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# THE IMPACT OF NEGOTIATION TEAMS' NARRATIVES ON THE NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS BETWEEN BELGRADE AND PRISTINA

Analysis of political representatives in 2022

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**October 2022**

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

EU	European Union
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
USA	United States of America
UN	United Nations
KM	Kosovska Mitrovica
PR	Pristina
RKS	Republic of Kosovo
MUP	Mnistry of Interior
VAT	Value added tax
EEAS	European External Action Service

## INTRODUCTION

The dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, with the mediation of the European Union, began in March 2011, three years after Kosovo\* declared independence.<sup>1</sup> The goal of the negotiations is the normalization of relations between the official Belgrade and Pristina and they include all issues that are important for the lives of people living in the territory of Kosovo. The negotiations are also one of the foreign policy projects of the European Union. As Serbia is currently in accession negotiations with the EU, the issue of the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo\* is considered within chapter 35 “Other issues” as a separate item that the EU will deal with throughout the negotiation process.<sup>2</sup> The EU negotiation framework explicitly stipulates that progress in the normalization of relations with Kosovo is also a condition for further negotiations between Serbia and the EU.<sup>3</sup>

All this shows that the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, in addition to improving the lives of citizens living in the territory of Kosovo, is also part of a wider political process that is an obligation of Serbia if it wants to join the EU. The first agreement on the principles governing the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina, known as the Brussels Agreement, was signed in 2013, and negotiations within the framework of these principles have lasted for as long as 9 years. Since then, there have been ups and downs, bright and not so bright moments in the relations between the two negotiating parties, with accompanying rhetoric that either served to justify the necessity of the dialogue with the “other side” or it was used for confrontation, mutual accusations, and measuring of forces.

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<sup>1</sup> This asterisk does not call into question the views on the status and is in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1244/1999 and the Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the Declaration of Independence of Kosovo. The name without the asterisk will be used hereinafter.

<sup>2</sup> Negotiating framework of the Republic of Serbia, see at: [https://www.mpravde.gov.rs/files/pregovaracki\\_okvir%201.pdf](https://www.mpravde.gov.rs/files/pregovaracki_okvir%201.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> If Serbia significantly lags behind the overall progress of the negotiations, and the reason for this is Serbia's failure to act in good faith, and in order to ensure a general balance regarding the progress of the negotiations, progress in the overall negotiations can be stopped until this balance is established. Even with the new enlargement methodology, Chapter 35 has the position of one of the key chapters in the process of Serbia's accession to the European Union, to the extent that it is not included in any of the six clusters, but the fulfillment of the prerequisites for its closure will be decided separately.

And while the European Union, which leads the dialogue process, has not fully and clearly defined what is expected as the final goal of the negotiations, the negotiating parties in Belgrade and Pristina each have their own view and interpretation of what is happening and what is expected in that process.<sup>4</sup> It seems that for Pristina it is an opportunity to confirm independence and complete sovereignty over the entire territory, while for Belgrade it is an attempt to formally and legally keep Kosovo within the constitutional and legal system of Serbia.

The obvious inconsistency of what the political elites of both sides decide to communicate to the public contributes to the fact that the citizens of Kosovo and Serbia do not have a clear and unique picture of what the dialogue is, and therefore have different expectations. The public discourses of the governments in Pristina and Belgrade do not leave the possibility that the final solutions contain compromises, but instead foster a competitive and victorious narrative, and the citizens themselves are against compromises that are the only realistic solutions. Nevertheless, both sides in the dialogue show a basic level of responsibility by, despite interruptions and setbacks, staying in the process leading to normalization and making efforts to find peaceful solutions even when it seems impossible.

The analysis “The Impact of the Negotiating Teams’ Narratives on the Normalization of Relations between Belgrade and Pristina” deals with the dialogue process between Belgrade and Pristina in 2022 and the specific messages that the negotiators of both sides sent to the public, in the context of the most significant events, as well as the impact of those messages on the further process of normalization of relations. Throughout the publication, the public narratives of the negotiation teams of Belgrade and Pristina were analyzed at the same time, with the aim of better understanding the meanings of such a narratives, their purpose, as well as the impact they can have on the further course of the dialogue between the two parties.

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<sup>4</sup> This name is without prejudice to the status and is in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution 1244/1999 and the Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the Declaration of Independence of Kosovo

## **METHODOLOGY**

For the purpose of analyzing the narratives of the negotiating teams, the researchers identified five key events in the relations between Belgrade and Pristina in 2022. The analysis covers the period from the beginning of January, i.e., from the campaign to organize the referendum until September 2022 and reaching the agreement on personal documents. The most significant events that marked the relations between Belgrade and Pristina in 2022 were:

- Referendum on amending the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia held on 16 January
- The beginning of the Russian Federation's armed attack on Ukraine, which began on February 24
- Parliamentary and presidential elections in the Republic of Serbia on April 3
- A new agreement on the Energy Agreement reached on 21 June
- Decisions of the Government of Kosovo on the re-registration of vehicles and personal documents in the period from June to September.

The subject of the analysis are the statements and positions of the negotiators in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, and their influence on the process of normalization of relations. The basic criteria for selecting events are the *criterion of relevance*, i.e., whether the selected events are related to and in accordance with the needs of the subject analysis, and the *criterion of impact*, i.e., whether in the context of the observed events and the analyzed narrative of the negotiators, there were effects or consequences produced that may be of importance for the further course of negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina.

The observed events were not only those that are the official subject of the dialogue between the two negotiating teams, but also internal and external events that made an impact and determined further relations between

Kosovo and Serbia, such as the conflict in Ukraine or the elections in Serbia. During the analysis of the content, the official announcements of the leaders of the institutions participating in the negotiations, government institutions, the president of the state, or special government services, i.e., offices were used as the main source of data. As a secondary source of data, the statements of public officials transmitted through print and electronic media and published through media portals were used.

For the analysis of the narrative presented in the text, *discursive analysis* was of particular importance, i.e., identifying the social context behind oral or written statements, as well as analysis of the relationship between narratives and social processes. In addition to the analysis of the text itself, which has formal characteristics, for the understanding of the narrative itself, the analysis of “*discourse practice*” is also important, which concerns the production, use and distribution of the narrative that was the subject of study, as well as “*social practice*” through the study of the political context of events and their ideological effects.

## CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS



### REFERENDUM ON THE AMENDMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

In order to fulfill the goals defined by the *Action Plan for Chapter 23*, and ensure greater independence for the judiciary system, the Government of the Republic of Serbia proposed changes to the Constitution in the part related to the judiciary, which is why a referendum was announced on 16 January 2022. Voting in the referendum was supposed to be implemented in the territory of Kosovo, in areas where the majority Serb population lives, as it was organized in previous years for elections at all levels.

On the occasion of the referendum in the Republic of Serbia, the Office for Kosovo and Metohija sent a request to the Mission of the Organization for European Security and Cooperation (OSCE) in Kosovo to operationally implement the referendum voting process in the field in accordance with its mandate. By *resolution*, the Parliament in Pristina prohibited the implementation of a referendum on the territory of Kosovo, proposing options for Serbs to vote in the same way as citizens do in foreign territory, through the post office or Liaison Office, and not at formal polling stations.<sup>5</sup> This was certainly unfeasible in accordance with the legal framework of the Republic of Serbia.

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<sup>5</sup> DW, [Kosovo ne dozvoljava birališta za srpski referendum](#), 16 January 2022

The Office for Kosovo and Metohija officially addressed the ambassadors of the Quint countries, the official Brussels, as well as the EU special representative Miroslav Lajčak, who is the mediator in the communication between Belgrade and Pristina, with a request to make it possible to organise the referendum in Kosovo and Metohija.<sup>6</sup> In a joint statement by several Western countries, they regret that the Government of Kosovo\* did not allow OSCE to collect ballots from Kosovo during the referendum. Due to the impossibility of voting in the territory of Kosovo, a reorganization was carried out and voting was made possible at the relocated polling stations in Vranje, Kuršumlja, Novi Pazar, Tutin and Raška.

Belgrade officials	Pristina officials
<p>The Director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija, <b>Petar Petković</b>, on the ban on the holding of the referendum and the news about the arrest of the Republic Electoral Commission's coordinator and the confiscation of election materials, stated that the Serbs, with such a decision and action, <i>witnessed demonstration of force and violation of the agreement by Albin Kurti, which will have unfathomable consequences on the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina.</i><sup>7</sup></p>	<p>Kosovo Prime Minister <b>Albin Kurti</b> announced on Twitter, after a telephone conversation with the head of European diplomacy, Josep Borell, that Serbs in Kosovo with dual citizenship can vote in the Serbian referendum by mail or in the Liaison Office in Pristina, but that a <i>referendum on the sovereign territory of another country is not a practice acceptable to any democratic country.</i><sup>12</sup></p>
<p>The Office for Kosovo and Metohija issued a statement in which it states that <i>any news published by Pristina is malicious</i>, that Belgrade did not address the institutions in Pristina</p>	<p>After a meeting with the ambassadors of the Quint countries, who asked Pristina to allow the Serbs from Kosovo* to vote in the referendum in accordance with the practice so far, Prime Minister <b>Kurti</b>, President</p>

<sup>6</sup> Office for Kosovo and Metohija of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, [Kancelarija je od OEBS-a zatražila da u skladu sa mandatom sprovede referendum na KiM](#), 12 January 2022

<sup>7</sup> Office for Kosovo and Metohija of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, [Kosovska policija privela je večeras na Merdaru koordinatora RIK i zaplenila materijal za referendum](#), 12 January 2022

<sup>12</sup> Albin Kurti's twitter account, see: <https://twitter.com/albinkurti/status/1481368149819904001/photo/1>.

regarding the referendum, and that *with a spin, Pristina is trying to mask the most direct violation of human rights of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija, with the decision to ban their right to vote and to declare their opinion.*<sup>8</sup> In a statement, the office pointed out that the Office for Liaison between Serbia and Kosovo is a *fictional body that exists exclusively in the imagination of Pristina politicians.* In relation to the reactions of the West towards the Pristina authorities, the office points out that *the West supports Kosovo as its child.*<sup>9</sup> In his statements, Petković nevertheless states that, despite the aforementioned challenges, Serbia will continue to *peacefully and democratically fight for the holding of future elections in Kosovo*, but also that *Albin Kurti and his extremists should not think that they will be able to prohibit Serbs from voting in Kosovo and Metohija in the future.*

Although they did not have official statements in the form of announcements, the Prime Minister of RS, **Ana Brnabić**, and the President of Serbia and the main negotiator in the process of normalizing relations

**Vjosa Osmani** and the President of the Kosovo Assembly **Glauk Konjufca** issued a joint statement and confirmed that *the Serbs in Kosovo will have the right to vote in the referendum by mail or through the Liaison Office in Pristina, while the practices so far have been unconstitutional and have only resulted in the strengthening of Serbia's illegal structures in Kosovo.* They further said that *Serbia wants to use the referendum as means to extend its sovereignty over Kosovo and called on the international community to apply the same standards in relations with Kosovo as with any other country.* The statement further states that *it is the practice of Serbia, which follows the Russian model, has the full support of the Russian Federation, thus proving that their tendencies are to quickly destabilize the region and undo the successes that Kosovo and the region have achieved in partnership with friendly democratic countries.*<sup>13</sup>

During the parliamentary discussion when the Kosovo deputies adopted a resolution against organizing a referendum to amend the Constitution

<sup>8</sup> Office for Kosovo and Metohija of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, [Kancelarija je od OEBS-a zatražila da u skladu sa mandatom sprovede referendum na KiM](#), 12. januar 2022. godine.

<sup>9</sup> Office for Kosovo and Metohija of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, [Kosovska policija privela je večeras na Merdaru koordinatora RIK i zaplenila materijal za referendum](#), 14 January 2022

<sup>13</sup> DW, [Kosova kundër referendunit të Serbisë në Kosovë - kundërshton edhe QUINT-in](#), 14 January 2022

between Belgrade and Pristina, **Aleksandar Vučić**, spoke on this occasion. On the occasion of the events related to the referendum, **Brnabić** expressed the opinion that *Albin Kurti does not want a stronger Serbia, which is the main reason why he forbade Serbs to vote in the referendum*.<sup>10</sup> Immediately after the vote, **Vučić** declared that *the ban will have far-reaching consequences*, but that in any case he is with the Serbian people in Kosovo and Metohija, and that he will make decisions together with them in the future. For him, *the behavior of Pristina "is not a surprise", considering that the Government of Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti "mistreats and harasses Serbs"*. He added that the Serbs, through the representatives of their Serbian list, declared that *the vote of the Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija is a vote for 'yes' and 'yes' for Serbia, not for Kurti*. For him, the deeper problem is what some members of the Quint think, because *"I guess they think or we look like idiots to them", because they are able to call Albanians to respect democracy and allow Serbs to vote, but when the Albanians do not allow it, not a word of protest is heard nor do they undertake actions and sanctions*.<sup>11</sup>

of Serbia on the territory of Kosovo, Prime Minister Kurti responded to the Serbian List MP **Igor Simić**, who said that preventing Serbs from going to the referendum was only "one in a series of anti-Serb actions", and said that the *Kosovo government is not anti-Serb because it has a minister from the Serb community who is even the president of the Serbian List, as well as a deputy minister and adviser*. Kurti then added that the *fight against crime and corruption does not recognize nationality*, and police officers in the fight against corruption do not obey the orders of the government but the prosecutor's office.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> NI [Brnabić: Kurti ne dozvoljava referendum jer ne želi jaču Srbiju](#), 15 January 2022

<sup>11</sup> NI [Vučić: Zabrana Kosova da Srbi glasaju na referendumu imaće dalekosežne posledice](#), 16 January 2022

<sup>14</sup> Bota Sot [Kuvendi miraton rezolutën kundër referendumit të Serbisë në Kosovë](#), 15 January 2022

## THE BEGINNING OF RUSSIA'S AGGRESSION ON UKRAINE

On 24 February 2022, the Russian Federation carried out an armed attack on Ukraine, which did not happen without implications for the normalization between Belgrade and Pristina and a tightening of the rhetorics of officials from both sides. Already on 3 March, the Assembly of Kosovo adopted a resolution condemning the attack and thereby clearly stood in solidarity with the people of Ukraine, while Serbia supported both Resolutions of the UN General Assembly, which, along with the condemnation, demand the immediate cessation of the use of force and the withdrawal of Russian military forces from the territory of Ukraine.

However, Serbia did not introduce sanctions against Russia, and thus did not harmonize its foreign policy with the rest of the EU and Western Balkan countries that did so, which a large part of the public perceives as Serbia's ambivalence to declare its position towards the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in order not to violate traditionally good diplomatic relations with Russia, at the same time running the risk of jeopardizing progress in the field of European integration. While Kosovo officials in their public appearances see a similarity between "Serbian aggression on Kosovo and Russian aggression on Ukraine", Serbia's official position is that it considers "violation of the sovereignty of any country, including Ukraine, wrong", drawing a parallel with the secession of a part of its territory.

<b>Belgrade officials</b>	<b>Pristina officials</b>
Director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija, <b>Petar Petković</b> , on the start of the war in Ukraine, made a statement that <i>politicians in Pristina are using the crisis in Ukraine to realize their Great Albanian ideas and are transforming their security forces into an army</i> . In his opinion, the authorities in Serbia appeal <i>for reason, peace, tolerance and refraining from words and actions that</i>	Kosovo Prime Minister <b>Albin Kurti</b> accused Serbia of siding with Russia, even though it condemned the invasion of Ukraine at the UN and assessed that <i>the crisis in Ukraine is one of the reasons why the dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade in Brussels is stopped</i> . In a statement to the media, he said that the Kosovo authorities expressed their readiness to accept 20 journalists and

could result in the destabilization of sensitive situations in Kosovo and Metohija, while at the same time the authorities in Pristina use every opportunity for provocations and false accusations against Serbs.<sup>15</sup> **Petković** conveyed the message of President Aleksandar Vučić to the Serbs in Kosovo that peace and stability are necessary in these difficult times and that Serbia should know that *peace and stability are a prerequisite for the economic development of the entire country of Serbia, and therefore of the Serbian people in Kosovo and Metohija.*<sup>16</sup>

In a statement to the media, the President of Serbia, **Aleksandar Vučić**, compared the situation in Ukraine with the status of Kosovo, saying that when they talk about Ukraine, *their mouths are full of the UN Charter, and when you mention Serbia and the UN Charter and Resolution 1244 of the UN Security Council, then they become wrapped in thought, you would say all Einsteins and Hegels.*<sup>17</sup> In relation to the various external pressures for a quick solution to the Kosovo problem, **Vučić** responded by saying that Western countries *are trying to end the Kosovo*

5,000 refugees from Ukraine and to join the US and EU sanctions, but that *Serbia did not do so and practically sided with Russia.*<sup>20</sup> He went a step further and accused Russia of wanting to use Serbia as a platform to destabilize the Balkans, and especially to attack Kosovo, *pointing out that only 160 km from Pristina is the Russian humanitarian center based in Niš and that the Sputnik headquarters for Western Balkans is located in Belgrade.* In this regard, he wrote on his Twitter account, where he announced that *the democratic world must oppose Russia's illegal war, which has the risk of spilling over to the Balkans through the violent aggression of its autocratic ally Serbia.*<sup>21</sup>

Deputy Prime Minister of Kosovo **Besnik Bislimi** said that the Government of Kosovo is extremely concerned about the development of the conflict in Ukraine. He said at the press conference that *not everyone in Europe adheres to Western values and condemns Russian aggression*, referring to Belarus and Serbia. According to him, *Serbia's position is worrying, and Serbia is a country that constantly destabilizes the region.*<sup>22</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Office for Kosovo and Metohija of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, [Petković: Kurti hoće da destabilizuje region](#), 3 March 2022

<sup>16</sup> Office for Kosovo and Metohija of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, [Petković u Zubinom Potoku sa predstavnicima Srba sa KiM: Važno da sačuvamo mir i jedinstvo](#), 12 March 2022

<sup>17</sup> Beta, [Vučić: Priština donela dve odluke usmerene ka proterivanju Srba](#), 29 June 2022

<sup>20</sup> Telegraf, [Kurti për zgjedhjet në Serbi: Me ambasadorët e QUINT-it po përpiqemi të gjejmë zgjidhje për votimin e serbëve në Kosovë](#), 15 March 2022

<sup>21</sup> Albina Kurti's Twitter account, see: <https://twitter.com/albinkurti/status/1525865618838257666>.

<sup>22</sup> Kallxo, [Bislimi: Qëndrimi i Serbisë për situatën në Ukrainë është shqetësues](#), 28 February 2022

<p><i>problem so that (Russian President Vladimir) Putin would not give them the 'five Kosovos', Donetsk, Luhansk, Crimea, Kherson, Zaporozhye. Also, the Government in Pristina is using the situation in the world by playing the card "big Putin ordered little Putin, so little Zelenski in the person of Albin Kurti will save someone and fight against Great Serbia hegemony".<sup>18</sup> He mentioned that Albin Kurti dreams of being Zelensky, sometimes he dreams of being (German philosopher) Hegel, but he is a small caliber.<sup>19</sup></i></p>	<p>The President of Kosovo, <b>Vjosa Osmani</b>, also supported the narrative about Russia's tendency to destabilize the region, which is supported by Serbia. She stated that <i>Serbia is targeting what Russia is targeting in Ukraine and Georgia.</i><sup>23</sup> She also accused Serbia of not showing the will to harmonize with the EU when it comes to sanctions against Russia, after the invasion of Ukraine, considering that such a decision is bad for the entire region.<sup>24</sup></p>
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## PARLIAMENTARY AND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN SERBIA

Elections for deputies of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, elections for the President of the Republic, as well as local elections in 13 local self-government units, including Belgrade, were held simultaneously on 3 April 2022. The President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, called the extraordinary parliamentary elections on 15 February, and on the same day, the President of the National Assembly, Ivica Dačić, called local elections, followed by regular presidential elections on 2 March.

The months leading up to the calling of elections were marked by numerous socio-political processes that took place both in institutions and on the streets - from attempts to change election conditions through inter-party dialogues, legislative changes to the framework for holding elections, as well as increasingly frequent and radical protests all over Serbia. During the election campaign, the issue of Kosovo was one of the most important

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<sup>18</sup> N1, [Vučić: Ne budu li hteli da sačuvaju mir, ja vam saopštavam – Srbija će pobediti](#)

<sup>19</sup> N1, [Vučić: Planiraju opšti napad na sever Kosova, cilj im je nova „Oluja](#), 29 June 2022

<sup>23</sup> Klan Kosova, [RUBIKON–Intervista ekskluzive me Presidenten Vjosa Osmani–24.02.2022–Klan Kosova](#), 24 February 2022

<sup>24</sup> N1, [Osmani: Odluka Srbije da ne uvede sankcije Rusiji loša za ceo region](#), 23 June 2022

topics on which all political parties and candidates for the position of president made declarations.

After announcing the elections, Serbia, taught by the experience of not holding the referendum, looked for a way to organize elections on the territory of Kosovo as well. The Quint countries worked intensively with the representatives of Kosovo and Serbia to find a pragmatic solution to enable eligible Kosovo Serbs to exercise their right to participate in the elections in Serbia. However, as the Government in Pristina rejected Quint's proposal to organize elections, the Republic Electoral Commission decided to establish polling boards where Serbs from Kosovo would vote, in the territory of central Serbia, namely in Raška, Tutin, Bujanovac and Kuršumljija.

<b>Belgrade officials</b>	<b>Pristina officials</b>
<p>During the election campaign, the director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija, <b>Petar Petković</b>, made a statement about the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, claiming that the representatives of Kosovo <i>refuse any dialogue and compromise, and that the Balkans would once again be a powder keg if it were not for the Serbian president.</i><sup>25</sup></p> <p>Regarding the refusal of the Kosovo authorities to allow the organization of voting in the parliamentary and presidential elections in Serbia, the President of Serbia, <b>Aleksandar Vučić</b>, stated that <i>the decision of the</i></p>	<p>When it comes to parliamentary and presidential elections in Serbia, Prime Minister <b>Kurti</b> of Pristina said that <i>he does not want any citizen of Kosovo who has Serbian citizenship to be deprived of the right to vote.</i> He said that the Kosovo government, together with the ambassadors of the Quint and the EU, are trying to find a solution for this, but that <i>it must not in any way violate the constitutionality and statehood of Kosovo.</i><sup>29</sup> In his address in Serbian, on his Facebook account, he also called on the Serbian community in Kosovo not to be influenced by the <i>authoritarian regime in Belgrade, because, as he</i></p>

<sup>25</sup> Office for Kosovo and Metohija of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, [Petković: Osmani i Kurti bi od Balkana da naprave bure baruta](#), 1 March 2022

<sup>29</sup> Telegrafi, [Kurti për zgjedhjet në Serbi: Me ambasadorët e QUINT-it po përpiqemi të gjejmë zgjidhje për votimin e serbëve në Kosovë](#), 15 March 2022

*Kosovo Prime Minister not to allow the voting of Serbs in Kosovo was aimed at “humiliating the Serbs”, but also at “reducing the number of votes” for the electoral list of the Serbian Progressive Party.<sup>26</sup> The President of Serbia also stated that the Prime Minister of Kosovo is constantly bullying the Serbs, because he wants to send a message that Serbs have no place in Kosovo and Metohija.<sup>27</sup> However, he also said that patriotism is to preserve peace and the Serbian people in Kosovo and Metohija, stating that it is easiest to make irresponsible statements about organizing elections in Kosovo.<sup>28</sup>*

*says, they are not interested in the rights or well-being of the Serbs in Kosovo, but are trying to destabilize Kosovo for their electoral purposes and perhaps also because of large warmongering forces, and he called them to preserve peace and trust the Government of Kosovo.<sup>30</sup>*

The Deputy Prime Minister in Pristina and the negotiator in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, **Besnik Bislimi**, confirms that there were requests from the Quint countries and the OSCE regarding the modalities within which the elections can be held and that the *Government of Kosovo is ready to help the Government of Serbia that the citizens of Kosovo with dual citizenship participate in voting in the parliamentary and presidential elections in Serbia through the best practice of the OSCE countries.* However, he explains that a country that wants to organize elections in another country needs to send such a request to the government of that country, but that the Government of Serbia did not do that but sent the request through the Liaison Officer.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Beta, [Vučić: Odluka Kurtija da smanji broj glasova meni i listi SNS](#), 23 March 2022

<sup>27</sup> Beta, [Vučić: Kurti se stalno izživljava, hoće da sruše jedinstvo Srba na Kosovu](#), 23 March 2022

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Albin Kurti's Facebook account, see at: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=425878219300904>.

<sup>31</sup> Kallxo, [Bislimi tregon për kërkesën e vendeve të QUINT-it në lidhje me zgjedhjet e Serbisë](#), 22 March 2022

	<p>The President of Kosovo, <b>Vjosa Osmani</b>, also spoke out on this issue the day after the Serbian elections, accusing <i>Serbia of continuing its propaganda by claiming that Kosovo's institutions violated the right to vote that the Serbs had in the elections on 3 April, pointing out that it was Serbia that rejected the three offered options for the organization of voting in the elections.</i><sup>32</sup></p>
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<sup>32</sup> Kosovo online, [Osmani: Srbija nastavila sa propagandom, ponuđene tri opcije za jučerašnje izbore](#), 4 April 2022

## NEW CONSENT ABOUT THE ENERGY AGREEMENT

On 21 June 2022, the chief negotiators of Belgrade and Pristina, Petar Petković and Besnik Bislimi, agreed on the implementation of the energy agreement, which was signed back in 2013, and which has not been fully implemented. The agreement contains *A Roadmap for the Implementation of Energy Agreements within the Framework of the Brussels Dialogue*, which foresees that the company “Elektrosever”, owned by the Republic of Serbia, and in accordance with Kosovo laws, will start supplying electricity to consumers in four municipalities in the north with a majority Serb population.

Residents of North Mitrovica, Zvečan, Leposavić and Zubin Potok have not paid their electricity bills for more than two decades, which has often been the subject of public controversy between Belgrade and Pristina officials. This agreement opened the way to charging for electricity used in the north of Kosovo, which, according to some predictions, is expected from January 2023, when a potential expression of dissatisfaction could damage the sensitive political and security situation in that part of Kosovo.

<b>Belgrade officials</b>	<b>Pristina officials</b>
The director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija, <b>Petar Petković</b> , on the occasion of agreeing on the roadmap for the implementation of the energy agreement, said that this agreement creates <i>independence in the supply of electricity in the north of Kosovo and Metohija, and thus Serbia has preserved peace and stability and ensured a normal supply of electricity</i> . <sup>33</sup> He explained that the	Prime Minister <b>Kurti</b> repeatedly insisted that citizens <i>in the north of Kosovo do not pay for electricity, and that they consume it, and what is consumed must be paid for</i> , and that the current government inherited this situation, and it is working intensively to resolve as soon as possible and that he is convinced that <i>the reason for not paying for the electricity is related to illegal structures in Serbia</i> . “There

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<sup>33</sup> Office for Kosovo and Metohija of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, [Petković: “Elektrosever” dobija samostalnost u snabdevanju](#), 21 June 2022

<p>agreed roadmap states that the energy agreements reached in 2013 and 2015 will be fully respected. Therefore, <b>Petković</b> noted that <i>people can be calm and peaceful because Pristina no longer has any argument to invade Valaç, violently occupy that important transformer substation and cause violence in the north of Kosovo and Metohija.</i><sup>34</sup></p> <p>Just before reaching the agreement, <b>Petković</b> made a statement that <i>there is no alternative to dialogue and that Belgrade will consistently be committed to dialogue as the only right way to resolve disagreements and open issues.</i><sup>35</sup> However, the director of the office also mentioned that <i>separatism in Kosovo, which is supported by western countries, is complementary and represents a type of Albanian monoethnic project.</i> He pointed out that <i>the removal of Serbs as a political and demographic factor from Kosovo and Metohija is an unofficial commitment in the programmes of many Albanian political parties.</i><sup>36</sup></p>	<p><i>are some structures that impose their interests and organize disobedience to Kosovo and in this way cause harm to the citizens without difference, but to our country as well. We are trying to bring this issue to a conclusion with as little damage as possible and in a peaceful way, and it can only take one form, and that is the payment of electricity by all those who consume it,”</i> said Kurti.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, he claims that Brussels understood <i>Serbia’s destructive approach to the agreement - We are constructive and committed, but Belgrade is on the opposite side of such behavior,</i> Kurti said.<sup>38</sup></p> <p>Pristina’s chief negotiator in the dialogue with Belgrade, <b>Besnik Bislimi</b>, announced on Twitter that the Roadmap for the implementation of the energy agreement, which was adopted in Brussels, will make it possible to bill the electricity in four municipalities in the north of Kosovo and Metohija. <i>“Finally, we approved the Roadmap for the implementation of the 2013 and 2015 energy</i></p>
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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Office for Kosovo and Metohija of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, [Snowi Prištine nisu deo dijaloga: Petar Petković, direktor Kancelarije za Kosovo i Metohiju, za „Novosti“](#), 20 June 2022.

<sup>36</sup> Office for Kosovo and Metohija of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, [Snowi Prištine nisu deo dijaloga: Petar Petković, direktor Kancelarije za Kosovo i Metohiju, za „Novosti“](#), 20 June 2022

<sup>37</sup> Gazeta Express, [Kurti për mospagesën e rrymës nga serbët në veri: Strukturat paralele po imponojnë padëgjueshmëri](#), 19 January 2022

<sup>38</sup> Kossev, [Kurti: „Nasilno nestali“ termin oko kojeg se ne slažemo: Nećemo subvencionisati struju za Sever](#), 20 July 2022

<p>The President of Serbia, <b>Aleksandar Vučić</b>, did not make an official statement on this occasion.</p>	<p><i>agreements.” This makes it possible to bill the electricity in four northern municipalities of Kosovo, in accordance with the laws and regulatory system of Kosovo,” Bislimi said on Twitter.<sup>39</sup></i></p>
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## DECISION OF THE KOSOVO GOVERNMENT ABOUT RE-REGISTRATION OF VEHICLES AND PERSONAL DOCUMENTS

The Government of Kosovo has made a decision to start issuing a declaration sheet for all those entering Kosovo who have identity cards issued by the Republic of Serbia from 1 August 2022. Also, owners of vehicles with license plates of cities in Kosovo (such as KM and PR) can re-register the car with RKS plates from 1 August to 30 September 2022, which aims to completely abolish the plates in Kosovo issued by the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Serbia, and which the Kosovo authorities consider illegal. These decisions were presented to the public as “reciprocity measures” towards Serbia and as “the introduction of legality in the north”.

However, on 31 July, in the afternoon, sirens were heard in North Mitrovica, then the road was blocked in Zvečan and Zubin Potok. The police determined that gunshots were heard, but that no one was injured. The increased tensions in the north of Kosovo and the visible agitation of the citizens were additionally influenced by the incendiary statements of the officials of both negotiating parties. Due to the potential escalation and further deterioration of the security situation, the American Ambassador in Kosovo, Jeffrey Hovenier, asked the Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti and the Kosovo President Vjosa Osmani to postpone the implementation of the decision on the plates and Serbian documents by 30 days, which the Kosovo government did. On the other hand, Belgrade and Pristina reached an agreement on identity documents on 27 August 2022, according to which Belgrade abolishes entry-exit documents for

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<sup>39</sup> Besnik Bislimi's Twitter account, see at: <https://twitter.com/BislimiBesnik/status/1539170793644609536>.

those who possess Kosovo identity cards, while Pristina will not introduce them for citizens with identity cards issued by Serbia. With this, the tensions in the north of Kosovo subsided, at least temporarily.

Belgrade officials	Pristina officials
<p>According to the director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija, <b>Petar Petković</b>, with the decisions of institutions in Pristina regarding Serbian license plates and identity cards from June 2022, Kosovo Prime Minister <i>Albin Kurti</i> most openly threatened with a war against the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija.<sup>40</sup> “With these moves, Pristina has brought the dialogue to the brink, and Pristina’s relations with Belgrade have been brought to a boiling point.”<sup>41</sup> As a reaction to this decision, he emphasized that <i>the Serbs will not allow to be persecuted, killed and to have their legitimately acquired property confiscated</i>.<sup>42</sup> After the renewed escalation at the beginning of August, Petković warned that the situation was <i>on the verge of serious conflicts</i><sup>43</sup>, as well as that <i>fully armed special forces were brought to the north with the intention of dealing with the bare-handed Serbian people</i>,<sup>44</sup> but also that Pristina was</p>	<p>Kosovo Prime Minister <b>Albin Kurti</b> first posted in Serbian on his Facebook profile and announced that, in the municipal registration centers, the vehicle re-registration process will be organized, i.e., <i>transition from illegal plates to those valid according to the laws of Kosovo</i>, i.e., the plates with the RKS mark, after the adoption of the Government's decision. He added that a major concession was made by the fact that those vehicles will not be subject to customs duty, which, according to him, would amount to about 5,000 euros for an average vehicle, and technical inspections and tax collection will not be mandatory either.<sup>55</sup> However, when the security situation in the north of Kosovo worsened, <i>the Prime Minister of Kosovo blamed Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and the director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija, Petar Petković, as the instigators of “riots”</i>. As riots, he specified <i>the blocking of roads and shootings, and as for the actions he described as “aggressive”, he stated that</i></p>

<sup>40</sup> RTS, [Petković o odluci Prištine: Direktan udar na sve Srbe i južno i severno od Ibra](#), 29 June 2022

<sup>41</sup> RTV [Petković: Priština odnose sa Beogradom dovela do tačke ključanja](#), 30 June 2022

<sup>42</sup> RTS, [Petković o odluci Prištine: Direktan udar na sve Srbe i južno i severno od Ibra](#), 29 June 2022

<sup>43</sup> N1, [Petković: Sinoć smo bili na korak od ozbiljnih sukoba, hteli da upadnu na sever](#), 1 August 2022

<sup>44</sup> Fonet, [Petković: Kurti hteo da izazove sukobe, oklopna vozila u bazi na jugu Mitrovice](#), 1 August 2022

<sup>55</sup> Albin Kurti's Facebook account, see at: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1725824637798476>.

trying to light a keg of powder and that they do not want dialogue, but new conflicts.<sup>45</sup> He assessed that *the Prime Minister of Kosovo is blowing war horns and leading a policy of threats and blackmail.*<sup>46</sup>

The Minister of Internal Affairs of Serbia, **Aleksandar Vulin**, assessed these decisions of Kosovo as *an announcement of a conflict that will not be possible to control,*<sup>47</sup> *as well as that all responsibility for causing the conflict lies with the Prime Minister of Kosovo and the Quint.*<sup>48</sup>

In relation to these events, the President of Serbia, **Aleksandar Vučić**, announced that *the Kosovo authorities are planning a general attack on the north of Kosovo on 1 October at the latest.*<sup>49</sup> Also, that *a decision was made with the aim of expelling the Serbs from the north of Kosovo and creating a new "Storm".*<sup>50</sup> He also added that Serbia has never been in a more complex and difficult situation in relation to Kosovo, as well as that it was *on the verge of a*

*they were planned in Belgrade and Raška, and that they were preceded by meetings and gatherings of fear and threats.*<sup>56</sup>

A day later, together with the Minister of the Interior **Xhelal Sveçla**, he held a press conference where he said that the illegal structures of Serbia have become *aggressive criminal gangs like never before* and that there are nine barricades north of the Ibar River that he expects will soon be removed.<sup>57</sup> *The possibility that Belgrade's aggressive policy will turn into an attack on Kosovo should not be ruled out,* Prime Minister **Albin Kurti** told Reuters, a few days after he warned of the danger of war in Kosovo, declaring that *Kosovo is ready to withstand possible attacks from Serbia because the escalation of the dispute with the Serbian minority could lead to an armed conflict.*<sup>58</sup> On the eve of 1 September, Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti once again encouraged citizens in the north of Kosovo whose vehicles are registered with KM plates to re-register their vehicles to RKS plates: "We encourage all citizens of the Serb community who

<sup>45</sup> Fonet, [Petković: Jasno je da vlast u Prištini ne želi dijalog, već sukobe](#), 5 August 2022

<sup>46</sup> Fonet, [Petković: Duvanje u ratne trube i politika pretnji – jedino što Kurti zna](#), 10 August 2022

<sup>47</sup> Fonet, [Vulin: Politika Prištine može izazvati sukob koji će zapaliti Balkan](#), 29 June 2022

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> N1, [Vučić: Planiraju opšti napad na sever Kosova, cilj im je nova „Oluja“](#), 30 June 2022

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Dukagjini, [Kurti: Vuçiq dhe Petkoviç janë përgjegjësit kryesorë për trazirat](#), 31 July 2022

<sup>57</sup> Kallxo, [Kurti: Strukturat ilegale të Serbisë janë bërë banda kriminale agresive si rrallë herë më parë](#), 01 August 2022

<sup>58</sup> Koha Ditore, [Kurti për kërcënimin për luftë: Jemi vigjilentë, por jo të frikësuar](#), 10 August 2022

<p><i>disaster,<sup>51</sup> that there will be no rows of refugees and that the people will be protected from pogrom<sup>52</sup> and that if Pristina dares to start persecution of Serbs, mistreatment of Serbs, killing of Serbs, Serbia will win.<sup>53</sup> However, according to his words, <i>Serbia will always stand for peace and dialogue, as the only way to solve open issues.</i><sup>54</sup></i></p>	<p>are citizens of Kosovo <i>to use our initiative to transfer license plates and avoid paying VAT, excise taxes and customs duties</i>”, calling KM license plates a legacy of the Milošević’s regime.<sup>59</sup></p> <p>The Deputy PM of the Kosovo Government, <b>Besnik Bislimi</b>, on the escalation in the north of Kosovo, said that all the riots that President Vučić is organizing in the countries of the region are masked by the idea of an alleged revolt of local citizens. He pointed out that <i>everyone has been made aware that there are no rebellions by local citizens, but rather rebellions staged and directed by the centre in Belgrade and Vučić himself.</i><sup>60</sup></p>
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## THE RETHORICS OF INTERNATIONAL OFFICIALS PARTICIPATING IN THE DIALOGUE

In addition to the statements of the participants in the negotiations, the statements of international officials were also relevant. Regarding the organisation of Serbia’s referendum in Kosovo\*, the position of the part of the international officials involved in the dialogue process provided a clear signal that *Kosovo should allow the referendum to be held*. High

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<sup>51</sup> RTS, [Vučić za RTS: Jedva je izbegnut najteži scenario pre dva dana na KiM, bili smo na korak od katastrofe](#), 2 August 2022

<sup>52</sup> N1, [Vučić: Šta god bilo, kako god bilo, izbegličke kolone neće postojati](#), 21 August 2022

<sup>53</sup> N1, [Vučić: Ne budu li hteli da sačuvaju mir, ja vam saopštavam – Srbija će pobediti](#), 31 July 2022

<sup>54</sup> N1, [Vučić: Dobro je što je Priština odustala od prvobitne namere da izazove sukob](#), 2 August 2022

<sup>59</sup> Kossev, [Kurti posle sastanka sa opozicijom „ohrabruje“ Srbe na Severu da uzmu „legitimne RKS“ tablice umesto „Miloševićevih“](#), 30 August 2022

<sup>60</sup> Kossev, [Petković: Srbi žele ZSO, a ne RKS tablice: Bisljimi hoće da spreči „samostalno“ delovanje Elektrosevera](#), 6 August 2022

Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, **Josep Borrell**, asked the Kosovo authorities to make it possible for local Serbs to vote in the referendum on changes to the Constitution of Serbia.<sup>61</sup> Also, the embassies of the Quint countries noted with regret that *the Kosovo government did not allow OSCE to collect the ballots of voters living in Kosovo in the upcoming referendum in accordance with the previous practice*. At the same time, they called on Belgrade and Pristina *to refrain from actions and rhetoric that raise tensions and to engage constructively in dialogue through the EU*.<sup>62</sup> Regarding this issue, the spokesperson of the European Union, **Peter Stano**, also spoke, and stated that Pristina should reconsider its position on the vote of Kosovo Serbs in the referendum on constitutional changes in Serbia. Stano added that the *EU has always encouraged talks and is ready to facilitate any new talks between the parties if requested*.<sup>63</sup>

The crisis in Ukraine was not directly linked to the context of the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina by international officials, but it was recognized as something that could indirectly affect the process by transferring the resources and interests of the European Union from Kosovo to Ukraine. The European mediator in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, **Miroslav Lajčak**, commented on the deadlock in the dialogue in the context of the crisis in Ukraine, pointing out that *the priority is to help Ukraine in the war, which consumes the EU's capacities, but that it is a favorable moment for the Balkans, and that the EU understands that it must not look like it has lost interest and turned its head to the east, which is why it insists on positive examples from the region*.<sup>64</sup> **Borrell** addressed the citizens of the Western Balkans with his text regarding the current war in Ukraine, stating that the Balkans are *the target of disinformation operations by the Kremlin*. He stated in the text that people in the Western Balkans,

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<sup>61</sup> Josep Borrell's Twitter account, see at <https://twitter.com/JosepBorrellF/status/1481545443439951873>.

<sup>62</sup> Kossev, [Kvinta o referendumu: Priština da dozvoli Srbima da glasaju u skladu sa ustaljenom praksom](#), 14 January 2022

<sup>63</sup> Kosovo Online, [Stano o referendumu: Priština da preispita stav](#), 14 January 2022

<sup>64</sup> BBC na srpskom, [Miroslav Lajčak za BBC na srpskom: „Sastanak Vučića i Kurtija u Briselu nije bio uzalud"](#), 24 August 2022

unfortunately, know what war is and that they understand what the Ukrainian people are going through, and then he confirmed that the countries of the Western Balkans belong in the EU. Also, there is concern in the European Union about the strengthening of ties between Serbia and Russia and the non-introduction of sanctions by Serbia, so the EU spokesman, **Stano**, stated that he expects that Serbia, as a candidate country, *will not further strengthen its ties with Russia*.<sup>65</sup>

Although the organization of Serbian presidential and parliamentary elections in Kosovo is not a topic of the dialogue, **Lajčak** assessed that Serbian elections should be organized on the basis of previous practice, with the mediation of the OSCE mission.<sup>66</sup> He was more explicit when he said that a political agreement must be reached very soon *that would not violate the constitutionality of Kosovo* and that would *make it possible for Kosovo Serbs to exercise their right to vote* in the elections on 3 April. He said that he is in contact on daily basis with the institutions of Kosovo and Serbia in order to find a solution for holding the elections and added that such an agreement would create another atmosphere in the high-level political dialogue, which, he says, will be continued after the elections.<sup>67</sup> When Kosovo rejected the proposal of the Quint countries regarding the solution for the voting of Kosovo Serbs in the elections in Serbia, **Stano** said that *it was contrary to the commitment to the European path and democratic future and contrary to the principle of protecting the democratic rights of all citizens, including those who belong to the non-majority population*. He said that the EU now expects *Kosovo and Serbia to refrain from actions and rhetoric that could increase tensions and calls on both sides to behave properly*.<sup>68</sup> **Borrell** also assessed that Pristina's

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<sup>65</sup> Kosovo Online, [Stano: Očekujemo da Srbija, kao zemlja kandidat, neće dalje jačati svoje veze sa Rusijom](#), 30 May 2022

<sup>66</sup> Radio Slobodna Evropa, [Escobar i Lajčak poručili Prištini da se izjasni kakvu Zajednicu želi](#), 2 February 2022

<sup>67</sup> Kosovo Online, [Lajčak: Mora da se pronade način za održavanje izbora 3. aprila na Kosovu](#), 16 March 2022

<sup>68</sup> Radio Slobodna Evropa, [Kosovo odbilo predlog Kvinte da omogući glasanje na srpskim izborima](#), 22 March, 2022

decision is contrary to Kosovo's commitment to European values and the principle of protecting democratic rights.<sup>69</sup>

In contrast, the agreement on energy was warmly welcomed by international representatives. **Lajčak** announced on his Twitter profile that he can announce with great pleasure that Kosovo and Serbia have just adopted the Roadmap for the implementation of energy agreements within the Dialogue with the support of the EU, calling it *a big step forward*.<sup>70</sup> European Union welcomed the agreement as a step forward in the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia for the benefit of all citizens. A statement issued by the European External Action Service (EEAS) says the agreed Roadmap sets out a clear timetable and concrete steps for the implementation of the 2013 and 2015 energy agreements, which, as they claim, have only been partially implemented with the relevant elements that are still unresolved. In the announcement, they also state that this *paves the way to ending the current non-transparent and unregulated practice*. **Josep Borrell** also joined in the congratulations on the agreement reached.<sup>71</sup>

The European Union called on both sides to use the EU-mediated dialogue as a platform to resolve all outstanding issues between them, including the license plates.<sup>72</sup> **Borrell** welcomed Kosovo's decision to move the measures to September 1, stating that *he expects all roadblocks to be removed immediately and that open issues should be resolved through EU-mediated dialogue and focus on the comprehensive normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia*.<sup>73</sup> Borrell also commented on the agreement on identity cards, under which Serbia agreed to abolish entry and exit documents for holders of Kosovo identity cards, and Kosovo agreed not to introduce the same measure for those with Serbian identity

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<sup>69</sup> Danas, [Borelj: Odluka Prištine da se ne održe srpski izbori na Kosovu suprotna evropskim vrednostima](#), 8 June 2022

<sup>70</sup> Miroslav Lajčak's Twitter account, see at: <https://twitter.com/MiroslavLajcak/status/1539169005172301825>.

<sup>71</sup> Radio Slobodna Evropa, [Kosovo i Srbija dogovorili Mapu puta o sprovođenju dogovora o energetici](#), 21 June 2022

<sup>72</sup> Euronews, [EU poziva Prištinu da omogući dovoljno vremena za preregistraciju](#), 1 September 2022

<sup>73</sup> Josep Borrell's Twitter account, see at: <https://twitter.com/JosepBorrellF/status/1553876818721128449>.

cards.<sup>74</sup> **Lajčak** welcomed Kosovo's decision and wrote on Twitter that the EU expects all roadblocks to be removed immediately,<sup>75</sup> while **Stano** stated that according to the agreements from the dialogue on freedom of movement from 2011 and 2016, Kosovo has the right to gradually abolish KM plates (issued by Serbia).<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> RTS, [Sporazum o ličnim dokumentima, bez blokada 1. septembra – u iščekivanju dogovora o tablicama](#), 28 August 2022

<sup>75</sup> Miroslav Lajčak's Twitter account, see at: <https://twitter.com/MiroslavLajcak/status/1553869532506251264>.

<sup>76</sup> Kosovo Online, [Stano: Kosovo ima pravo da ukine tablice koje izdaje Srbija, ali postepeno](#), 30 June 2022

## **ANALYSIS OF THE NARRATIVES AND THE IMPACT ON THE PROCESS OF NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS**

Bearing in mind the previously described framework and proclaimed goals that are to be achieved through negotiations, the question arises, what constitutes the background of the public discourse of the negotiators who conduct a mutual dialogue? Why is political speech and the language of negotiators burdened with additional conflict? One gets the impression that the way negotiators formulate assessments of the interlocutors with whom they are negotiating may have a certain hidden political purpose or may represent a form of dissatisfaction with the current failure of conducting negotiations, which is manifested through additional political confrontations with the interlocutors. However, as it is a permanent phenomenon and a constant feature of public discourse between negotiators, the basic explanation for this phenomenon is the conclusion that such a narrative is constructed with a specific goal to convey a specific message.

One of the explanations for this kind of speech can be that *one of the main "recipients"* addressed by such messages are, first of all, the electorate targeted by the politicians. Negotiators, who are also political representatives, use negotiations to win over voters, with the aim of winning future elections. By sending apocalyptic messages about the existence of the danger of *lines of refugees, pogroms and persecutions, a new Storm, bullying and killing, a new disaster, an uncontrolled conflict*, a political show is created for internal needs. By raising national sentiments with the special threat for the people and the nation from external danger and the external enemy, the aim is to consolidate "internal ranks". As long as the people and the nation are threatened by the current danger, (*"special forces fully armed with the intention of dealing with the bare-handed Serbian people"*) all other political issues become secondary and less important (*"it is sad if someone thinks that Europride is as important as Kosovo"*). Also, the tightening of relations with opposing "unpopular"

negotiators creates undoubted benefits for one's own electorate and winning over new voters, which political elites can usually count on when producing such messages.

Another explanation for this phenomenon of creating a harsh narrative among negotiators, whose main task is to participate in mutual dialogue, is that they send messages to the international community and international actors who are involved in the negotiations in some way. By sending *apocalyptic messages* and predicting *catastrophic scenarios*, the political elites want to win over the international community, under whose auspices the negotiations are conducted, as their ally. In situations where the negotiators are dissatisfied with the current outcome or certain decisions of the opposite party, the threat of *disrupting the peace and escalating conflicts that will not be possible to control* has the motive of intimidating the international community and further delaying the problem, until a sustainable solution is found. This type of alarming followed almost all decisions related to personal documents and license plates, after which the implementation would be delayed under pressure from the international community, until a certain agreement was reached.

Regarding the mentioned events, which were taken as a sample precisely because of their political significance and/or reflection on the dialogue, the pattern of commenting by those directly involved in the dialogue is most often repeated. On the negotiating side of Belgrade, it is inevitably the director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija, **Petar Petković**, and the President of the Republic of Serbia, **Aleksandar Vučić**. Petković speaks in an archaic style, mainly from the point of view of the “victim” of the dialogue, using well-known phrases that are explicitly linked to the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, such as “hearth”, “settlers”, “endangered existence” and “provocation”. His messages are aimed at criticizing the behavior of Pristina, indicating an existential threat to the Serbs in Kosovo, with the ending in the form of semi-threats and messages for the other

negotiating party.<sup>77</sup> On the other hand, Vučić always addresses the electorate by sending messages that he thinks they want to hear, and always drawing attention to the role and obligations of the international community in the dialogue. Any kind of agreement with Pristina, which certainly implies compromises on the Serbian side, receives less attention in the president's statements. Thus, it is visible that the president's statements were completely absent after reaching an agreement in the field of energy, while the agreement regarding license plates and the use of personal documents was presented as a kind of victory, even though it was essentially Serbia that had to make concessions.

Relevant actors who do not participate directly in the dialogue speak according to the need to reinforce the discourse. Thus, we had active speech of the Prime Minister, **Ana Brnabić**, only in the event of the absence of organizing a referendum regarding the change of the Constitution, while the Minister of Internal Affairs, **Aleksandar Vulin**, speaks exclusively when the dominant narrative becomes a potential open conflict.

As for the negotiating side of Pristina, Prime Minister **Albin Kurti** and his deputy and negotiator in the dialogue with Belgrade, **Besnik Bislimi**, often made public statements related to the mentioned events. They are followed by the statements of the President **Vjosa Osmani**, the President of the Assembly **Glauk Konjufca** and the Minister of the Interior **Xhelal Sveçla**, who with equal sharpness and intensity contributed to the confrontation of public narratives between the two parties in the dialogue, and that in sensitive moments when relations were becoming strained in the media space, and often in the field.

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<sup>77</sup> Example: "If they do not know the agreements they signed in Pristina, they can generously download and read them on the website of the Government of the Republic of Serbia or the Office for Kosovo and Metohija."; "That's why we remind Pristina once again not to provoke Belgrade and the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija and to threaten peace and security by violating the agreement, because in that case all responsibility lies with Pristina, but also with the international community, which is obliged to ensure peace and stability in Kosovo and Metohija"

In his public discourse, Kosovo Prime Minister **Albin Kurti** often stresses that the unilateral moves that Pristina makes are the result of the *policy of reciprocity*, the implementation of which he began as soon as he came to power. He tries to leave the impression of a determined statesman who will strengthen the sovereignty and integrity of Kosovo, and often appears in public criticizing Belgrade's official policy towards Kosovo. His public discourse is characterized by the constant confirmation of the independence and sovereignty of Kosovo and the insistence that the negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina, under the auspices of the European Union, are actually taking place between two independent countries, Kosovo and Serbia, with the ultimate goal of *mutual recognition*.<sup>78</sup> Together with the main negotiator, **Besnik Bislimi**, who uses the "softest" rhetoric of the negotiators, he presents the agreements reached with the Belgrade side to the Albanian public in Kosovo as a success of his politics and a confirmation of Kosovo's statehood. Both Prime Minister **Kurti** and President **Osmani** in their statements present Serbia as an aggressor, and the government in Belgrade as undemocratic. They used the momentum of the war in Ukraine to accuse Serbia of preparing the same scenario for Kosovo and the Western Balkan region together with Russia.

On the other hand, Prime Minister **Kurti** tried on a couple of occasions to get closer to the Serbian community in Kosovo, addressing them directly, in Serbian language, but at the same time presenting the Serb majority north of Kosovo as an area ruled by criminal and illegal structures and introducing measures that negatively affect the very members of that community. The lack of dialogue with the Serb community, especially in the north of Kosovo, results in its very low trust in the institutions in Pristina, even though members of the **Serbian List** are members of the parliament. However, **Kurti** claims that his government is not anti-Serb because it includes representatives of the Serb community, including the president of the Serbian List (**Goran Rakić**).<sup>79</sup> On the other hand, the

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<sup>78</sup> Radio KIM, [Kurti ponovio: Cilj dijaloga međusobno priznanje](#), 15 September 2022

<sup>79</sup> Kossev, [Kosovska skupština rekla „ne“ referendumu, usvojena rezolucija](#), 15 January 2022

Minister of Internal Affairs, **Xhelal Sveçla**, has on several occasions accused the vice-president of the Serbian List, **Milan Radoičić**, of being the leader of *criminal structures in the north of Kosovo*, and Serbia of using these groups to *undermine the authority of Kosovo in the north*, and as a reward giving them the opportunity to get rich illegally.<sup>80</sup>

While Belgrade and Pristina stick to their harsh and opposing public positions, representatives of the **European Union**, who are directly involved in the dialogue process, take a position depending on the situation. When one of the parties does not express the will to compromise or does not act in accordance with democratic principles, **EU** representatives criticise, while publicly expressing gratitude for the agreements and compromises reached. They, however, tend to take a neutral stance when it comes to the rhetoric of the negotiators themselves. In those cases, their reaction generally boils down to urging both sides to refrain and return to the negotiating table.

Despite sharp confrontations and harsh words, in their speeches, the negotiators express a clear commitment to a peaceful *dialogue that has no alternative* and is also *the only correct way of resolving disagreements and open issues*. This kind of confusing narrative, which is at the same time burdened by sharp confrontations with the opposite side but undoubtedly determined for further dialogue *as a basic method of conflict resolution*, shows that the political elites always move within the allowed limits.

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<sup>80</sup> Radio Slobodna Evropa, [Šef policije Kosova: Milan Radoičić je među vođama švercera koji napadaju policiju](#), 18 July 2022

## **CONCLUSION**

The scope of the analysis limits a detailed review of each individual event relevant to the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. Despite this, conclusions can be drawn about the influence of the negotiator's narrative on the process itself, based on isolated examples. The main conclusion is that the negotiators are primarily addressing their electorate, and not with the aim of informing the public about the progress in the dialogue. That is why each message has a completely different interpretation in Serbia and Kosovo\*. While the negotiators do not miss the opportunity to mention that the dialogue has no alternative, at the same time they accuse the "other side" of not wanting to participate in it or of jeopardizing the normalization process with their moves. Since the basic principles are diametrically opposite, ie. that Belgrade views the dialogue as an internal issue, and Pristina as a bilateral agreement between two sovereign states, it is clear that the events are interpreted in relation to this initial position. This is most visible in the examples of non-implementation of voting in the referendum and elections in the territory of Kosovo\*.

In addition to these different positions, negotiators do not miss an opportunity to increase their rhetoric in moments where they recognize that the other side has a more favorable position. In these situations, negotiators from Belgrade talk about the threatened existence of Serbs in Kosovo\* and predict catastrophic consequences with examples from the wars of the 90s of the last century. On the other hand, the negotiators from Pristina are resorting to the narrative of Serbia as an aggressor that threatens state sovereignty, with the inevitable alleged accusations of genocide committed in Kosovo. The common accusation is that the other side is violating the normalization.

The conflict in Ukraine, caused by Russia's armed attack, gave an additional dimension to the narrative, which was especially used by the negotiators from Pristina. It is interesting that both sides identify with Ukraine, whose sovereignty is threatened, Kosovo\* through equating

Putin's tendencies and policies with Vučić's, and Serbia through the secession of Ukrainian territories and violation of its territorial integrity, which is compared to the secession of Kosovo\*. Tensions are rising further in anticipation of reaching an agreement. Thus, the situations related to the decisions of the Kosovo government on reciprocal measures for personal documents and vehicle registration were practically followed by increasing combat readiness, precisely through the statements of officials.

As long as the negotiators themselves resort to incendiary rhetoric and further increase the population's sense of threat, the general public cannot recognize progress in the negotiations, even when it is real. Blaming the "other side" is inevitable, but what can really be avoided is the verbal threat of conflict that is constantly resorted to.



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