbia. As of currently, the greatest threat to Kosovar's sovereignty is Serbia's refusal to allow Kosovo to secede from Serbia. Additionally, EULEX does have influence over Kosovar governmental operations, but is not entirely opposed to Kosovo's independence; thus, EULEX is not a great threat.

III. Key Stakeholders

Kosovar Albanians: Within Kosovo, the Kosovar Albanians—ethnic majority of Kosovo—are those with the separatist sentiment and the leading force advocating for Kosovo's independence. In the past, Kosovar Albanians have faced intense crimes from the Serbian government. These crimes in question: displacement of Kosovar Albanians, an ethnic cleansing, abuse of Kosovar Albanians by Serbian forces. Kosovar Albanian media and schools were shut down, and Kosovar Albanian government officials were replaced with Serbian officials. These crimes do not include the Serbian persistence against Kosovar independence, of which encompasses further violence through the forms of an actual violent conflict and police violence. Kosovar Albanians strongly believe in reclaiming justice for themselves, through firstly, demanding justice from Serbia and secondly, gaining independence. In summary, the Kosovar Albanian reason for independence is to be able to protect their own people, in order to eliminate the threats history has imposed on them.

Serbia: Serbia can currently be considered Kosovo's "mother state." Serbia acknowledges and grants Kosovo autonomy under the formality that Kosovo is an autonomous region under Serbia, and is fully against Kosovo's complete independence. The region of Kosovo holds a significant cultural and historical significance highly relevant to Serbia's sovereignty, hence the strong opposition to Kosovo's

independence. During the middle ages, the region of Kosovo was the center of the Serbian Empire until it was conquered by the Ottoman Empire. Eventually, Serbia reclaimed this area in the 20th century and since then it was considered Serbian territory. During the initial Serbian occupation in the middle ages, many Serbian Orthodox sites were constructed. The construction of these sites also built up the cultural significance of Kosovo to Serbia, as Serbia itself is largely Eastern Orthodox. Due to both the historical and cultural significance of Kosovo, Serbia has opposed Kosovo's complete separation from Serbia.

European Union: The EU's involvement in Kosovo is primarily to help another European region develop and stabilize the region. Not all of the EU countries recognize Kosovo as an independent state, but there are EU organizations operating within Kosovo to support the region nevertheless. This includes the EU Special Representative program (EUSR, deployment of EU officials to support the Kosovo government as well as promote freedoms and human rights), Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX). The EU also has an official office in Kosovo. Much of the support towards the development of Kosovo (regarding economic development and democratization) has been from the EU through its various programs. The European Commission, which is one of the EU's institutions, has been a large contributor to Kosovo over the years. It initially provided economic support for humanitarian aid and infrastructure reconstruction during the years of the Kosovo Conflict, but has shifted more into sustainable economic development. In total, the EU and its various organs have contributed over 1.5 billion Euros towards economic and political reform in Kosovo (including agricultural, social development, media, etc.). The EU has been able to establish various trade agreements that would support Kosovo economically as well (Stabilization and Association Agreements). Kosovo is also included in the EU's plans to support the sustainable development of the western Balkan region and Turkey, of which the EU has invested more into that region as a whole (Press and information team of the EU Office/EU Special Representative in Kosovo). Although Kosovo may not be fully recognized as an independent state by some EU members, the aid the EU has sent to Kosovo in terms of economic, political and infrastructure development is undeniable.

NATO: NATO support for Kosovo is mostly for peacekeeping reasons. Its operation in Kosovo, KFOR, was to aim for a demilitarization of the Kosovo region, a maintenance of peace and humanitarian support for the region. Because tensions have remained high despite the retreat of any major military conflicts, KFOR remains deployed in Kosovo for peacekeeping reasons. The original objective was to support humanitarian aid efforts, completely demilitarize the area (demilitarizing both Serbian and Kosovar forces), civilian protection, addressing the displaced persons issue and other efforts contributing to the sustainable stabilization of Kosovo. Since then, Kosovo has supported a peaceful deconstruction of the KLA and KPC, and helped develop the KSF. With NATO's assistance, the KSF was developed into an ethnically diverse and citizen-controlled volunteer force, trained by NATO. The KSF serves as a basic protection force that covers for security issues outside of police jurisdiction, like emergency response (NATO). Similarly to the EU, NATO's operations in Kosovo are not aimed towards aiding the independence of Kosovo, but instead towards sustainably stabilizing the region as there are NATO members (like Greece and Spain) who are opposed to Kosovar independence.

USA: Similarly to NATO and the EU, the US is also making active efforts to support Kosovo's sustainable economic development and democratization process. In addition, the US has contributed to training the KSF. Different from NATO and the EU, the US openly supports Kosovo's independence and

has interest in helping Kosovo–Serbia relations reach a point of mutual recognition from state to state. The US strongly advocates for Kosovar membership in various international organizations like the EU and UN (Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs). The US-run Camp Bondsteel—a military base located in Ferizaj, Kosovo—is another demonstration of US-Kosovo relationships. Camp Bondsteel currently hosts KFOR, the NATO project, and follows its regulations (Military Bases).

IV. Key Issues including Background Information

Autonomy of Kosovo: The question of Kosovo’s autonomy is inevitably the largest issue. As previously stated, Serbia acknowledges Kosovo as an autonomous region under its rule, while Kosovo acknowledges itself as a fully independent country. There is a harsh disagreement on this matter between Serbia and Kosovo, but there have been recent agreements with great progress (See: Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue). Despite this, there is very little agreement between Kosovo and Serbia on Kosovo’s independence at all. The two sides have been at odds for decades with hardly any budging. Considering this, it will be difficult to find a satisfactory solution regarding Kosovo’s autonomy for both Serbia and Kosovo—it is one or the other.

Serbian Sovereignty: The removal of Kosovo from Serbian authority can cause large disagreement from Serbians. As aforementioned in the stakeholders section, the Kosovo region holds great cultural and historical significance to Serbians. Therefore, it would raise many questions of sovereignty as well as preservation of Serbian culture. The Serbian people and government are pretty adamant (including Kosovar Serbians) on keeping Kosovo under its rule, even as an autonomous province. This standstill between Kosovo and Serbia has lasted for at least 40 years, with neither side yielding.

Kosovar Economic Issues: The Kosovar economy is in rough shape. During the 1990s, there was a lack of federal support from Yugoslavia to Kosovo, which already set up some issues beforehand. As of currently, it is one of the most underdeveloped Balkan regions. With international intervention and the adoption of the Euro, Kosovo has seen some economic growth. A large part of Kosovo’s economy relies on remittances (money sent home from immigrants) (Lampe et al.). Not to mention, the unemployment rate in Kosovo is very high at 12.6%—considerably higher than countries in Eastern Europe (Focus Economics). Kosovo’s weak economic state poses challenges to its sovereignty, as Kosovo’s heavy dependence on other member states and most importantly international organizations in part, demonstrates a lack of power and weak sovereignty.

V. Timeline of Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

Date	Description of event
1913	End of the First Balkan War. Serbia officially reclaims Kosovo from the Ottoman Empire. Previously, the Ottoman Empire defeated Serbian forces and took over Kosovo, as well as much of Serbia, which marked the end of Kosovo’s several-hundred-year status as Serbian land. The 1913 reclamation of Kosovo

was a step towards restoring and maintaining the sovereignty of Serbia.

- 1918 After losing Kosovo once again in 1915, Kosovo was returned to Serbian authority. Yugoslavia was created, and Serbian land—including Kosovo—was merged into Yugoslavia. During this time, many Kosovar Albanians were displaced and forced to flee to modern-day Türkiye.
- 1941 Italian invasion and domination of Kosovo and Albania. Kosovo and Albania, during this time, were considered one whole region. During this time, many Kosovar Serbians were driven out and killed.
- 1944 Italian withdrawal from Kosovo and Albania. Kosovar Albanians revolted against the Yugoslavian reclamation of Kosovo, wishing to stay merged with Albania. Despite repression of any nationalist/separatist sentiments, Kosovo is acknowledged as an autonomous region by the Yugoslav government.
- 1946 Population of Kosovo becomes more and more dominated by Kosovar Albanians as Kosovar Serbians leave the region. This emphasis of the Kosovar Albanian ethnic majority became a major factor into separatist sentiments.
- 1974 Kosovo is officially declared as an autonomous region by the Yugoslavian constitution of 1974. During this time, Kosovo actually maintained great sovereignty and was only formally controlled by the Yugoslav government. Otherwise, it maintained full control of its governmental operations.
- 1981 Large public dissent advocating for full and formal Kosovar independence starts. Tensions rise in Kosovo. Violence is used against protestors, which only escalate the scale of the protests.
- 1989 Slobodan Milošević term as president of the Serbian republic. Under Milošević, much of Kosovo's autonomy was stripped, which contributed to both higher tensions and further violent conflict in Kosovo as well as the conflict and breakup of Yugoslavia. In 1990, the province's assembly was closed, and schools teaching Albanian were shut down. Serbia and Montenegro were then split into a separate state in 1992, which brought Kosovo along with it.
- 1996-1999 Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) created. The KLA mostly fought against Serbian law enforcement officials who exacted violence on Kosovar Albanian protestors, but also targeted Kosovar Serbian politicians. The conflict between Kosovar Serbian police and the KLA lasted until 1998, where official Serbian forces were deployed to fight the KLA. Ceasefire agreements sprang up but fell through multiple times throughout 1998 and 1999, until an official agreement between Yugoslavia and NATO was reached for Yugoslavian troops to withdraw from Kosovo, promptly ending what is formally known as the Kosovo Conflict

(1998-1999). Peacekeeping troops flowed into Kosovo to placate any dissent.

- 2008 Kosovo officially declares independence from Serbia. This independence is directly opposed by Serbia and Russia. As a response, Serbia files Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) as a violation of international law (Lampe et al.).
- 2010 The ICJ comes back with the conclusion that Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence is not a violation of international law.
- 2023 Semi-formal agreement between Serbia and Kosovo reached regarding normalization of relationships. This is known as the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue, and has many articles detailing goals for the future Serbia-Kosovo relationships (EEAS Press Team).

VI. Possible Challenges & Solutions

An Independent Kosovo: Bringing independence to Kosovo is an option. It would be what supporters of Kosovo's independence would propose. But, one thing to remember is that there are still strong oppositional forces to Kosovo's independence. In the past, Russia, as a long-standing ally of Serbia, has vetoed Kosovo's membership to the UN. Though it is true that an independent Kosovo would satisfy the Kosovar Albanians, Serbia and its allies (most notably Russia, of course) will hold strong opposition to Kosovo's independence.

No Change: Preserving Kosovo's status as an autonomous province is also an option, but would incur opposition from Kosovo itself and open supporters of Kosovo's independence (like the US and France). As of currently, Russia has already used its veto power on blocking Kosovo's membership, and it may continue to stand as an obstacle in Kosovo's membership. Should delegates wish to pursue a stance of no change, however, there would need to be some solution to mitigate the Kosovar separatist sentiments.

International Economic Support: Continuing the current programs in place (e.g those by NATO and the EU) to Kosovo would be a way to continue the Kosovar Economy's upward trend. Though slowly, Kosovo's economic status is improving under the support of the various international organizations—shown through the decrease in unemployment rate and growing GDP increase rate. Further investigation into the specifics of Kosovo's economy and how the issues can be addressed would be greatly beneficial to Kosovo, as well as possible creations or expansions of programs to address unaddressed issues in Kosovo's economy. In decreasing the economic dependence of Kosovo on other member states and intranational/international organizations (e.g UN, EU, NATO), Kosovo's sovereignty will be strengthened.

VII. Recommendations for Resolution Writing including Research

I would encourage delegates to look strongly into the past and current official documents on Kosovo's membership. Investigating your country's stance and its relationship with Kosovo is the best way to

decide your course of action in resolution writing. Regarding basic topic research, it is best to look into Kosovo's history (the Britannica page for Kosovo is reliable and quite comprehensive) to understand the need for independence, then approach research with your country's stance from there. Additionally, looking into Kosovo-Serbia agreements like the Belgrade-Pristina Discussion can help guide resolution making, as they demonstrate an agreed stance between Kosovo and Serbia. However, it is important for delegates to consider the fact that the membership of a state is a delicate matter and cannot always be put forth so easily. Therefore, delegates should keep in mind that their resolutions do not necessarily have to completely vouch for membership or nothing, but can also work on the progress of membership and development of autonomy for this region.

VIII. Bibliography

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IX: Additional Resources

[UNMIK's mission Mandate \(UNMIK\) 10 June 1999](#)

[UNMIK's activities \(UNMIK\) 2023](#)

[NATO's Role in Kosovo \(NATO\) 20 November 2023](#)

[The European Union and Kosovo \(EEAS\) 20 October 2021](#)

[Republic of Kosovo \(IMF\) October 2023](#)

[Kosova \(UNPO\) 6 June 2018](#)

[Getting Back on Track: Unlocking Kosovo's Euro-Atlantic and Development Perspective \(Atlantic Council\) 11 December 2023](#)

[Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: Agreement on the Path to Normalization Between Kosovo and Serbia \(EEAS\) 27 February 2023](#)

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[List of Acknowledgements \(Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora\) 1 February 2021](#)

[Kosovo \(Britannica\) 4 December 2023](#)