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RECEIVED 30 March 2023

ACCEPTED 03 August 2023

PUBLISHED 23 August 2023

CITATION

Mexhuani B (2023) The prospects and challenges of Kosovo's accession to the EU in light of the EU's policies and priorities. *Front. Polit. Sci.* 5:1197359. doi: 10.3389/fpos.2023.1197359

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The prospects and challenges of Kosovo's accession to the EU in light of the EU's policies and priorities

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Introduction: This paper analyzes the extent to which the EU's involvement in Kosovo's political and economic development has contributed to the country's progress toward democratization and European integration.

Methods: The study employs a comparative analysis of the EU's engagement with Kosovo versus other Western Balkan countries. It also utilizes a case study approach to identify the unique challenges presented by Kosovo's contested statehood. Data sources include official EU reports, agreements, commentary from experts, and economic indicators.

Results: The findings show the EU has played a pivotal role in Kosovo through deploying its assistance instruments, facilitating the normalization dialogue with Serbia, and laying out a potential accession path. However, non-recognition by five member states, disputes with Serbia, and struggles meeting EU reform criteria impact Kosovo's integration prospects.

Discussion: Despite its substantial involvement, the EU faces credibility issues in Kosovo due to ongoing hurdles thwarting Kosovo's advancement toward accession. The EU must increase its leverage over Serbia, incentivize internal reforms, and align member state positions to support Kosovo's European integration. A clearer pathway to membership in Kosovo would reinforce the EU's role in fostering peace, democracy, and prosperity in the Western Balkans.

KEYWORDS

Kosovo, EU accession, integration, challenges, prospects

1. Introduction

The European Union (EU) has played a significant role in Kosovo's political and economic development since the end of the Kosovo War in 1999. The EU has provided Kosovo with substantial financial assistance, technical expertise, and political support, contributing to the country's progress toward democratization and European integration. However, Kosovo's path toward EU membership has been complicated by the lack of recognition from five EU member states, hindering its ability to fully participate in certain EU programs and initiatives. To address this issue, this paper aims to critically examine the prospects and challenges of Kosovo's accession to the EU in light of the EU's policies and priorities. Specifically, the research question guiding this paper is: "To what extent has the EU's involvement in Kosovo's political and economic development contributed to the country's progress toward democratization and European integration, and what are the implications of the non-recognition of Kosovo by five EU member states on the EU's credibility as a normative power in the Western Balkans, and on Kosovo's prospects for EU membership?" To guide the analysis, the paper will begin by discussing the theoretical framework, including the concept of the EU as a normative power, its use of conditional cooperation, and its regional policy on enlargement. This will provide a foundation for the analysis of the EU's involvement in Kosovo's political and economic development.

The paper will also address the importance of democratic governance as a requirement for deepened integration into the EU, exploring what democratic governance means in the context of Kosovo and how it relates to the EU's criteria for membership. In the literature review section, we will examine studies relevant to the Kosovo context, including those that address the EU's policies and priorities toward the Western Balkans, particularly Kosovo.

In his study, "The EU and the Western Balkans: Stabilization, Integration, and the Challenges of Governance," Florian Bieber examines the EU's policies toward the Western Balkans, including Kosovo. He emphasizes the EU's role as a normative power and its efforts to promote democratization, human rights, and the rule of law in the region. Bieber's study provides a valuable framework for understanding the EU's policies toward the Western Balkans and the challenges that Kosovo faces on its path to EU accession (Bieber, 2018).

KIPRED's study "Kosovo's EU Integration: Challenges and Opportunities," also emphasizes the significant challenges that Kosovo faces on its path to EU accession. The EU's support for Kosovo's EU integration process has been significant, with the signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) in 2015 representing a major milestone. Despite this progress, Kosovo still faces significant challenges on its path to EU accession, including the unresolved issue of the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, corruption and rule of law issues, and the lack of recognition by five EU member states (KIPRED, 2019). The paper will examine the implications of these challenges for Kosovo's prospects for EU membership, as well as the EU's credibility as a normative power in the Western Balkans. To address these challenges, sustained efforts by Kosovo's political leaders, civil society, and the EU are required. The EU should continue to provide support and assistance to Kosovo in its efforts to meet the necessary conditions for membership, while also addressing the underlying political and social issues that hinder Kosovo's progress toward a more democratic and inclusive society.

The theoretical contribution of this paper lies in its exploration of the EU's role as a normative power in the Western Balkans, particularly in Kosovo, and its impact on the country's progress toward democratization and European integration. The paper also contributes to the literature by examining the implications of the non-recognition of Kosovo by five EU member states on the EU's credibility as a normative power in the region. Additionally, the paper highlights the importance of sustained efforts by Kosovo's political leaders, civil society, and the EU to address the underlying political and social issues that hinder Kosovo's progress toward a more democratic and inclusive society.

One limitation of this paper is that it relies primarily on secondary sources, such as academic articles and reports, rather than primary data collection. Additionally, the paper's analysis is limited by the availability and quality of the existing literature on the topic. Finally, the paper focuses primarily on the EU's policies and priorities toward Kosovo and does not examine in depth the perspectives and actions of other actors, such as Kosovo's neighbors and other international organizations.

2. Methodology

This study aims to examine the extent to which the EU's involvement in Kosovo's political and economic development has contributed to the country's progress toward democratization and European integration, and the implications of the non-recognition of Kosovo by five EU member states on the EU's credibility as a normative power in the Western Balkans and on Kosovo's prospects for EU membership.

To achieve this, a qualitative approach will be used that combines a comparison analysis with a qualitative analysis. Firstly, a comparison analysis will be used to compare Kosovo's progress toward democratization and European integration with other Western Balkan countries. This analysis will involve reviewing relevant academic literature, reports, and data from organizations such as the European Union and the World Bank.

Secondly, a qualitative analysis will be conducted to examine the impact of the EU's involvement in Kosovo's political and economic development on the country's progress toward democratization and European integration and the implications of the non-recognition of Kosovo by five EU member states on the EU's credibility as a normative power in the Western Balkans and on Kosovo's prospects for EU membership. This analysis will involve collecting and analyzing data from various sources such as interviews with experts, policymakers, and civil society representatives, as well as reviewing official EU documents, academic literature, and policy documents related to Kosovo's EU integration process. The collected data will be analyzed using qualitative methods such as content analysis to identify the main factors that have contributed to Kosovo's progress toward democratization and European integration and the implications of the non-recognition of Kosovo by five EU member states.

The sources used in this study were carefully selected and evaluated for their reliability, relevance, and limitations. The methodology used for the analysis of the sources has been rigorous, and it has been applied consistently throughout the research process. Any limitations of the study, such as data availability and reliability, will be acknowledged and discussed.

The findings of this study will be presented with a focus on the main themes, trends, and issues related to the EU's involvement in Kosovo's political and economic development and the implications of the non-recognition of Kosovo by five EU member states. The study will conclude by drawing a conclusion based on the findings of the research and identifying areas for further research. The study will highlight the strengths and limitations of the research field and provide recommendations for future research in the field.

3. Theoretical framework

This paper's theoretical framework relates to the research question by exploring the prospects and challenges of Kosovo's accession to the EU in light of the EU's policies and priorities. The paper draws from the literature on the EU's role as a normative power in the region, promoting democratic governance, human rights, and the rule of law. The lack of recognition of Kosovo by

five EU member states and its impact on Kosovo's path toward EU membership is also examined.

To support the theoretical framework of this paper, relevant literature is cited to demonstrate how it relates to previous research in the field. This will include studies that have explored similar topics or used similar theoretical frameworks. For example, Florian Bieber's study "The EU and the Western Balkans: Stabilization, Integration, and the Challenges of Governance" will be cited to provide a valuable framework for understanding the EU's policies toward the Western Balkans and the challenges that Kosovo faces on its path to EU accession (Bieber, 2018). Additionally, KIPRED's study "Kosovo's EU Integration: Challenges and Opportunities" will be cited to emphasize the significant challenges that Kosovo faces on its path to EU accession, including the unresolved issue of the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, corruption and rule of law issues, and the lack of recognition by five EU member states (KIPRED, 2019). Clear definition of key concepts and terms is provided to ensure that the readers understand the theoretical foundation of the study and can follow the arguments and analysis. For example, the concept of the EU as a normative power will be defined as its ability to shape the behavior of other actors in the international system through the promotion of its values, such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. The concept of democratic governance is also defined, and its importance for deepened integration into the EU is explored.

To make the theoretical framework more tangible and accessible to the readers, examples or case studies are used to illustrate how it applies to real-world situations. For instance, the paper provides examples of how the lack of recognition by five EU member states impacts Kosovo's ability to fully participate in certain EU programs and initiatives, hindering its path toward EU membership. The paper also uses case studies to explore how the EU's policies and priorities have impacted Kosovo's progress toward democratization and European integration.

The implications of this research for the broader field of study will also be discussed. This will involve considering how the findings contribute to our understanding of key theories or concepts, such as the EU's role as a normative power and its use of conditional cooperation. Additionally, the paper will explore how the findings might inform future research in the field, particularly in the context of the Western Balkans and the challenges that countries in the region face on their path toward EU membership.

In summary, this paper critically examines the prospects and challenges of Kosovo's accession to the EU in light of the EU's policies and priorities, exploring the EU's role as a normative power in the Western Balkans and its impact on Kosovo's progress toward democratization and European integration. By using relevant literature, clear definitions of key concepts, examples and case studies, and a discussion of the implications for the broader field of study, this paper aims to contribute to our understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing countries in the region on their path toward EU membership.

4. The EU as a normative power and its regional policy on enlargement: a theoretical framework

The EU as a Normative Power refers to the EU's ability to shape the behavior of other states and international actors through the promotion of its norms and values, such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law (Hyde-Price, 2006). Kosovo's journey toward EU membership is closely linked to the EU's normative power. Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia in 2008 and has since been recognized by over 100 countries, including 22 out of 27 EU member states. However, Serbia, a candidate country for EU membership, does not recognize Kosovo's independence, which has hindered the direction of Kosovo's path to EU membership.

The EU has made it clear that Kosovo's progress toward membership is contingent on the country's ability to meet the EU's normative requirements. Kosovo has made significant progress in implementing reforms related to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, which are key components of the EU's normative framework. For example, Kosovo has adopted a constitution that enshrines democratic principles and has established independent institutions, such as the judiciary and the ombudsman, to ensure the protection of human rights.

However, Kosovo still faces challenges in meeting the EU's normative standards. One area of concern is the rule of law, where Kosovo has struggled with corruption and organized crime. The EU has made it clear that progress in this area is crucial for Kosovo's path toward membership.

There are several specific examples of how the EU has promoted its norms and values in Kosovo.

Firstly, the EU has been actively involved in supporting the development of democratic institutions in Kosovo. For example, the EU has provided financial and technical assistance to strengthen the capacity of Kosovo's parliament, political parties, and civil society organizations. The EU has also supported the establishment of independent electoral bodies to ensure free and fair elections.

Secondly, the EU has been instrumental in promoting the rule of law in Kosovo. The EU has provided support to the establishment of the Kosovo Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecutor's Office, which were set up to investigate and prosecute war crimes and other serious crimes committed during the Kosovo conflict. The EU has also provided support to Kosovo's justice sector, including the establishment of a new court system and the strengthening of the capacity of prosecutors and judges.

Thirdly, the EU has been actively involved in promoting the protection of human rights in Kosovo. The EU has provided support to the establishment of the Office of the Ombudsperson, an independent institution responsible for the protection and promotion of human rights in Kosovo. The EU has also supported the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which aims to protect the rights of ethnic minorities in Kosovo (Hegemann and Missiroli, 2014).

The EU has also supported the implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement, which aims to promote

economic integration and cooperation between Kosovo and the EU.

The EU's promotion of its norms and values in Kosovo has been a key factor in shaping Kosovo's domestic policies and behavior, and in facilitating the country's progress toward EU membership.

In this context, this paper aims to assess the prospects and challenges of Kosovo's accession to the EU and to analyse the role of the EU in shaping Kosovo's political future, in comparison to other Western Balkan states. Specifically, the paper will examine the EU's policies and priorities toward Kosovo and other Western Balkan states and will analyse the implications of these policies for Kosovo's progress toward EU membership. Through this analysis, the paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of the EU's role in the Western Balkans and its implications for the region's political future. Since the collapse of Yugoslavia, the Western Balkans have been the focus of significant international attention. The region has been characterized by political instability, economic underdevelopment, and ethnic conflict (Risse and Börzel, 2012). The EU has played a key role in the region, offering support for democratic reforms, promoting regional cooperation, and encouraging states to align with EU norms and standards.

In the case of the Western Balkans, the EU has pursued a stabilization and association process that requires reforms in key policy areas and aims to bring the countries closer to EU membership (Irion, 2014). Kosovo, which declared independence from Serbia in 2008, has faced significant challenges in building a stable and democratic political system. The EU's approach is based on the enlargement process and the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) for the [EU Enlargement the Western Balkans](#). (2021). The EU has been an important player in the country, supporting political and economic reforms and encouraging the normalization of relations with Serbia. The Western Balkans are a priority for the European Union.

Moreover, a range of external factors—including the post-9/11 'war on terror', the EU's eastern enlargement and the Union's post-2004 constitutional debate—have combined to reduce the appeal of EU membership in the Balkans (Keukeleire and Šipulová, 2007). The EU is committed to supporting the political, economic and social transformation of the region, with a view to consolidating peace, stability and prosperity.

Compared to other Balkan states, the EU's role in Kosovo has been significant. Overall, the EU's promotion of its norms and values in Kosovo has been a key factor in shaping Kosovo's domestic policies and behavior, and in facilitating the country's progress toward EU membership.

4.1. Conditional cooperation: the EU's approach to promoting norms and values in the Western Balkans

The EU often uses conditional cooperation as a tool for promoting its norms and values. This means that the EU provides incentives to countries that meet certain conditions, such as making reforms or improving governance, in order to encourage them to align with EU standards. Conditional cooperation, as a tool used by the European Union (EU), has been an effective method

for promoting its norms and values. The EU provides incentives to countries that meet certain conditions, such as improving governance or making reforms, to encourage them to align with EU standards (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2004). This approach has been used extensively in the process of EU enlargement, where candidate countries have been required to meet strict political and economic criteria before being granted membership (Börzel and Risse, 2007). In the case of Kosovo, the EU's conditional cooperation has played a significant role in shaping the country's domestic policies and behavior. Kosovo's progress toward EU membership is contingent on its ability to meet the EU's normative requirements, and the EU has provided significant financial and technical assistance to support Kosovo's efforts to implement reforms related to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law (European Commission, 2021).

The EU's use of conditional cooperation in Kosovo has been particularly important in promoting improvements in the rule of law, where Kosovo has struggled with corruption and organized crime (European Parliament, 2019). The EU has made it clear that progress in this area is crucial for Kosovo's progress in its EU accession process and has provided significant support to strengthen Kosovo's justice sector and improve its capacity to prosecute and investigate serious crimes (European Commission, 2020). The EU's conditionality policy toward the region, while successful in some aspects, has faced serious limitations in addressing endemic corruption, weak judiciary, and nationalist pressures, which have hampered the consolidation of democratic institutions and undermined the EU's transformative role (Štiks, 2017). Ultimately, therefore, the prospects for EU policy in the Balkans look bleak (Ker-Lindsay, 2009).

In conclusion, the EU's use of conditional cooperation has been an important tool for promoting its norms and values and has played a significant role in shaping Kosovo's domestic policies and behavior. By providing incentives for countries to align with EU standards, the EU has been able to encourage positive changes in governance, democracy, and human rights, which are key components of the EU's normative framework.

4.2. The EU's regional policy on enlargement

The European Union (EU) has a well-established regional policy when it comes to enlargement, which involves providing support and assistance to countries that are seeking to join the EU. This policy has been a key component of the EU's engagement with the Western Balkans, including Kosovo, which is considered a potential candidate for EU membership (European Commission, 2020). The EU's regional policy on enlargement is designed to encourage political and economic reforms, improve governance, and promote stability and security in the region (Börzel and Risse, 2012).

The EU's regional policy on enlargement has a significant impact on the trajectory of Kosovo's journey toward EU integration. The EU has provided significant financial and technical assistance to support Kosovo's reforms related to areas such as the rule of law, human rights, and public administration

(European Commission, 2021). The EU's support has been crucial in helping Kosovo to align with EU standards and requirements and has facilitated the country's progress toward EU membership.

The EU's regional policy on enlargement is closely linked to the EU's normative power. The EU promotes its norms and values through its enlargement policy, by requiring candidate countries to meet strict political and economic criteria, which are based on EU standards and norms (Börzel and Risse, 2012). The EU also encourages candidate countries to adopt EU policies and legislation, which helps to promote convergence and alignment with EU norms and values.

However, the EU's regional policy on enlargement is not without its challenges. Enlargement fatigue among some EU member states and the slow pace of reform in some candidate countries have contributed to a more cautious and conditional approach to enlargement (Hegemann and Missiroli, 2014).

Nonetheless, the EU's regional policy on enlargement remains a key tool for promoting stability, security, and democracy in the Western Balkans, and for extending the EU's normative power beyond its borders.

However, the EU's influence in the region has been uneven, with some states receiving more attention and support than others. For example, Croatia and Serbia have been the focus of significant EU attention, with Croatia joining the EU in 2013 and Serbia becoming a candidate country in 2012. Bosnia and Herzegovina, on the other hand, has faced significant challenges in its EU integration process, with political instability and ethnic tensions hindering progress.

In conclusion, the EU's regional policy on enlargement has a significant impact on the route that Kosovo is taking toward EU integration and is closely linked to the EU's normative power. By providing support and assistance to candidate countries, the EU is able to promote its norms and values, and encourage positive changes in governance, democracy, and human rights.

5. The importance of democratic governance in the EU's enlargement policy: implications for Kosovo

Democratic governance is a fundamental requirement for deepened integration into the European Union (EU), and Kosovo is no exception. The EU's criteria for membership include the establishment of stable democratic institutions, the rule of law, and respect for human rights (European Commission, 2021). These are essential components of the EU's normative framework, which is closely linked to democratic principles.

In the context of Kosovo, democratic governance has been a significant challenge. The country has struggled with corruption, political polarization, and weak institutions, which have hampered its progress toward EU membership (European Parliament, 2019). To address these challenges, Kosovo has implemented a range of reforms, including the adoption of a new constitution, the establishment of an independent judiciary, and the strengthening of civil society (European Commission, 2021).

However, Kosovo still faces significant challenges in meeting the EU's criteria for membership. Corruption remains pervasive, and the country has struggled to implement reforms related to

the rule of law and human rights (European Parliament, 2021). These challenges have hindered Kosovo's economic development, political stability, and overall progress toward EU membership.

To address these challenges, the EU has played a significant role in supporting Kosovo's efforts to strengthen democratic governance. The EU has provided financial and technical assistance to support the development of democratic institutions, such as the judiciary and parliament, and has worked closely with Kosovo to implement reforms related to the rule of law and human rights (European Commission, 2021). The EU has also provided support to civil society organizations and independent media, which are important for promoting accountability and transparency.

However, to further support Kosovo's progress toward EU membership, the EU could consider additional measures. For example, the EU could provide more targeted technical assistance to help Kosovo implement reforms related to the rule of law and human rights. The EU could also encourage Kosovo to adopt EU policies and legislation related to democratic governance, which could help to promote convergence and alignment with EU norms and values. In addition, the EU could work with Kosovo to promote greater transparency and accountability in government, which could help to address corruption and promote political stability.

The importance of democratic governance in the context of EU enlargement extends beyond Kosovo. The EU's enlargement policy is closely linked to its broader goals of promoting stability, security, and democracy in Europe. By supporting democratic governance in the Balkans, the EU can help to promote peace and stability in the region and can strengthen the EU's role as a normative power. Moreover, the success (or failure) of Kosovo's progress toward EU membership could impact other countries in the region and could have broader implications for democracy and stability in the Balkans.

In conclusion, democratic governance is an essential requirement for deepened integration into the EU, and Kosovo faces significant challenges in meeting this requirement. However, the EU has played a significant role in supporting Kosovo's efforts to strengthen democratic institutions and can continue to support Kosovo in its efforts to meet the EU's criteria for membership. By promoting democratic governance in the Balkans, the EU can help to promote peace and stability in the region, strengthen its role as a normative power, and advance its broader goals of promoting democracy and stability in Europe.

6. The EU's impact on Kosovo's democratization and European integration: an analysis of practical examples

Since Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008, the European Union (EU) has played a significant role in promoting stability, democracy, and economic development in the country. The EU's involvement in Kosovo has included a range of initiatives and programs aimed at supporting Kosovo's political and economic development.

Despite the EU's efforts to promote stability, democracy, and economic development in Kosovo, the country still faces numerous challenges in these areas.

The EU has implemented various initiatives in Kosovo, including those aimed at promoting stability, democracy, and economic development, among others.

However, the effectiveness of these initiatives and their impact on Kosovo's development and stability remains a subject of ongoing debate and analysis. Additionally, while some initiatives have shown promising results, others have faced criticism for their limited impact or implementation challenges.

- The stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA): The SAA is a framework agreement between the EU and Kosovo that aims to promote political, economic, and social cooperation between the two parties. It was signed in 2015 and entered into force in 2016. The SAA includes provisions on trade, customs, competition, public procurement, and other areas, as well as commitments by Kosovo to undertake reforms in various sectors.
- The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA): The IPA is a financial instrument designed to support reforms in countries that are candidates or potential candidates for EU membership. Kosovo has been a beneficiary of IPA funding since 2007, with funds allocated to areas such as governance and public administration, education and employment, and justice and home affairs.
- The European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX): EULEX is a civilian mission established by the EU in 2008 to support the development of an independent judiciary and the fight against corruption and organized crime in Kosovo. EULEX's mandate includes monitoring and mentoring of Kosovo's justice institutions, as well as providing support for investigations and prosecutions of serious crimes.
- The EU Dialogue for Normalization of Relations between Kosovo and Serbia: This dialogue was launched in 2011 with the aim of resolving outstanding issues between Kosovo and Serbia, including the status of Serb-majority areas in northern Kosovo. The dialogue is facilitated by the EU and has resulted in several agreements, including the Brussels Agreement in 2013, which established the basis for normalizing relations between the two countries.

6.1. Positive aspects of the EU's involvement in Kosovo

One of the positive aspects of the EU's involvement in Kosovo has been its support for the development of the country's institutions. The EU has provided extensive financial and technical assistance to help Kosovo build its institutions and strengthen its economy. For example, the EU has funded a number of projects in Kosovo, including road construction, energy infrastructure, and waste management.

The EU has also established programs to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Kosovo, which have helped to create jobs and promote economic growth. The EU's involvement

in Kosovo has been extensive and has had a significant impact on the country's development (Mexhuani, 2023).

Another positive aspect of the EU's involvement in Kosovo has been its support for political stability and democracy. The EU has supported Kosovo's democratic institutions, including the parliament, the government, and the electoral process. The EU has provided extensive support to the Kosovo government to help it implement necessary reforms and strengthen its democratic institutions. The EU has also played a key role in supporting the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, which has been a major challenge for both countries.

According to a report by the European External Action Service (EEAS, 2018), the EU has provided substantial financial and technical assistance to Kosovo to help it build and strengthen its institutions, including its justice system and public administration. The EU has also funded a number of infrastructure projects in Kosovo, such as the construction of the Kosovo Motorway, which has helped to improve transportation and stimulate economic growth (European Commission, 2020).

In terms of support for political stability and democracy, the EU has established a number of programs aimed at strengthening democratic institutions and promoting good governance in Kosovo. For example, the EU's Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) has provided funding to support the rule of law and the fight against corruption in Kosovo (EEAS, 2018). The EU has also played a key role in supporting the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia through the EU-facilitated dialogue process (European External Action Service, 2021). Furthermore, the EU has established programs to support SMEs in Kosovo, which have helped to create jobs and promote economic growth (European Commission, 2020).

According to a study by Arifi and Maxhuni (2019), the EU's support for SMEs in Kosovo has been successful in promoting economic growth and reducing unemployment in the country.

6.2. Assessing the EU's involvement in Kosovo: practical examples of EU support for Kosovo's political and economic development

As part of its involvement in Kosovo, the EU has implemented a range of initiatives and programs aimed at supporting Kosovo's political and economic development. One significant example of the EU's involvement in Kosovo is the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX). Established in 2008, EULEX has been one of the largest civilian missions ever deployed by the EU, with a mandate to support the development of the rule of law in Kosovo, including the judiciary and law enforcement institutions.

Over the years, EULEX has played a crucial role in supporting Kosovo's justice system, providing technical assistance, training, and mentoring to judges, prosecutors, and other key actors in Kosovo's legal system. EULEX has also worked to promote transparency and accountability in the justice system, helping to build public trust in the rule of law. Through its support for Kosovo's justice system, EULEX has contributed to Kosovo's

progress toward EU accession, which requires the establishment of a functioning rule of law system.

Another practical example of the EU's involvement in Kosovo is the European Partnership for Education program. This program aims to improve the quality of education in Kosovo by providing financial and technical assistance to support education reforms. The program has helped to improve access to education for children in Kosovo and has helped to strengthen the education system in the country.

In terms of the EU's involvement in supporting the development of the rule of law in Kosovo, the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) has been a key practical example (European Union External Action, 2020). EULEX has played a crucial role in supporting Kosovo's justice system, including the judiciary and law enforcement institutions (European Union External Action, 2020).

Another practical example of the EU's involvement in Kosovo is the European Partnership for Education program, which has aimed to improve the quality of education in Kosovo by providing financial and technical assistance to support education reforms (European Commission, 2020). The program has helped to improve access to education for children in Kosovo and has helped to strengthen the education system in the country (European Commission, 2020).

The EU's involvement in Kosovo is the construction of the Kosovo Motorway, which is part of the Trans-European Transport Network. The EU provided significant financial support for the construction of this motorway, which has helped to improve Kosovo's infrastructure and create jobs. The motorway has also helped to improve trade and economic ties between Kosovo and neighboring countries. Another practical example of the EU's involvement in Kosovo is the European Partnership for Education program. This program aims to improve the quality of education in Kosovo by providing financial and technical assistance to support education reforms. The program has helped to improve access to education for children in Kosovo and has helped to strengthen the education system in the country.

The EU's involvement in Kosovo has been extensive and has had a significant impact on the country's development. The EU has played a crucial role in promoting stability, democracy, and economic development in Kosovo. The EU's involvement in Kosovo has included a wide range of initiatives and programs, including support for the justice system, economic development, and political stability. Practical examples of the EU's involvement in Kosovo include the construction of the Kosovo Motorway and the European Partnership for Education program.

The EU's involvement in Kosovo is an important example of the EU's commitment to promoting peace, stability, and prosperity in the Western Balkans. The EU's involvement in Kosovo has been guided by a range of priorities, including promoting stability, strengthening democracy, and encouraging economic growth. One of the key successes of the EU's engagement with Kosovo has been the support provided for the country's state-building efforts (Radeljić, 2019). The EU has played a significant role in promoting the rule of law in Kosovo, supporting the development of institutions such as the police and the judiciary (Radeljić, 2019). The EU has also provided significant financial support for Kosovo,

helping to fund the country's public services, infrastructure, and private sector development.

However, the EU's approach to Kosovo has not been without challenges. One of the main challenges has been the lack of consistency and coordination among EU member states. Different member states have had different priorities and interests in relation to Kosovo, which has led to a fragmented approach to the country. This has resulted in a lack of clarity in the EU's policies toward Kosovo, which has made it difficult for Kosovo to fully understand what the EU expects from it. Another challenge of the EU's involvement in Kosovo has been the prioritization of stability over democracy (Beqiri, 2019). This has led to a focus on maintaining the status quo, rather than pushing for more fundamental reforms. This has been particularly evident in the EU's approach toward the issue of Kosovo's status, which has remained unresolved for many years.

While the EU has supported Kosovo's independence, it has not actively pushed for recognition from those countries that have not yet recognized Kosovo's sovereignty. This has left Kosovo in a state of limbo, with its status as an independent country still disputed by some. The limited impact of the EU's involvement in Kosovo has also been a cause for concern. While the EU has provided significant financial assistance to Kosovo, this has not always translated into tangible improvements in people's lives. Kosovo remains one of the poorest countries in Europe, with high unemployment people.

While the EU has provided significant support to Kosovo over the years, its approach has not been without criticism. One of the main criticisms of the EU's involvement in Kosovo has been the lack of consistency and coordination among EU member states. This has led to a fragmented approach, with different member states having different priorities and interests in relation to Kosovo. This has resulted in a lack of clarity in the EU's policies toward Kosovo, which has made it difficult for Kosovo to fully understand what the EU expects from it. This has also made it difficult for the EU to achieve its objectives in Kosovo, as different member states have pursued different strategies in their relations with the country.

Another criticism of the EU's approach toward Kosovo is that it has often prioritized stability over democracy. This has led to a focus on maintaining the status quo, rather than pushing for more fundamental reforms. This has been particularly evident in the EU's approach toward the issue of Kosovo's status, which has remained unresolved for many years. While the EU has supported Kosovo's independence, it has not actively pushed for recognition from those countries that have not yet recognized Kosovo's sovereignty. This has left Kosovo in a state of limbo, with its status as an independent country still disputed by some.

Furthermore, the EU's involvement in Kosovo has been criticized for its limited impact on the ground. While the EU has provided significant financial assistance to Kosovo, this has not always translated into tangible improvements in people's lives. Kosovo remains one of the poorest countries in Europe, with high levels of unemployment and poverty. While the EU has supported economic reforms, these have not yet led to the creation of sustainable jobs and growth. The EU's involvement in Kosovo's political development has also been criticized for its lack of engagement with local civil society and grassroots movements.

This has led to a sense of disconnect between the EU and the people of Kosovo, which has made it difficult for the EU to fully understand the needs and aspirations of the country.

In light of these criticisms, it is clear that the EU's involvement in Kosovo needs to be more strategic and coordinated. The EU needs to work more closely with its member states to ensure a more coherent and consistent approach toward Kosovo. This should involve greater engagement with local civil society and grassroots movements, to ensure that the EU's policies are more closely aligned with the needs and aspirations of the people of Kosovo. The EU also needs to prioritize democracy over stability, and to actively push for more fundamental reforms in the country. This may involve taking a more proactive role in resolving the issue of Kosovo's status, and pushing for recognition from those countries that have not yet recognized Kosovo's sovereignty. By doing so, the EU can help to shape a more positive political future for Kosovo, and to ensure that the country is able to fully realize its potential as a democratic and prosperous nation.

The special representative has played a crucial role in mediating between Kosovo and Serbia, particularly in the implementation of agreements reached between the two sides, but the success of this mediation has been limited by factors beyond the EU's control, including political obstacles and resistance to compromise from both sides (Beqiri, 2019).

Kosovo and the European Union (EU) have signed a series of agreements over the years that have aimed to deepen Kosovo's political and economic ties with the EU. These agreements have been significant for Kosovo's political future, as they have helped to solidify Kosovo's place in the European community and have provided a framework for cooperation and partnership between Kosovo and the EU.

6.3. Challenges and limitations of the EU's role as a normative power in Kosovo: implications for EU credibility and Kosovo's accession process

One of the negative aspects of the EU's involvement in Kosovo has been the slow progress in implementing necessary reforms. Despite significant financial and technical assistance from the EU, Kosovo still faces major challenges in areas such as corruption, organized crime, and human rights. While the EU has provided support for the development of Kosovo's institutions, progress has been slow, and there is still a long way to go to achieve the necessary reforms.

Another negative aspect of the EU's involvement in Kosovo has been the lack of progress in resolving the issue of Kosovo's independence. While the majority of EU member states recognize Kosovo's independence, some member states, such as Spain and Slovakia, do not. This lack of consensus within the EU has hindered progress in resolving the issue of Kosovo's independence and has made it difficult for the EU to play a more active role in promoting stability in the region. The EU has been a major contributor to Kosovo's post-war reconstruction and development.

It has provided extensive financial and technical assistance to help Kosovo build its institutions and strengthen its economy. One of the most notable examples of the EU's involvement in Kosovo is the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX). EULEX was established in 2008 to support the development of the rule of law in Kosovo, including the judiciary and law enforcement institutions. It has been one of the largest civilian missions ever deployed by the EU and has played a crucial role in supporting Kosovo's justice system.

The EU has also been instrumental in promoting economic development in Kosovo. It has provided significant financial assistance to help Kosovo build its infrastructure and create jobs. The EU has funded a number of projects in Kosovo, including road construction, energy infrastructure, and waste management. The EU has also established a number of programs to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Kosovo, including the European Partnership for SMEs program, which aims to provide financial and technical assistance to help SMEs grow and create jobs. The EU has also been involved in promoting political stability and democracy in Kosovo. It has supported Kosovo's democratic institutions, including the parliament, the government, and the electoral process.

The EU has provided extensive support to the Kosovo government to help it implement necessary reforms and strengthen its democratic institutions. The EU has also played a key role in supporting the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, which has been a major challenge for both countries. The slow progress in implementing necessary reforms despite significant financial and technical assistance from the EU is mentioned in a report by the [European Court of Auditors \(2019\)](#). The report also highlights the need for better coordination among EU institutions and member states to ensure more effective assistance to Kosovo in implementing reforms.

The challenges Kosovo faces in areas such as corruption, organized crime, and human rights are mentioned in the Kosovo Progress Report ([European Commission, 2020](#)), published by the European Commission. The report states that Kosovo needs to make more progress in these areas to fulfill the criteria for closer ties with the EU. The lack of consensus within the EU on Kosovo's independence is mentioned in an article by Euractiv ([Euroativ, 2021](#)). The article highlights that the lack of unanimity among EU member states on this issue has prevented the EU from having a more active role in promoting stability in the region.

The EU's support for economic development in Kosovo is mentioned in a report by the [European Commission \(2021\)](#) on the implementation of the European Neighborhood Policy in Kosovo. The report highlights the EU's funding of various infrastructure projects and programs to support SMEs in Kosovo.

The EU's support for promoting political stability and democracy in Kosovo is mentioned in a report by the [European Parliament \(2021\)](#) on the implementation of the EU-Kosovo Stabilization and Association Agreement. The report emphasizes the importance of the EU's support for Kosovo's democratic institutions and the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia.

6.4. Assessing Kosovo's political and economic integration with the European Union: an examination of key agreements between Kosovo and the EU

Kosovo's path toward integration into the European Union (EU) has been defined by a series of agreements that establish the conditions for the country's political and economic integration with the EU. These agreements cover a range of areas, including trade, the rule of law, human rights, democratic governance, and other key aspects of EU membership.

Through these agreements, Kosovo has committed to implementing reforms and meeting certain benchmarks in order to align its policies and practices with EU standards. In turn, the EU has provided support and assistance to Kosovo to help it meet these commitments and move closer toward EU accession. In this section I will examine the key agreements between Kosovo and the EU, and to assess the progress that Kosovo has made in meeting its commitments under these agreements including the Stabilization and Association Agreement, the Visa Liberalization Agreement, the Interim Agreement on Trade and Trade-Related Issues, the Agreement on the Participation of Kosovo in European Programs, and the Framework Agreement for the Provision of Emergency Support to Kosovo. These agreements have helped to facilitate greater people-to-people contact and have strengthened ties between Kosovo and the EU, paving the way for Kosovo's eventual accession to the EU.

Here are some of the key agreements between Kosovo and the EU:

- Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA). The SAA is the main framework for relations between the EU and Kosovo. The agreement was signed in 2015 and entered into force in 2016. It sets out the political and economic conditions for Kosovo's eventual accession to the EU, and provides for the gradual integration of Kosovo into the EU's single market. The SAA includes provisions on trade, the rule of law, human rights, and democratic governance, among other areas.
- Visa Liberalization Agreement In 2010. On 14 December 2010, the Council reaffirmed that Kosovo would benefit from the perspective of eventual visa liberalization once all conditions are met; took note of Kosovo's progress in the fields of readmission and reintegration; and took note of the Commission's intention to launch a visa liberalization dialogue once all conditions are met and the Commission's intention, before launching such a dialogue, to share its assessment with the Council of the fulfillment of such conditions. This agreement was significant for Kosovo, as it has helped to facilitate greater people-to-people contact and has strengthened ties between Kosovo and the EU.
- Interim Agreement on Trade and Trade-Related Issues (IATA). The IATA was signed in 2006 and provides for the gradual integration of Kosovo into the EU's single market. The agreement sets out the conditions for Kosovo's participation in the EU's trade regime, and includes provisions on trade liberalization, customs procedures, and technical regulations.
- Agreement on the Participation of Kosovo in European Programs. The Agreement on the Participation of Kosovo in European Programs was signed in 2014 and provides for Kosovo's participation in a range of EU programs, including education, research, and cultural programs. The agreement aims to promote people-to-people contacts between Kosovo and the EU, and to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and expertise.
- Framework Agreement for the Provision of Emergency Support to Kosovo. The Framework Agreement for the Provision of Emergency Support to Kosovo was signed in 2017 and aims to improve Kosovo's preparedness for natural disasters and emergencies. The agreement provides for the EU to provide financial and technical assistance to Kosovo in the event of a disaster or emergency.

These agreements have had a significant impact on Kosovo's political future, as they have helped to deepen Kosovo's ties with the EU and have provided a framework for cooperation and partnership between Kosovo and the EU. The SAA, in particular, is seen as a key step toward Kosovo's eventual accession to the EU, and has helped to ensure that Kosovo meets the political and economic conditions for membership. The analysis shows that the SAA constitutes a difficult, yet necessary, step in the EU's relations with the Western Balkans (Irion, 2014).

The visa liberalization agreement has also been significant, as it has helped to strengthen people-to-people contacts between Kosovo and the EU and has facilitated greater economic and cultural exchange. Overall, these agreements have provided a framework for Kosovo's integration into the European community and have helped to solidify Kosovo's place in Europe.

However, there are also challenges and limitations to these agreements. Some critics argue that the agreements have not gone far enough in addressing some of the key challenges facing Kosovo, such as corruption, organized crime, and weak rule of law. Others have raised concerns about the impact of these agreements on Kosovo's economic and political sovereignty. As Kosovo continues to deepen its ties with the EU, it will be important to address these challenges and to ensure that Kosovo's interests are protected and promoted in the context of its partnership with the EU.

The findings of this paper highlight the EU's crucial role in shaping Kosovo's political future and the significant impact of non-recognition by five EU member states on Kosovo's accession process. The EU's engagement with Kosovo has been a critical driver of Kosovo's democratization and European integration process, with the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) signed in 2015 serving as an important milestone in this regard. However, the non-recognition of Kosovo by five EU member states has significant implications for the country's path toward EU accession. The lack of recognition creates significant obstacles to Kosovo's participation in EU programs and initiatives, and also affects Kosovo's international status and relations with its neighbors. One of the main difficulties is the fact that five EU member states (Spain, Greece, Romania, Slovakia, and Cyprus) do not recognize Kosovo as an independent state, which creates challenges for Kosovo's prospects for EU membership. While the EU institutions hold a neutral position regarding Kosovo

statehood, some EU member states have been reluctant to recognize Kosovo's independence due to concerns about the potential implications for their own territorial integrity. Therefore, it is important for the EU to engage in constructive dialogue with these countries to encourage them to recognize Kosovo and support its integration into the EU. The so-called EU constructive ambiguity has also been a contentious issue in the EU's approach to Kosovo. The EU has been criticized for its lack of clarity on whether Kosovo is considered a state or not. This ambiguity has created uncertainty for Kosovo's political and economic development and has potentially hindered its progress toward EU membership. However, some argue that the EU's constructive ambiguity has allowed for flexibility in its approach to Kosovo and has helped to maintain peace and stability in the region.

Furthermore, the Russian invasion in Ukraine has had an impact on the movements in the Balkans, including the EU's role in the Kosovo-Serbia negotiations. Russia's influence in the region has increased, and some countries in the Balkans have been pressured to align themselves with either Russia or the West. This has made it more difficult for the EU to maintain a united front in its approach to the Western Balkans and has created challenges for the EU's credibility as a normative power in the region. It is important for the EU to continue to engage with the Western Balkans and support their progress toward EU membership, while also being mindful of the changing geopolitical landscape in the region.

The role of the European Union in shaping Kosovo's political future cannot be understated. Since the establishment of the EU's rule of law mission in Kosovo in 2008, the EU has been heavily involved in the country's political and economic development. The EU has been instrumental in facilitating dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, as well as providing financial assistance to Kosovo's government and civil society. In Serbia, the threat of negative conditionality was largely ineffective because it failed to shift the domestic political balance in favor of reformers, while in Kosovo, positive conditionality provided greater leverage for the EU to promote political and economic reforms (Squires and Schimmelfennig, 2018).

One of the major successes of the EU's involvement in Kosovo has been the facilitation of dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. The Brussels Agreement, which was signed in 2013, was a major breakthrough in the normalization of relations between the two countries. The agreement was facilitated by the EU and required both Kosovo and Serbia to make significant concessions. Kosovo agreed to form an association of Serb-majority municipalities, while Serbia agreed to stop its efforts to block Kosovo's accession to international organizations. The implementation of the agreement has been challenging, but the fact that the dialogue has continued and progress has been made is a testament to the EU's role in facilitating the process. By prioritizing stability over democracy, the EU's engagement with Kosovo has focused primarily on building strong institutions and enhancing the rule of law, but has failed to address underlying political tensions and inequalities that threaten to undermine the country's democratic development (Krasniqi et al., 2018).

However, the EU's involvement in Kosovo has not been without its challenges. One of the biggest challenges has been the issue of corruption and rule of law. Despite the EU's significant investment

in strengthening Kosovo's justice system, corruption remains a major problem. The EU has been criticized for not doing enough to tackle corruption and for failing to hold Kosovo's political elites accountable. The lack of progress on this issue has had a negative impact on Kosovo's prospects for EU membership. However, the EU's dilemma is that it faces the Catch-22 of legitimizing the power of incumbents, while trying to curtail their control of state institutions (Štikš, 2017). An issue that arises in relation to the EU's political conditionality in the Balkans is the degree to which it is seen to be fully legitimate by the target countries (Keukeleire and Šipulová, 2007). Marc Weller argues in his analysis "What went wrong in the Brussels dialogue?" that the current approach is unbalanced and unfair, with the international community catering to Serbia's interests at the expense of Kosovo's (Weller, 2023). He emphasizes the importance of a balanced implementation process that offers equal benefits for both parties and raises concerns about the lack of a clear perspective on how the overall implementation will continue.

Another challenge has been the issue of the five EU member states that do not recognize Kosovo's independence: Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain. These countries have been a major obstacle to Kosovo's accession to the EU. They have been reluctant to recognize Kosovo as an independent state and have used their veto power to block Kosovo's membership in international organizations. This has had a significant impact on Kosovo's political future, as it has hindered the country's ability to fully integrate into the international community.

In conclusion, the EU has played a crucial role in shaping Kosovo's political future, but there are still many challenges that need to be addressed. The EU must continue to support the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia and to push for the implementation of the Brussels Agreement. It must also do more to address the issue of corruption and rule of law in Kosovo.

Finally, the EU must find a way to address the concerns of the five member states that do not recognize Kosovo's independence, in order to ensure that Kosovo has a path toward EU membership. Only then can we truly see hope in Kosovo's accession to the EU and a brighter future for the country.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

In conclusion, this paper has presented a nuanced analysis of the prospects and challenges of Kosovo's accession to the EU in light of the EU's policies and priorities, highlighting the potential for the EU to play a constructive role in promoting reconciliation between Kosovo and Serbia, which could ultimately pave the way for Kosovo's EU accession.

The paper has identified a range of challenges that Kosovo faces on its path toward EU accession, including the non-recognition of its independence by five EU member states. This lack of recognition poses significant challenges to Kosovo's European integration process, hindering its ability to fully participate in EU initiatives and programs. To address these challenges, the EU needs to take a more proactive role in engaging with these member states to encourage recognition of Kosovo's independence. The EU should also consider alternative measures, such as providing

Kosovo with increased support and assistance to help it overcome these challenges.

The so-called EU constructive ambiguity has also been a contentious issue in the EU's approach to Kosovo. The EU has been criticized for its lack of clarity on whether Kosovo is considered a state or not. This ambiguity has created uncertainty for Kosovo's political and economic development and has potentially hindered its progress toward EU membership. However, I argue that the EU's constructive ambiguity has allowed for flexibility in its approach to Kosovo and has helped to maintain peace and stability in the region.

Assessing the EU's policies and priorities toward Kosovo, the paper finds that the EU has provided crucial support for democratic reforms and promoted regional cooperation. However, the paper also acknowledges the limitations and challenges of the EU's involvement in Kosovo. One such limitation is the lack of genuine political will among Kosovo's elites to implement the necessary reforms to fully align with EU standards. The persistence of nationalist sentiments also poses a significant challenge, as it hinders the development of a more inclusive and democratic society in Kosovo.

Furthermore, the Russian invasion in Ukraine has had an impact on the movements in the Balkans, including the EU's role in the Kosovo-Serbia negotiations. Russia's influence in the region has increased, and some countries in the Balkans have been pressured to align themselves with either Russia or the West. This has made it more difficult for the EU to maintain a united front in its approach to the Western Balkans and has created challenges for the EU's credibility as a normative power in the region. It is important for the EU to continue to engage with the Western Balkans and support their progress toward EU membership, while also being mindful of the changing geopolitical landscape in the region.

To achieve lasting stability and democratic development in the Western Balkans, the EU needs to continue to play an active role in the region. This includes supporting political reforms and promoting economic development, as well as addressing the underlying issues that contribute to instability and conflict in the region. Additionally, the EU should work toward ensuring that all states in the region are treated equally and receive the support they need to build stable and democratic political systems.

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Overall, the EU has an important role to play in supporting Kosovo's political and economic development and promoting regional stability and cooperation. While the prospects of Kosovo's EU accession remain uncertain, with continued engagement and support, there is hope that Kosovo can overcome its challenges and achieve its goal of EU accession. To achieve this goal, the EU and Kosovo must work together to address the challenges and obstacles that stand in their way.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

BM contributed to the conception and design of the work, acquisition of data, analysis and interpretation of data, drafting and critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content, and read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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