

# From Technical Negotiations to Comprehensive Normalization

## Relations Between Belgrade and Pristina

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- For Belgrade, 'comprehensive normalization' means "everything but recognition," that Belgrade is willing to "recognize reality, but not independence." For Pristina, "recognition is everything," that normalization without recognition is inconceivable. Pristina insists that recognition should take place at least 24 hours before Serbia joins the EU, so that it could not veto Kosovo's eventual membership. But Serbian officials say that Serbia cannot treat Kosovo as a separate country, and it could only agree to 'normalization without recognition.' Reconciling these conflicting objectives will be the main challenge to the normalization process.
- Ambiguity served well at the outset of the process, but it has now become a liability. Attuned to the politics at home, Pristina and Belgrade negotiators have been reluctant to sign documents that lay out too many specifics. However, future negotiations should produce more than just a general understanding, that the agreements should have a quantitative dimension – specifics and clear timelines for implementation. International mediators should also apply a merit-based system of rewards and penalties to encourage Belgrade and Pristina to stick to their commitments and keep up their end of the bargain.
- The comprehensive normalization agreement is expected to be a condition for EU membership for both Serbia and Kosovo. The EU is not likely to import another 'frozen conflict.' The EU also should make the prospect for membership for both Serbia and Kosovo more credible and visible through stronger political and financial support.
- All three sides – Belgrade, Pristina, and the international community – have an interest to conclude the conflict. Belgrade would resolve one of the main conditions for EU membership, improve its international standing, and legalize its relations with Kosovo Serbs. Pristina could obtain at least implicit recognition by Belgrade, integrate its Serb-dominated north, and make headways towards EU integration. And the international community would get a rather stubborn problem off its plate.

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## Introduction

Belgrade and Pristina are under increasing international and domestic pressure to define their relations through a comprehensive normalization agreement. Both Serbian and Kosovo representatives in principle confirm their commitment to full normalization but have different and often conflicting understanding of it. For Serbian officials, a 'comprehensive normalization' could include "everything but recognition," that Belgrade is willing to "recognize reality, but not independence." But for Kosovo representatives, "independence is everything," that normalization without recognition is inconceivable. Pristina insists that recognition of independence should take place at least 24 hours before Serbia becomes an EU member, so that it could not veto Kosovo's eventual EU membership.

Pristina and Belgrade differ also on the timeline for reaching such an agreement. While Pristina insists that the agreement should be reached within the next two years, Belgrade favors a period of six to ten years.

But before Belgrade and Pristina even begin negotiations on a comprehensive normalization agreement, they need to implement the 2013 Brussels Agreement in full. Faced by opposition at home to stop the dialogue on one hand and by international pressure to move forward on the other, Serbian and Kosovo governments have made only gradual and balanced progress: not too much to alienate their publics, but not too little to be considered insufficient by the international community. Also, the carefully balanced and ambiguous agreement enabled both sides to claim victory: it allowed Belgrade to keep its influence with the Kosovo Serbs and make considerable progress in its EU integration process, and met Pristina's goal of integrating the Serb-dominated north in its legal and political framework and making moderate steps towards EU integration. But the implementation has been slow and many points of the agreement are being renegotiated.

Ambiguity is considered as the main culprit for the delay of the implementation process. Many observers say that while useful at the beginning of the dialogue, "the ambiguity has become too ambiguous" and has run its course. They say the agreements from now on should be more specific. But Pristina and Belgrade negotiators, highly attuned to the politics at home, have been reluctant to sign documents that lay out too many specifics, some familiar with the negotiations reported. An increasing number of local and international officials say that the rounds of talks should produce more than just a general understanding, that the agreements should also have a quantitative dimension – that is, specifics and clear timelines for implementation.

The Brussels dialogue has served as a useful instrument in breaking the status quo, especially in Kosovo's north. Though the publics in Kosovo and Serbia question the results of the process, they support dialogue as an instrument to resolve disputes. There was consensus among the interlocutors that nationalism in Serbia and Kosovo is giving way to rationality and pragmatism.

The irreconcilable differences over Kosovo's status are considered as the main obstacles to normalization. As a potential compromise, at least in the short term, some interlocutors recommended Kosovo's membership in international organizations, including in the United Nations, in exchange for Serbia's non-recognition of independence. Although such membership depends on other actors and factors, particularly the Russian Federation, they recommended that Serbia commit not to oppose Kosovo's membership applications. Specifically, Belgrade would not lobby against membership, would not vote against, and would not use veto when applicable. Belgrade and Pristina committed in the 2013 Brussels Agreement not to undermine each other's prospects to EU integration. Same model could be applied for membership in international organizations, a number of interlocutors suggested.

This paper is based on a series of off-the-record conversational interviews with Serbian and Kosovo political party and government officials, civil society activists, and international representatives

in Serbia and Kosovo, as well as on activities of the Council for Inclusive Governance (CIG), a U.S.-based international nongovernmental organization. The paper offers an analysis of the normalization process from 2011 to 2017, focusing on the Brussels dialogue and various unofficial activities; addresses the challenges to the normalization process; and concludes with a list of topics that could be incorporated in the comprehensive normalization agreement.

CIG's vice president Shpetim Gashi and CIG's associate in Serbia Igor Novaković conducted the research and prepared the paper. CIG's president Alex Roinishvili Grigorev offered suggestions and provided feedback. The paper does not necessarily reflect the views of the authors or the organization they represent. The authors have tried to be accurate and balanced in outlining the discussions and ask for the understanding of interlocutors whose remarks may have not been fully captured in this brief paper.

### Normalization without recognition

Serbia and Kosovo have different and often conflicting interests and objectives in engaging in the normalization process. Serbia aims to gain EU membership, improve political and economic relations with the international community, and gradually put an end to its Kosovo problem. Kosovo aims to integrate its Serb-majority north – about 10% of its territory, become member of international organizations, and gain recognition from Serbia and the five remaining EU member states (Cyprus, Greece, Slovakia, Spain and Romania). Belgrade is in favor of normalization but without recognition, and opposes Kosovo's membership in major international organizations. Membership in the EU is perhaps Belgrade's and Pristina's only common stated goal. They committed through the 2013 Brussels Agreement not to undermine each other's paths to EU integration.

The major obstacle to the full normalization of relations remains the status dispute. Belgrade supports 'normalization without recognition' while Pristina argues that 'normalization is recognition.'

In this context of conflicting objectives, many interlocutors said that governments should first work on creating some basic preconditions for addressing the status dispute, starting with rationalizing domestic debate, decreasing inflammatory rhetoric, weigh in on the available options and alternatives, and pick the options that best benefit the society. They concluded that the debate should be based on rationalism and pragmatism, and the choices should reflect peoples' needs, not sentiment.

The Brussels dialogue is the main driver of the normalization process. Other mechanisms include several informal bilateral activities, including visits between Serbian and Kosovo officials, and informal activities between members of parliaments and of civil society.

### The Brussels dialogue 2011-2017

The EU-sponsored process broke the post-war status quo between Kosovo and Serbia. Kosovo and Serbian officials were reluctant to even shake hands, let alone sit at the same table to address their disputes, until the Brussels dialogue started. The Brussels process could be divided into two phases: so-called 'technical negotiations' – concluding with a number of agreements in 2011, and the 'political dialogue' – resulting in a fifteen-point agreement in 2013. More than four years after the conclusion of these agreements, the implementation is still lagging. Some interlocutors familiar with the process confirmed that implementation has been even more complicated than negotiations.

In the '*technical negotiations*,' Belgrade and Pristina reached the following agreements:

- **Exchange of liaison officers.** Although with minimal responsibilities and unclear mandates, the exchange of liaison officers had a symbolic significance in breaking the ice in relations between Kosovo and Serbia. The liaison officers are placed in the EU offices in Pristina and Belgrade. They assist their citizens with issues of consular and technical nature and are not involved in political issues.

- **Custom stamps.** Belgrade agreed to recognize Kosovo custom stamps. As a result, the undeclared trade embargo, mainly imposed by Serbia on Kosovo, was lifted. Though the agreement was not as important for Kosovo since it has little to export, it was significant in that it ensured freedom of movement of goods. Also, Kosovo exports to Serbia have increased moderately since then.
- **Cadastral records.** The agreement established a reliable cadaster in Kosovo. Although Belgrade refused to turn over the original cadaster documents it had taken in 1999, it agreed to give Pristina certified copies.
- **Recognition of university diplomas.** Though not recognizing each other's education systems outright, both parties agreed to certify university diplomas through an international education institution. This primarily helped Albanians in South Serbia who study in Kosovo universities.
- **Regional representation and cooperation.** The agreement allowed Kosovo to participate, sign agreements, and speak at all regional meetings. Until then, UNMIK signed agreements on Kosovo's behalf. The parties though agreed that Kosovo would participate under a neutral formula, where only 'Kosovo' would be used, without the 'Republic' and a footnote would be applied explaining that the designation is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence, two conflicting positions. The former recognizing Serbia's sovereignty over Kosovo while the latter effectively legalizing Kosovo's right to declare independence.
- **Integrated border/boundary agreement.** This was perhaps the most important agreement as it established police control between Serbia and Kosovo. Until then, the cross points in Kosovo's north were not policed and substantial amounts of goods entered Kosovo illegally, harming both Serbia's and Kosovo's budgets, and allowing organized crime to flourish.
- **The Development Fund for the north.** It is a special fund for the four Serb-majority

municipalities in Kosovo's north based on customs revenues from imported goods from the two crossing points in the north. The fund can be used only for investment. So far, the fund has accrued over 10 million euros.

In the 'political dialogue' Pristina and Belgrade reached a 15-point, known as the Brussels Agreement.

Although the agreement lacked specifics, and the prime ministers only initialed it, it was considered a breakthrough in relations between Serbia and Kosovo. The main objectives of the agreement were to dismantle the Serbian system in Kosovo, integrate its employees in Kosovo's system, and offer a degree of self-administration to the Kosovo Serbs through the formation of an association/community for the ten Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo.

The agreement contained the following points:

- **Establishment of the Association /Community of the Serb Majority Municipalities (Association/Community).** Six of the 15 points of the agreement were dedicated to the Association/Community. Pristina and Belgrade agreed on the formation of the Association/Community, but not on its mandate. Four years later, the bargaining process over its authority continues but without results in sight. The next step should be drafting the Association/Community's statute on which Albanian and Serb representatives hold diametrically opposed views. Kosovo Albanian officials maintain that the Association/Community should be a non-governmental organization promoting cooperation among the ten Serb-majority municipalities in the four areas specified in the Brussels Agreement: education, healthcare, rural and urban planning, and economic development, but it should not take these powers from municipalities. In other words, the Association/Community could complement but not substitute the mandate of the municipalities. Serbian officials and Kosovo Serb representatives, on the other hand, argue that the Association/Community should

become a political body with decision-making powers in the four specified areas.

- **Integration of members of Serb security structures into the Kosovo police.** The Serbian police and members of the Civil Protection Corps in the north have been integrated into Kosovo's police and other institutions. One could conclude that this part of the agreement has been implemented in full.
- **Integration of the judiciary into Kosovo legal framework.** This point of the agreement has been renegotiated many times. The two presidents agreed, one more time, at a meeting in Brussels in September this year to conclude the implementation of judicial integration by October 17.
- **Organization of the local elections in the four municipalities in the north.** This point is only half-implemented. Local elections took place but municipal administrations have not been established. Elections produced only new mayors and assemblies. Most of the services to the north residents continue to be provided by the Serbian institutions, known as parallel institutions.
- **Telecommunications and energy.** Kosovo has received its own telephone code. The energy agreement has not been implemented yet. The implementation of the energy agreement has financial implications for both. Kosovo is losing millions of euros because of not being a member of the international network and cannot connect its high voltage system – on which it spent 400 million borrowed euros – to the regional network. Some Kosovo interlocutors said that implementation of energy should become a condition for the formation of the Association/Community.
- **Belgrade and Pristina will not block, or encourage others to block, each other's progress in their respective EU paths.** Although a rather abstract commitment, neither side is in a position to block one another now. But Kosovo interlocutors fear that if Serbia becomes an EU member before Kosovo, which is most

likely, it may veto Kosovo's membership. Some suggested that EU apply a clause that prevents Serbia from voting on Kosovo's membership.

The Brussels Agreement was ratified by Kosovo's parliament as an international agreement, thus committing Kosovo's institutions to implement it. On the other hand, Serbia's parliament has not ratified it. Serbia's Constitutional Court concluded that the agreement is simply a political document.

The implementation is four years behind the schedule. Many Pristina and Belgrade interlocutors argued that the delay is because the process has no clear sanctions or rewards attached. The EU mediators do not want to take the role of interpreting the agreements and assigning blame to the parties. The EU representatives said the EU is simply a facilitator and this is a dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. Interlocutors offered various interpretations of the Brussels dialogue, some praising it, others criticizing it. But as one international interlocutor said, "we shouldn't forget where we started from, things were much worse before the dialogue."

#### Informal direct cooperation

The normalization process has been supported by various informal activities organized by Serbian and Kosovo civil society organizations. Another set of activities has been facilitated by international non-governmental and governmental organizations. The main objective of these informal activities was to bring some normalcy to the relations between the Kosovo and Serbian societies. Many say the official dialogue is focused on normalizing relations only between the governments.

As these activities show, there are many opportunities for direct cooperation between Belgrade and Pristina, but also limitations due to the status-related issues. Cross-border cooperation is one area where both sides would benefit but no solution has been reached yet. It was suggested that the European Commission draft a compromise proposal to Belgrade and Pristina to utilize such funds.

- **Kosovo and Serbian missing person committees.** There remain about 1,650 people still missing from the Kosovo war – around 1,100 Albanians, and about 550 from Serb and other communities. The International Committee of the Red Cross facilitates the cooperation on this issue, but Kosovo and Serbian governmental committees run the process. The result of this cooperation is significant: thirteen years ago, there were over 3,400 unsolved cases. Resolving the missing persons issue is an important step towards normalization and reconciliation between the two societies.

- **Cooperation between chambers of commerce.** As part of the normalization process and through the facilitation of the Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Eurochambres), the Serbian Chamber of Industry and Commerce and the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce signed a memorandum of understanding, committing to promote trade and economic cooperation. They also signed a number of agreements, including one on arbitration as a tool to settle commercial disputes and to exchange chamber representatives. In this spirit, the Serbian chamber supported Kosovo's chamber's membership application in Eurochambres in 2015, a significant reversal from its 2008 decision to block it.

- **Cooperation between members of parliaments.** There are two informal initiatives – one organized by Council for Inclusive Governance together with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and one by OSCE – promoting cooperation between the parliaments of Kosovo and Serbia. CIG began its initiative in 2014. It gathers members of parliaments of all major parliamentary parties from Serbia and Kosovo and most of the meetings take place in Belgrade and Pristina. The initiative addresses topics related to the Brussels dialogue and the process of normalization, and promotes bilateral cooperation between the parliaments, with the goal of strengthening domestic conflict resolution capacities and decreasing dependence on international mediation. The initiative resulted in the formation of an informal

joint group of parliamentarians called "Group for Cooperation."

- **Civil society cooperation.** Cooperation between Serbian and Kosovo civil society organizations covers areas of politics and policy, media, and education. Such cooperation is particularly helpful in normalizations of relations between the societies and on advancing EU integration. Since their work is politically less sensitive, these organizations address many sensitive issues that are not yet popular with governments and voters, in effect offering 'out of the box' thinking.

### Steps towards comprehensive normalization

There are indications that Belgrade and Pristina are preparing for negotiations on a comprehensive normalization agreement. Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić has announced an internal dialogue in Serbia over a sustainable solution for the Kosovo. Many Kosovo politicians also support an internal dialogue with the Serb community in Kosovo. And Kosovo President Hashim Thaci has said that he is preparing to assemble a team for negotiations. The two presidents are once again showing an increasing eagerness – after the wall and train incidents in Kosovo – to position themselves as pragmatic leaders willing to tackle thorny issues.

The international community is also recommending various steps in moving the process forward. Chapter 35, a monitoring mechanism of Serbia's relations with Kosovo, already conditions Serbia's path to EU membership *vis-à-vis* Kosovo.

**Internal dialogue in Serbia:** Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić announced the launching of internal national dialogue on Kosovo in which relevant individuals and institutions in Serbia could offer their input. The stated goal of the dialogue is "keep what is ours but recognize the reality." The announcement was followed by a series of editorials by President Vučić, Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic, and a number of other politicians from

the governing and opposition parties. The Serbian government plans to organize several debates among the government institutions, universities, and civil society organizations. The objective of these debates is to offer input about a potential solution of dispute between Serbia and Kosovo.

After the conclusion of the national debate, the Serbian state institutions would reportedly come out with a new policy towards Kosovo. Some speculate that the new policy would include some form of recognition of Kosovo's independence, while others argue that no substantive change of existing policy will result from the dialogue. Reactions of the Serbian public have been mixed: the initiative received strong support from the governing parties but the opposition parties and many civil society organizations believe this is a 'farce,' just to buy more time, and for President Vučić to gain greater international support. There was consensus among the interlocutors that Serbia would have trouble to become an EU member without recognizing Kosovo, or at least without legally relinquishing its territorial claim over Kosovo.

A number of interlocutors said that another goal of the national dialogue is to cement the legitimacy of the Brussels dialogue and its agreements, especially in the legal context. The Serbian Constitutional Court questioned the legality of the agreements when it ruled that the 2013 Brussels Agreement does not represent a legal act, but simply a political decision. Unlike Kosovo's parliament, the Serbian parliament has not ratified the Brussels Agreement. But the major goal of the national dialogue remains preparations for reaching a legally binding agreement on comprehensive normalization and at the same time fulfilling the conditions of the Chapter 35.

**Internal dialogue in Kosovo:** The Brussels dialogue has two goals: normalization of relations between Pristina and Belgrade and integration of the Serb community into Kosovo's system. The first cannot be completed successfully without the latter. Though Kosovo Serbs have been taking part in elections and in institutions, their integration into Kosovo's system and society is far from complete.

Distrust and suspicion between the Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo persist. A number of Kosovo parties, especially the Self-Determination Movement, have been calling for an internal dialogue with Kosovo Serbs on social integration.

This dialogue could address some of the sensitive political issues, including the Association/Community. A number of Kosovo Albanian interlocutors who oppose the formation of the Association/Community argued that if the proposal had come from Kosovo Serbs, their approach would have been different. "We would have discussed the Association/Community's merits with Kosovo Serbs." But when proposals come from Belgrade, "we reject them outright." They added that their "problem is with the claimant – Belgrade, not with the demand – the Association/Community."

**Implementation of the Brussels Agreement:**

Before the parties begin a new negotiation process, they need to implement the Brussels Agreement in full. Pristina should establish the Association/Community and Belgrade should implement the energy agreement, the two last points of the Brussels Agreement.

Conclusions and recommendations

The status dispute remains the big elephant in the room. Kosovo interlocutors argue that Kosovo cannot normalize its relations with Serbia as long as it continues to claim its territory. Serbian interlocutors respond that Serbia cannot treat Kosovo as a separate country. They support the status neutrality formula instead under which the Brussels process is being conducted. Serbian interlocutors say that normalization of relations should not be about status, but about resolving concrete issues. As one put it, "we need ambiguity in status and clarity in agreements." Belgrade also insists to address the issue of property in Kosovo, claiming that Serbian state or Serbian companies own portion of public property in Kosovo. Pristina refuses to address the property issues, contending that Kosovo is the only legal owner of property there. Some interlocutors

suggested to address these property issues based on the models of resolution of such disputes in the area of former Yugoslavia.

#### Challenges to normalization

- Sporadic incidents – such as train and wall incidents in Mitrovica – complicate the normalization process. As a result, a lot of domestic and international resources concentrate on damage management rather than on the implementation process. On a positive note, these events have not resulted in a single interethnic incident in Kosovo, showing that relations between the two communities are stable and can no longer be destabilized by symbolic incidents.
- Inflammatory rhetoric remains a burden to the process, causing confusion and suspicion about the normalization process and its objectives. The same leaders that speak of war in the morning speak of peace in the evening. Publics in Kosovo and Serbia are understandably disoriented and as a result have lost trust in their political leaderships.
- The dialogue lacks clear principles; it is more of an ad hoc process. Other processes, such as the Vienna negotiations, were based on some broad principles. However, setting principles at this stage might not be possible so the resources should focus on the implementation of the agreements. Future dialogues, though, should be based on clear and transparent principles.
- Dialogue is not sufficiently inclusive at home. The governments rarely share information about the dialogue with their legislatures and publics. People are usually informed only after the agreements have been signed.
- EU credibility is decreasing in Serbia and Kosovo. EU membership is increasingly considered a distant outcome, which in turn results in less enthusiasm for the normalization process. The delay of visa liberalization for Kosovo because of non-ratification of the border agreement with Montenegro – while visa liberalization is granted

to Ukraine and Georgia with real border issues – is undermining hopes for EU integration.

- Constructive ambiguity – a necessity at the outset of the process – is becoming too ambiguous and thus a liability for the implementation process. Constructive ambiguity should be replaced with constructive clarity and transparency. One of the most prominent examples of ambiguity is the meaning of the phrase “full overview” when describing the competences of the Association/Community, allowing Belgrade to claim that the Association/Community has executive powers, while Pristina claims that it has only a coordinating role.
- The continuing resistance of the five EU members not to recognize Kosovo is considered a serious problem for Kosovo’s EU prospect and thus decreasing enthusiasm for normalization with Serbia.
- There is a lack of domestic support for normalization. Governments should engage more in public campaigns to increase support of citizens for the normalization and EU integration.

#### Suggested changes to current approach

- Just like Serbia, Kosovo should also have clear and credible EU integration prospects. Visa liberalization is a good start. Pristina and the international community should search for a solution for de-conditioning visa liberalization with border demarcation with Montenegro.
- The governments should be more transparent with publics. In addition to transparency, the governments should become more inclusive at home, especially in including opposition parties in the process. They should show constructive transparency, offer details of the agreements, and prepare progress reports on implementation backed up by data, when applicable, as in the case of university diploma certification.
- Normalization should be supported through complementary activities, including education, sport and art.

- EU should offer more explanations and guidance in the implementation process and warn parties internally of the consequences of their actions.
- EU should make the prospect for EU membership for both Serbia and Kosovo more credible and visible. When possible, it should support infrastructure projects and institutional reform through concrete actions, such as offering financial support for the Niš-Pristina highway.
- EU together with Kosovo and Serbian stakeholders should define a set of broad principles for the normalization process.
- Kosovo and Serbia are no longer at the top of agendas of international actors. This is an opportunity for Belgrade and Pristina to work out a common agenda on issues of mutual interest, including regional cooperation and EU integration.
- **Judicial system.** Recognition of judiciaries and their respective decisions and documents. Belgrade and Pristina should recognize legal decisions of each other's courts. Currently, court rulings in Kosovo, e.g., on divorce, are not recognized in Serbia and vice-versa. Such mutual recognition would directly improve the lives of the people in Kosovo and Serbia.
- **Direct cooperation on security issues.** Pristina and Belgrade should formalize and strengthen cooperation between their police forces, intelligence, and courts in order to better fight corruption and organized crime.
- **Kosovo's membership in international organizations.** Serbia opposes Kosovo's membership in international organizations, particularly in the UN. Tensions often increase when Kosovo applies to join organizations such as UNESCO or Interpol. Some Pristina interlocutors said that Kosovo's membership at these major international organizations could be an acceptable solution in exchange for Serbia's non-recognition.

#### Topics for comprehensive normalization agreement

As Serbian President Vučić said, a quick fix would be recognition of Kosovo, but under the circumstances it is not likely to happen. In this context, the international community is searching for a model that allows normalization without recognition.

The following is a list of issues that Serbian and Kosovo interlocutors suggested to incorporate into the comprehensive normalization agreement.

- **Travel documents.** Serbia recognizes most of Kosovo's travel documents, but not its passports. The parties need to readdress the issue and recognize each other's documents in full.
- **Symbols.** The parties should find a model whereby they recognize or at least tolerate each other's symbols.
- **Education.** Pristina and Belgrade should unconditionally recognize diplomas at all levels. The university in Mitrovica north should also be legalized in Kosovo.
- **Reconciliation.** Both sides support, at least officially, the process of reconciliation. However, not much has been done in that direction. Some interlocutors suggested Serbia apologize to Kosovo and Kosovo apologize to Kosovo Serbs and other non-Albanian communities.
- **EU membership.** Both sides recognize that the EU integration is a mutual goal. Hence, they confirmed in the Brussels Agreement that they would not obstruct each other's path towards membership. Pristina would like to use the normalization process as a tool for softening the position of the five EU members that do not recognize Kosovo. Some of the interlocutors said that Pristina believes that Belgrade could play a positive role with these five member states, arguing that it is in Serbia's long-term interest to have Kosovo in the EU. However, some Belgrade interlocutors dismissed such a suggestion, saying Belgrade should not block, but it also should not advocate for Kosovo's EU integration.

There was consensus that the EU should make the prospect for membership for both Serbia and Kosovo more credible and visible. Many interlocutors also said that reaching and implementing the comprehensive normalization agreement should be a strict condition for EU membership for Serbia and Kosovo. Such conditioning would eliminate any doubt that they could become full members of the European family without first establishing good relations and resolving their outstanding disputes. The EU is not likely to import another 'frozen conflict.' In this context, EU representatives should become more vocal and engaged in the process and offer both political and financial support. For instance, supporting the construction of a highway from Niš to Pristina could have a significant impact on intensifying social interactions and economic cooperation between Serbian and Kosovo societies.

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