

Research Briefing

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Kosovo: developments since 1999 and relations with Serbia



Summary

- 1 The conflict of the 1990s and its aftermath
- 2 Kosovo since the declaration of independence
- 3 Recognition and international organisations

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Summary

Following the NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999, a [United Nations Security Council \(UNSC\) resolution](#) authorised the establishment of an interim administration and the deployment of the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) to keep the peace. The interim administration had the objective of promoting self-government in Kosovo pending a final settlement. After UN-led talks involving leaders from Serbia and Kosovo reached an impasse, [Kosovo unilaterally declared independence](#) in February 2008.

The NATO intervention followed the revocation of Kosovo's autonomy, a growing independence movement in Kosovo and [a brutal crackdown by Serbia in the 1990s](#). Although Kosovo [is largely ethnic-Albanian](#) with a small Serbian minority, Kosovo is a territory of [cultural and historical significance](#) for Serbia. Serbia was unwilling to countenance Kosovo's independence in the 1990s, amidst the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, and has refused to recognise Kosovo's independence since its unilateral declaration in 2008.

Kosovo and Serbia after the declaration of independence

After declaring independence, Kosovo adopted [a new constitution](#) but initially remained under international supervision. An International Steering Group, involving the USA, UK and other states that had recognised its independence supervised an International Civilian Office (ICO). The period [of supervised independence ended in September 2012](#), with the closure of the International Civilian Office. However, KFOR remained in Kosovo and the UN Interim Administration Mission continued to operate.

Tensions between ethnic Albanians and ethnic Serbs in Kosovo, involving violent clashes, and between Kosovo and Serbia itself have continued since the NATO intervention. Kosovo Serbs, concentrated in the north of Kosovo, have continued to maintain parallel institutions with direct links to the Serbian authorities in Belgrade.

Steps towards normalisation of relations

Steps towards normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia have been taken since 2011, with talks facilitated by the EU. An [agreement on principles governing the normalisation of relations](#) was reached in 2013. This integrated the Kosovo Serb community into Kosovo state structures, including

the police force and judicial system. The agreement also provided for an Association/Community of Serb Municipalities, involving limited autonomy and an assembly for Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo.

A 2015 agreement outlined a legal framework and structure for the Association/Community. However, this led to [mass protests among Kosovo Albanians and a referral to the constitutional court](#). The court ruled that elements of the 2015 framework were not in compliance with the constitution but said that [the Association/ Community should be implemented in line with the 2013 agreement](#). Kosovo has subsequently not implemented the Association/Community and this has remained a key stumbling block in Kosovo-Serbia relations.

In 2018, the two countries presidents indicated they were considering a [proposed land swap](#) involving an exchange of Serb-majority areas in Kosovo for an Albanian-majority area in Serbia, but this met with opposition within Kosovo and internationally. The plan did receive some encouragement from the Trump administration in the USA, which also [brokered talks leading to an economic normalisation agreement](#) in 2020.

Deteriorating relations and renewed EU-brokered talks since 2021

In the summer of 2021, tensions escalated after drivers of vehicles with Serbian licence plates were told that they had to replace them with temporary Kosovo plates and [protestors from the Serb community blockaded the border](#) with Serbia. The Kosovo government sent special forces to keep the border open, leading the Serbian government to in turn send military jets and tanks to the scene. After an [EU-mediated agreement](#) helped to cool tensions, the dispute flared up again in 2022 after the Kosovo government said it would impose fines on those refusing to replace their license plates. This led to a mass resignation of ethnic Serbs from all of Kosovo's national institutions in November 2022. President Vučić of Serbia said he would [“take all measures to protect our people”](#).

Following pressure from the EU and the USA, new talks resulted in an agreement on normalisation of relations in February 2023. This would involve mutual recognition of documents and national symbols, including passports, diplomas and licence plates, protection of Serbian religious and cultural heritage sites in Kosovo, and [“an appropriate level of self-management for the Serbian community in Kosovo”](#). An [implementation annex](#) to the agreement was announced by the EU in March 2023. However, Vučić then said some [further points needed to be agreed](#) and Kosovo's Prime Minister Albin Kurti complained that the Serbian side would not sign the agreement.

Tensions escalated again in April 2023, when ethnic Serbs boycotted local elections and the Kosovo authorities then sought to install ethnic Albanian

mayors in Serb areas elected on a turnout of 3.7%. This led to [violent clashes between ethnic Serbs and Kosovo police](#), with KFOR troops also injured. The EU and the Quint (the USA, UK, France, Germany and Italy) [condemned the actions of the Kosovo authorities](#), as well as the attacks on KFOR troops.

In September 2023, there was a clash between an armed group of Kosovo Serbs and the Kosovo police, with the [Serbs barricading themselves in a monastery](#) and a police officer being killed. Serbia and Russia blamed Kurti for provoking the incident. The incidents in 2023 [led to KFOR being reinforced](#), with 200 British troops among the reinforcements deployed in October 2023. This brought the KFOR contingent up to around 4500.

EU attempts to revive peace talks have not been fruitful. An EU statement in March 2024 stated it was “regrettable” that despite extensive efforts by the EU and the broader international community, there had been “[very limited progress by both Kosovo and Serbia](#)” in implementing the 2023 agreement. It said this threatened the integration of both countries with the EU.

A decision by the Kosovo Central Bank in January 2024 to make the euro the only valid currency for cash transactions in Kosovo was also criticised by the EU and the Quint. Kosovo adopted the euro as its currency in 2002, but the Serbian dinar remains in circulation in Serb areas. Vučić described the decision [as an attempt to “ethnically cleanse” Kosovo Serbs](#). A Quint statement said the decision would have a “[direct impact on the everyday lives of the overwhelming majority of Kosovo Serbs](#) who receive payments/ financial assistance from Serbia”. The Kosovo government later said it would allow a transitional period for the decision to take effect.

International recognition

Kosovo’s independence [has been recognised by 90 countries](#), including the UK, USA and all other G7 countries and most EU Member States. It has not been recognised by 78 countries, including Russia (which backs Serbia’s position), China, five EU Member States and most Asian, Latin American and African countries. A small number of states that recognised Kosovo subsequently derecognised it after lobbying from Serbia.

Kosovo is not a member of the United Nations, accession to which would be opposed by Security Council members Russia and China. Kosovo has applied to join the Council of Europe and [obtained the necessary support of two-thirds of member states](#) to initiate the accession process in 2023. It has also applied to join the EU but has not been granted candidate status.

In March 2022, shortly after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Kosovo’s Prime Minister Albin Kurti said that Kosovo would like to join NATO as soon as possible. He referred to Russian influence over Serbia and suggested [this might be used to provoke a proxy conflict in the Western Balkans](#).

1 The conflict of the 1990s and its aftermath

1.1 Historical background

Kosovo has a predominantly ethnic-Albanian population, with a small Serbian minority.¹ It has a population of close to two million people. According to a 2011 census, around 93% of its inhabitants were ethnic Albanian and 1.5% Serbian. 95.6% of the population were Muslim.² Other estimates suggest a higher Serbian population of around 8%, with around 87% ethnic-Albanian.³

Historical accounts suggest that close to half the population of Kosovo was ethnic Albanian and under a quarter Serbian when it was annexed by Serbia in 1912.⁴ However, ethnic Albanians in Kosovo increased in number during the twentieth century while the proportion of Serbians decreased, with more Serbians leaving Kosovo following the NATO intervention in 1999 (see below).

Serbia has viewed Kosovo as integral to its own history.⁵ Kosovo was part of a Serbian state in the twelfth century. The Serbian Orthodox church was established in Kosovo in the thirteenth century and there are many important historical sites for the church in the territory.⁶ Kosovo was the location of the defeat of the Serbs by the Ottoman Empire in the fourteenth century. Kosovo and Serbia later became part of the Ottoman Empire.⁷ Serbia regained its independence in the second half of the nineteenth century, and annexed Kosovo during the Balkan war of 1912-13, when the Ottoman Empire lost much of its European territory.⁸ Kosovo then became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes proclaimed in 1918, which then became Yugoslavia in 1929.⁹

¹ Euronews, [A history of tension: Serbia-Kosovo relations explained](#), 28 May 2019

² CIA, The World Factbook, [Kosovo - The World Factbook](#), updated 13 March 2024

³ European Parliamentary Research Service, [Serbia-Kosovo relations](#) (PDF), PE635.512, February 2019

⁴ Section II of House of Commons Research Paper 98/73, [Kosovo](#), 7 July 1998; The Guardian, [Is Kosovo Serbia? We ask a historian](#), 26 February 2008; and Washington Post, [Kosovo: The Jerusalem of Serbia](#), July 1999

⁵ Relief Web, [Why Kosovo is central to Serb national epic](#), 12 October 2007

⁶ Kosovo online, [The importance of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo: Who is bothered and why? - Kosovo Online](#), 27 March 2023; France 24, [Arrested development: the unfinished church dividing Kosovo](#), 2 December 2021

⁷ Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 14 March 2024]

⁸ Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 14 March 2024]

⁹ BBC News, [Serbia profile -Timeline](#), 28 November 2022

1.2

Kosovo in post-war Yugoslavia

After the Second World War, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) was established, with Kosovo becoming an autonomous province within Serbia, which was one of six constituent republics of the SFRY.¹⁰ The province was initially named Kosovo- Metohija ('Metohija', meaning 'monastic estates' with reference to the Orthodox church estates in the territory), but was renamed simply as Kosovo as part of a constitutional change in 1974.¹¹ The 1974 Yugoslav constitution gave the autonomous province of Kosovo almost equal rights with the republics.¹²

Tensions between Serbians and Albanians in Kosovo increased in the 1980s, with demonstrations by Kosovo Albanians demanding full republic status violently suppressed.¹³ Slobodan Milošević was a leading figure in the Serbian Communist party in this period, becoming its President in 1986, and organised demonstrations in support of the Serb population in Kosovo, calling on it to stand up to alleged repression by the Kosovo Albanians.¹⁴ Milošević became President of the State Presidency of Serbia in 1989 and pressed for constitutional change.¹⁵

In 1990, the Serbian Government revoked the autonomy of Kosovo, also renaming the territory again as Kosovo- Metohija.¹⁶ This was followed by a declaration of independence of Kosovo by a majority of deputies in the provincial assembly. Serbia then introduced a special administration in Kosovo.¹⁷ Further repression of the rights of Kosovo Albanians then followed.¹⁸

1.3

The conflict of the 1990s

The early 1990s saw the disintegration of Yugoslavia, with the republics of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia all declaring independence.¹⁹ Yugoslavia was reduced to the republics of Serbia and Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina descended into an armed conflict

¹⁰ BBC News, [Serbia profile -Timeline](#), 28 November 2022

¹¹ Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 14 March 2024]

¹² Europa World, [Kosovo: Recent History](#) [accessed 14 March 2024]; US State Department, Office of the Historian, [A Guide to the United States' History of Recognition, Diplomatic, and Consular Relations, by Country, since 1776: Kosovo](#) [accessed 14 March 2024]; The Guardian, [How Milosevic stripped Kosovo's autonomy - archive, 1989](#), 20 March 2019

¹³ US State Department, Office of the Historian, [A Guide to the United States' History of Recognition, Diplomatic, and Consular Relations, by Country, since 1776: Kosovo](#) [accessed 14 March 2024]

¹⁴ See Section III of House of Commons Research Paper 98/73, [Kosovo](#), 7 July 1998

¹⁵ Europa World, [Serbia: Recent History](#) [accessed 19 March 2024]; Europa World, [Kosovo: Recent History](#) [accessed 19 March 2024]

¹⁶ Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 14 March 2024]

¹⁷ Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 14 March 2024]

¹⁸ See Section III of House of Commons Research Paper 98/73, [Kosovo](#), 7 July 1998

¹⁹ Europa World, [Serbia: Profile](#) [accessed 14 March 2024]

which eventually came to an end in 1995.²⁰ Passive resistance by Kosovo Albanians in the early 1990s was eventually replaced by a more aggressive strategy with the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) declaring its intention to achieve independence in 1996 and launching attacks against security forces.²¹

In 1998, the Serbian security forces began a brutal crackdown in Kosovo. This later also involved the Yugoslav army. Indiscriminate killings and the displacement of ethnic Albanians, with more than 800,000 Albanians driven out of Kosovo, caused an international outcry.²² After international attempts to broker a peace deal were rejected by Serbian and Yugoslav leadership, the conflict was ended by the NATO intervention of March to June 1999, involving air strikes across Yugoslavia.²³ Serbian forces withdrew from Kosovo in June 1999 and the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) mission, was deployed in Kosovo to maintain peace in the territory.²⁴ KFOR was authorised by a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution in June 1999 (see below) and would initially comprise 50,000 men and women from NATO countries.²⁵

1.4 Kosovo under the interim UN administration

UNSC Resolution 1244 adopted on 10 June 1999 set out general principles to a political solution (set out in the annexes to the solution) and provided for the withdrawal of Yugoslav military and police forces from Kosovo, the demilitarisation of the KLA and other armed Albanian groups and the return of refugees. It also provided for the deployment of an international security presence with substantial NATO involvement to deter future hostilities and enforce a ceasefire, and an international civil presence in Kosovo to provide an interim administration for Kosovo. The international civil presence would promote the establishment of substantial self-government in Kosovo pending a final settlement, and facilitate a political process designed to determine Kosovo's future status.²⁶

Elections to Kosovo Assembly

Elections were held for 100 seats in the 120-member Kosovo Assembly in March 2002 under a UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) programme for establishing partial and provisional self-government in the territory. The other 20 seats were reserved for representatives of the Serb and other minority ethnic group. The Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), associated with the earlier non-violent resistance of the 1990s, was the

²⁰ Europa World, [Serbia: Profile](#) [accessed 14 March 2024]

²¹ Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 14 March 2024]

²² Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 19 March 2024]

²³ Europa World, [Serbia: Recent History](#) [accessed 19 March 2024]; UK Government, Ministry of Defence, Kosovo: An account of the crisis, October 1999

²⁴ Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 19 March 2024]

²⁵ KFOR, [History](#) [accessed 20 March 2024]

²⁶ United Nations Mission in Kosovo, [United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244](#), 10 June 1999. See also [Mandate | UNMIK \(unmissions.org\)](#)

leading party in the new Assembly. It was followed by the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), which grew out of the KLA armed resistance.²⁷

Following the elections in March 2002, Ibrahim Rugova, who had been the elected President of the self-proclaimed 'Republic of Kosovo' in the 1990s, was elected President of Kosovo by the Assembly. Bajram Rexhepi of the PDK became Prime Minister, and a coalition Government was established. This was joined by a coalition of Serb parties in April 2002.²⁸

Continuing tensions

Tensions continued between the Albanian and Serbian communities in Kosovo following the conflict. Following the NATO intervention in 1999, ethnic Albanians retaliated against the Serbian community with large numbers of Serbs fleeing the territory. The Serbs remaining in Kosovo complained of discrimination and maintained parallel structures with direct links to the Serbian authorities in Belgrade. Serb-majority municipalities within Kosovo continued to function as if part of Serbia, and Serbian enclaves within Kosovo were protected by NATO forces.²⁹

In March 2004, there was rioting in the northern city of Mitrovica, which is divided between Serbs living in its northern part and Albanians in the south of the city. This led to 19 deaths, with around 5000 fleeing.³⁰ Around 2,000 KFOR troops were sent in to stop the violence.³¹

In elections to the Kosovo Assembly in October 2004, the LDK remained the leading party, followed by the PDK and the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK). The LDK negotiated a coalition agreement with the AAK, with the AAK leader Ramush Haradinaj being appointed as Prime Minister. However, this was strongly criticised by Serb parties as Haradinaj was previously a leading figure in the KLA and was under investigation by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) for alleged war crimes. In March 2005, Haradinaj resigned as Prime Minister and surrendered to the ICTY following his indictment on 37 charges.³²

²⁷ Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 21 March 2024]

²⁸ Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 21 March 2024]

²⁹ Europa World, [Kosovo: Recent History](#) [accessed 22 March 2024]

³⁰ Europa World, [Kosovo: Recent History](#) [accessed 22 March 2024]

³¹ Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 21 March 2024]

³² Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 21 March 2024]

1 The dissolution of Yugoslavia

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) began to break up at the beginning of the 1990s, with four of its six constituent republics breaking away in 1991 and 1992. Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence in 1991, followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia in 1992. The two remaining republics, Serbia and Montenegro, then formed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) in April 1992.³³

Conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo followed in the 1990s. Montenegro also began to take a more independent stance during the 1990s, taking a neutral stance during the Serbia-Kosovo conflict.³⁴

Support for independence in Montenegro increased following Slobodan Milošević's removal from power in FRY in 2000 (Milošević had become President of FRY in 1997 after previously being President of Serbia from 1990).³⁵

Increasing support for independence in Montenegro was initially addressed through an EU-brokered compromise in 2002 under which FRY would be reconstituted as the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. This was officially proclaimed in March 2003.³⁶ The two republics were largely self-governing, and the central state had a limited set of competences, including in foreign affairs and defence. The agreement provided that either Serbia or Montenegro could initiate proceedings to withdraw from the State Union after three years.³⁷

In May 2006, Montenegro held a referendum on independence with 55.5% voting in favour. Serbia was acknowledged as the successor of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, continuing to claim sovereignty over Kosovo. In October 2006 Serbia voted by referendum in favour of a new constitution, which confirmed the status of the Republic of Serbia as an independent state.³⁸

Talks on future status of Kosovo

In October 2005, talks on Kosovo's future status began after a UN review said that the Kosovo Government had made significant progress towards

³³ International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, [What is the former Yugoslavia?](#) [accessed 22 March 2024]

³⁴ Europa World, [Montenegro: Recent History](#) [accessed 22 March 2024]. See also BBC News, [Fears for neutral Montenegro](#), 7 April 1999

³⁵ Reuters, [Timeline - Serbia, 20 years since Milosevic came to power](#), 30 September 2010; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, [Timeline: The Political Career Of Slobodan Milosevic](#), 13 March 2006

³⁶ Europa World, [Montenegro: Recent History](#) [accessed 22 March 2024]

³⁷ Europa World, [Serbia, Recent History](#) [accessed 22 March 2024]

³⁸ Europa World, [Serbia, Recent History](#) [accessed 22 March 2024]

establishing executive, legislative and judicial institutions. In November 2005, the former President of Finland Martti Ahtisaari was appointed as the UN Special Envoy for the Future Status Process for Kosovo.³⁹ Negotiations involving delegations from both the Serbian and Kosovan government began in February 2006. The Kosovo delegation reiterated their demands for full independence for the territory but Serbian leaders said that they would not accept this and sought to retain sovereignty over Kosovo and control of external borders.⁴⁰

Ahtisaari presented recommendations for the future status of Kosovo in February 2007 which would involve a limited form of statehood under international supervision.⁴¹ Although this fell short of full independence, the plan was rejected by Serbia as it opened the possibility of independence.⁴² After concluding there was no prospect of a negotiated settlement, Ahtisaari submitted a final report to the UN Security Council at the end of March 2007, recommending independence for Kosovo.⁴³ This was endorsed by the then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.⁴⁴

Ahtisaari's report said that throughout the process the two sides had reaffirmed their "categorical, diametrically opposed positions", with Serbia demanding that Kosovo should have autonomy within Serbia, while Kosovo demanded "nothing short of independence" and that the potential to produce any mutually agreeable outcome was exhausted. The report said that given that Serbia had not exercised any authority over Kosovo since 1999, the situation was now "irreversible" and independence with international supervision was the "only viable option".⁴⁵

The report set out provisions for a status settlement for Kosovo, including a framework for governance that would protect minorities, notably the Serbian community. The framework would involve extensive municipal autonomy, including for the Serbian majority municipalities, and key national policy decisions would require cross-community support. Refugees and displaced persons would have a right to return and reclaim their property. Religious and cultural heritage and the rights of the Serbian Orthodox Church would be protected. An International Civil Representative would supervise the implementation of the settlement, with the power to annul legislation and dismiss officials where actions are inconsistent to the final status settlement

³⁹ Relief Web, [Kosovo a challenge for former Finnish president Ahtisaari](#), 2 November 2005

⁴⁰ Europa World, [Kosovo: Recent History](#) [accessed 22 March 2024]

⁴¹ Euractiv, [Ahtisaari seeks compromise on Kosovo plan](#), 5 February 2007

⁴² Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, [UN Envoy Presents 'Compromise' Proposal on Kosovo](#), 2 February 2007

⁴³ The Guardian, [UN envoy recommends Kosovo independence](#), 26 March 2007

⁴⁴ United Nations Security Council, [Letter dated 26 March 2007 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council](#), 26 March 2007

⁴⁵ United Nations Security Council, [Letter dated 26 March 2007 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council](#), 26 March 2007

similar to that of the International High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁴⁶ KFOR would continue to provide security for Kosovo.⁴⁷

Serbia rejected the proposal, with Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica describing it as a violation of the UN Charter, the Serbian Constitution and international law, and representing solely the interests of the ethnic-Albanian side.⁴⁸ Serbia also called for the appointment of a new international mediator to replace Ahtisaari.⁴⁹ The proposal was however approved by near unanimity in the Kosovo Assembly, though boycotted by the Serbian minority. Further discussions between the Serbian and Kosovan delegations followed but did not break the deadlock.⁵⁰

In elections to the Assembly in November 2007, the PDK became the leading party in the Kosovo Assembly. The elections were boycotted by the Serb parties. The PDK and LDK formed a coalition government headed by PDK leader and former KLA commander Hashim Thaçi as Prime Minister.⁵¹

1.5 Kosovo declaration of independence

On 17 February 2008 the Kosovo Assembly unanimously endorsed a declaration establishing an independent Republic of Kosovo. The declaration approved was based on the plan set out in Ahtisaari's proposal, providing for international supervision, limitations on Kosovo's armed forces and protections for the Serbian minority.⁵² Kosovo would also be unable to join any other country.⁵³

Serbia was supported by Russia in rejecting the declaration and declaring it in breach of international law. The UN Security Council met in emergency session on 18 February 2008 to discuss the situation after a request from Serbia and Russia. Serbia's President Boris Tadić, said the declaration was illegal and in flagrant violation of UNSC resolution 1244 (1999), which he said had reaffirmed the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia. He also warned that allowing independence for Kosovo would set a dangerous

⁴⁶ Office of High Representative [Mandate](#) [accessed 22 March 2024]

⁴⁷ United Nations Security Council, [Letter dated 26 March 2007 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council](#), 26 March 2007

⁴⁸ Relief Web, [Serbia rejects Ahtisaari's proposal for status of Kosovo-Metohija](#), 27 March 2007

⁴⁹ Relief Web, [Serbia rejects Ahtisaari's proposal before UN Security Council and requests new international mediator](#), 3 April 2007

⁵⁰ Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 21 March 2024]

⁵¹ Balkan Insight, [Kosovo to Enact Ahtisaari Plan](#), 18 January 2008

⁵² Europa World, [Kosovo: Recent History](#), 23 March 2024

⁵³ Europa World, [Kosovo: Recent History](#), 23 March 2024

precedent for other countries with similar situations.⁵⁴ Russia also demanded that the unilateral declaration of independence be declared null and void.⁵⁵

The USA, UK, France and other European countries however granted recognition to Kosovo as an independent state on 18 February (see also section 3.1). The UK representative at the UN said that the legacy of Kosovo's repression by Serbia in the 1990s had made it impossible to Kosovo to return to control by it. The UK statement also noted that Serbia had changed its own constitution in the middle of the status process, and that this had excluded any future for Kosovo outside Serbia, effectively ending any chance of a negotiated settlement.⁵⁶ The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said that UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) would continue to implement its mandate under UNSC resolution 1244 (1999).⁵⁷

Although EU Member States took differing approaches to recognition, the EU continued with plans for the deployment of an EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) agreed before the declaration of independence. This involved the deployment of around 1,900 personnel, including EU police, justice and customs experts, who would advise the Kosovan authorities and support its judiciary and law enforcement agencies.⁵⁸

The Kosovo Assembly adopted a new constitution on 9 April 2008 which declared Kosovo to be an independent and sovereign state. There was uncertainty over the future of UNMIK and the EULEX deployment with the Kosovo Serbs and the Serbian Government initially refusing to accept the EU mission. The EULEX deployment eventually began in December 2008 on the basis of a plan put forward by the head of UNMIK and UN Special Representative for Kosovo, Lamberto Zannier, and agreed with Serbia.⁵⁹ EULEX would remain neutral regarding Kosovo's status operating within the framework of UNSC Resolution 1244, and Serb-majority areas would initially continue to be under the UNMIK umbrella.⁶⁰ However, EULEX would eventually be deployed in Serb-majority areas as well.⁶¹ UNMIK would retain a role in

⁵⁴ United Nations, [Security Council meets in emergency session following Kosovo's declaration of independence, with members sharply divided on issue](#), 18 February 2008

⁵⁵ United Nations, [Security Council meets in emergency session following Kosovo's declaration of independence, with members sharply divided on issue](#), 18 February 2008

⁵⁶ United Nations, [Security Council meets in emergency session following Kosovo's declaration of independence, with members sharply divided on issue](#), 18 February 2008

⁵⁷ United Nations, [Security Council meets in emergency session following Kosovo's declaration of independence, with members sharply divided on issue](#), 18 February 2008

⁵⁸ OECD, [EU Decides to Launch Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo](#) [accessed 25 March 2024]; Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 25 March 2024]

⁵⁹ Balkan Insight, [Kosovo 'Ready to Welcome EU Mission'](#), 27 November 2008

⁶⁰ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, [UN Council Clears Way For EU Mission In Kosovo](#), 27 November 2008; Reuters, [Kosovo and Serbia to cooperate with EU](#), 25 November 2008; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, [Kosovo after independence : is the EU's EULEX mission delivering on its promises?](#) (PDF), July 2009

⁶¹ France 24, [EU takes over from the UN in Kosovo](#), 9 December 2008

helping to develop and monitor Kosovo's institutions and supporting minority communities, including the Serbs.⁶²

KFOR also remained in Kosovo. In June 2008 it began assisting in the disbandment of the Kosovo Protection Corps, which had been formed in 1999 largely on the basis of the KLA, and in the establishment and the training of the multi-ethnic Kosovo Security Force (KSF), together with a civilian structure to oversee the KSF.⁶³

⁶² United Nations, [Kosovo situation calm, but political transition following declaration of independence more complex than expected, Security Council told](#), SC/9512, 26 November 2008

⁶³ Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 28 March 2024]; NATO

2 Kosovo since the declaration of independence

2.1 Kosovo's Constitution

Kosovo's constitution, which entered into force on 15 June 2008 defines the Republic of Kosovo as an "independent, sovereign, democratic ... and indivisible state" (Article 1). It states that Kosovo shall have "no territorial claims against, and shall seek no union with, any State or part of any State" (Article 3).

The official languages of Kosovo are Albanian and Serbian. Turkish, Bosnian and Roma languages have the status of official languages at municipal level (Article 5).

The Kosovo Assembly is the legislative institution of Kosovo. The Assembly comprises 120 deputies, elected by a system of proportional representation with open lists for four-year mandates. 20 seats are reserved for the representatives of specified minority ethnic communities, with representatives of the Serb Community having a minimum of 10 seats (Article 64).

The President of Kosovo is the head of state and is elected by a two-thirds' majority of all deputies in the Assembly (Article 86). The President appoints the Prime Minister, who heads the Government. This follows discussions between the President and the political party or coalition holding the majority of seats in the Assembly. The Prime Minister submits the composition of his Government for approval by the Assembly. The Government then needs to receive a majority of votes from deputies in the Assembly in order to be considered "elected" (Article 95).⁶⁴

2.2 End of international supervision

After Kosovo's declaration and after a request from Kosovo, a group of states that had recognised Kosovo's independence formed the International Steering Group (ISG) on 28 February 2008. These included the USA, UK, Turkey and several EU Member States. The ISG supervised the International Civilian Office (ICO) which was tasked with full implementation of the Comprehensive

⁶⁴ UNHCR Refworld, [Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo](#), June 2008

Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement of 26 March 2007. ISG members provided personnel to staff the ICO.⁶⁵

In July 2012, the ISG announced that Kosovo's period of supervised independence would end in September 2012, meaning Kosovo would gain "full sovereignty".⁶⁶ The end of the period of supervised independence also required an amendment to Kosovo's 2008 constitution.⁶⁷

Article 143 of the 2008 constitution also provided that all authorities in the Republic of Kosovo were to abide by Kosovo's obligations under the Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement of 26 March 2007, prepared by the UN Special Envoy for the future status process for Kosovo, Martti Ahtisaari (see section 1.4).⁶⁸ All necessary actions for the implementation of the proposed settlement would be taken and the provisions of the proposal would "take precedence over all other legal provisions in Kosovo". The constitution, law and legal acts of the Republic of Kosovo would be interpreted in compliance with the proposed settlement, and where there were inconsistencies the provisions of the proposed settlement would have precedence.⁶⁹ Article 143 was abrogated by the constitutional amendment adopted by Kosovo's Assembly on 7 September 2012.⁷⁰

Kosovo officially obtained full independence on 10 September 2012 with the closure of the International Civilian Office. However, following an agreement with the EU, the mandate of EULEX was extended.⁷¹ KFOR troops also remained in Kosovo and UNMIK continued to operate.⁷²

2.3

Party politics and elections in Kosovo

Following the NATO intervention in 1999, Kosovo's two leading political parties were the LDK and PDK. The LDK was formed in 1989 by a group of intellectuals headed by Ibrahim Rugova and had its roots in the earlier non-violent resistance to Serbian rule.⁷³ The PDK grew out of the of the armed KLA resistance in the 1990s, initially led by former KLA commander Hashim Thaçi.⁷⁴

⁶⁵ US State Department, [International Support for Kosovo](#), archived content [accessed 28 March 2024]

⁶⁶ France 24, [West ends supervised independence of Kosovo](#), 10 September 2012

⁶⁷ Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 9 April 2024]

⁶⁸ United Nations Security Council, [Letter dated 26 March 2007 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council](#), 26 March 2007

⁶⁹ UNHCR Refworld, [Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo](#), June 2008

⁷⁰ Constitute Project, [Kosovo 2008 \(rev. 2016\) Constitution](#) [accessed 28 March 2024]

⁷¹ Balkan Insight, [Kosovo to Extend EU Law Mission's Mandate](#), 4 September 2012

⁷² Relief Web, [Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo \(S/2012/818\)](#), 8 November 2012

⁷³ Europa World, [Kosovo: Recent History](#) [accessed 28 March 2024]

⁷⁴ Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 21 March 2024]

The LDK has been described as a liberal centre-right party, favouring a free market economy and privatisation. The PDK initially presented itself as a social-democratic party but later shifted to the right. PDK draws its support especially from poor ethnic-Albanian rural areas that endured high levels of violence during the conflict with Serbia.⁷⁵ A third party, the AAK, has gained a smaller number of votes in elections but has been influential. It was initially a coalition of nationalist parties, becoming a more moderate, pro-European party on the centre-right.⁷⁶ Differences between these parties were initially described as focusing on allegiance to particular individuals and their territorial base, rather than policy programmes, with a division between followers of the LDK and former supporters of the KLA.⁷⁷

The LDK was initially the leading party in elections in 2002 and 2004, although it formed a coalition with the AAK in 2004 with AAK leader Ramush Haradinaj as Prime Minister. The PDK became the leading party in Assembly elections of November 2007, and then formed the coalition government with the LDK under Thaçi which declared Kosovo's independence from Serbia in February 2008.⁷⁸ The PDK was the leading party again in early elections to the Kosovo Assembly in December 2010, ahead of the LDK, with Thaçi continuing as Prime Minister. The centre-left populist pro-independence Self-Determination Movement (Vetëvendosje, LVV) came third.⁷⁹ LVV would lead protests against the normalisation agreement with Serbia in 2013 and the border agreement with Montenegro in 2015 (see sections 2.4 and 2.5).⁸⁰ LVV went on to increase its vote share at subsequent elections, becoming the leading force in the Kosovo Assembly (see section 2.9 below).⁸¹

There was a similar result to 2010 in the 2014 Assembly election, but PDK attempts to lead another government were blocked by LDK and other opposition parties. This eventually led to a new PDK-LDK government being formed with LDK leader Isa Mustafa becoming Prime Minister. Thaçi was then elected President of Kosovo in 2016, with the support of the governing parties.⁸² Thaçi was forced to step down as President in 2020 after being indicted for war crimes (see section 2.9).

There were early elections again in 2017 after a vote of no confidence brought down Mustafa's government. A coalition led by the PDK, also including the AAK and Initiative for Kosovo (NISMA), won the most seats, followed by LVV

⁷⁵ European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, [Kosovo, Political Parties](#), [accessed 18 April 2024]

⁷⁶ European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, [Kosovo, Political Parties](#), [accessed 18 April 2024]; PolitPro, [Political parties at a glance, Kosovo](#) [accessed 18 April 2024]

⁷⁷ Věra Stojarová, "The party system of Kosovo" in *Party Politics in the Western Balkans*, edited by Věra Stojarová and Peter Emerson, Routledge, 2010

⁷⁸ Balkan Insight, [Kosovo to Enact Ahtisaari Plan](#), 18 January 2008

⁷⁹ Bilge Yabancı, [Populism and Anti-Establishment Politics in Kosovo: A Case Study of Lëvizja Vetëvendosje](#) (PDF), *Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, 2015 3 (2); Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 21 March 2024]

⁸⁰ Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 18 April 2024]

⁸¹ Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 18 April 2024]

⁸² Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 18 April 2024]

with 32 seats, and then an LDK-led alliance.⁸³ A new government involving the PDK, AAK, NISMA and Serb List was subsequently formed, with Haradinaj returning as Prime Minister.⁸⁴

Haradinaj was a former KLA commander who had been forced to resign as Prime Minister in 2005 after an indictment by the ICTY, but was then acquitted of war crimes twice by the ICTY in 2008 and 2012.⁸⁵ He was forced to resign again in July 2019 after being summoned for questioning by the Kosovo Specialist Prosecutor's Office in the Hague (a separate office to the ICTY, established under Kosovo law), over alleged crimes committed during and after the Kosovo war, from 1998 to 2000.⁸⁶

2.4 Steps to normalisation of Kosovo-Serbia relations

Relations between the Kosovo authorities and the Serb community in Kosovo, as well as with Serbia itself, remained tense following Kosovo's declaration of independence. However, steps were taken towards normalisation of relations between the two countries, facilitated by an EU-sponsored dialogue.⁸⁷

The Serb community in Kosovo established parallel institutions following Kosovo's declaration of independence. This included the establishment of an Assembly of the Community of Municipalities which held its first election in May 2008. This convened for the first time at the end of June 2008 in Mitrovica.⁸⁸ In February 2012, in a referendum held by Kosovo Serbs in four northern municipalities, 99.7% of those voting rejected the authority of Kosovo state institutions. The referendum was declared illegal by the Kosovo Assembly.⁸⁹

In July 2011, Kosovo Serbs resisted attempts by Kosovo police to take control of two crossing points at the border with Serbia, with one Kosovo police officer killed by Kosovo Serbs.⁹⁰ There were also clashes between Kosovo Serbs and KFOR troops.⁹¹ EULEX units were deployed to take control of the border posts in September 2011 after Kosovo Serbs erected barricades.⁹² The

⁸³ Al Jazeera, [Kosovo ex-fighters declare victory in general election](#), 12 June 2017; Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 18 April 2024]

⁸⁴ Balkan Insight, [New Kosovo Government Gets Parliament Approval](#), 9 September 2017

⁸⁵ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, [UN Court Acquits Former Kosovar Prime Minister, Two Others](#), 29 November 2012

⁸⁶ Balkan Insight, [Kosovo PM Resigns after Summons from Hague Prosecutors](#), 19 July 2019

⁸⁷ Balkans Policy Research Group, [The Brussels Dialogue Between Kosovo and Serbia - Achievements and Challenges](#) (PDF), September 2020

⁸⁸ Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 9 April 2024]

⁸⁹ Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 9 April 2024]

⁹⁰ Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 9 April 2024]

⁹¹ UN News, [Serbia-Kosovo dialogue eases tensions, but challenges remain](#), 8 February 2012

⁹² Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 9 April 2024]

barricades were removed in February 2012 following an agreement between the Kosovo Serbs and EULEX.⁹³

An EU-facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia (also known as the Brussels dialogue) began in Brussels in March 2011. This led to agreements in July 2011 on freedom of movement of citizens between the two countries and in September 2011 on the opening of new border crossing points between them.⁹⁴

In February 2012, the two sides reached a deal enabling Kosovo's participation in regional meetings. It would be able to use the name "Kosovo" in regional meetings, but with a footnote referring to UN Resolution 1244 and the ICJ opinion in 2010 that Kosovo's declaration of independence was not illegal (see section 3.2).⁹⁵ The agreement also paved the way for an EU decision to grant EU accession candidate status to Serbia on 1 March 2012.⁹⁶

On 19 April 2013, Kosovo's Prime Minister, Hashim Thaçi, and Serbia's Prime Minister, Ivica Dačić, initialled the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations.⁹⁷ Under this agreement the Serb-majority areas in northern Kosovo would be administered by the central authorities, but would retain autonomy in a number of areas including appointment of a police commander.⁹⁸ Serbia was not obliged to recognise Kosovo's independence, but neither side would block the other from seeking to join the EU.⁹⁹ This was followed by an implementation agreement at the end of May 2013, under which all members of Serb security bodies in Kosovo would be integrated into state structures.¹⁰⁰ Despite protests organised by LVV the agreement was approved by the Kosovo Assembly at the end of June 2013.¹⁰¹ The day after the Assembly vote, the Council of the EU authorised the opening of negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with Kosovo.¹⁰²

The agreement enabled a degree of normalisation of Kosovo-Serbia relations and integration of the Kosovo Serb community into Kosovo state structures, including the police force and judicial system.¹⁰³ However, the provision in the agreement for an Association/Community of Serb Municipalities (Serbia refers to it as a Community and Kosovo as an Association) has not been

⁹³ Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 9 April 2024]

⁹⁴ Balkans Policy Research Group, [The Brussels Dialogue Between Kosovo and Serbia - Achievements and Challenges](#) (PDF), September 2020

⁹⁵ Balkan Insight, [Kosovo, Serbia Reach Deal on Regional Representation](#), 24 February 2012

⁹⁶ Politico, [EU grants candidate status to Serbia](#), 28 February 2012

⁹⁷ Balkan Insight, [Kosovo, Serbia Reach Deal on Regional Representation](#), 24 February 2012

⁹⁸ Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 11 April 2024]

⁹⁹ Europa World, [Kosovo: Recent History](#) [accessed 11 April 2024]

¹⁰⁰ Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 11 April 2024]

¹⁰¹ Europa World, [Kosovo: Profile](#) [accessed 11 April 2024]

¹⁰² EU Monitor, [Decision 2015/1988 - Signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Kosovo](#) [accessed 11 April 2024]

¹⁰³ Balkans Policy Research Group, [The Brussels Dialogue Between Kosovo and Serbia - Achievements and Challenges](#) (PDF), September 2020

implemented. The Association/Community would involve limited autonomy and an assembly for Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo.¹⁰⁴

A further agreement between Kosovo and Serbia in 2015 outlined a legal framework and structure for the Association/Community. However, this led to mass protests and an opposition petition with around 200,000 signatures, followed by a request by the President for a ruling by the Constitutional Court on the Association/Community's compatibility with the Constitution. The Court found that the 2015 agreement provisions on the Association/Community were not entirely in compliance with the constitution, as it went beyond constitutional principles for local self-governance, legislative initiative and rights to promote the interests of the Kosovo Serb community. There has subsequently been an impasse between the two sides on the implementation of the Association/Community with the Kosovo government insisting it can only implement it in accordance with the Court ruling and Serbia insisting the main elements of the 2015 be implemented in full.¹⁰⁵

The Constitutional Court ruling did not state that the Association/Community itself was contrary to the constitution. It said that the 2015 agreement principles were “not entirely in compliance with the spirit of the Constitution” but that the Association/Community should be implemented in line with the 2013 agreement.¹⁰⁶

Tensions between Serbia and Kosovo have remained high, with the non-implementation of the Association/Community of Serb Municipalities a particular sticking point. The Government also came under pressure from opposition groups, including LVV, which staged protests over its concessions to the Serbian community.¹⁰⁷

2.5

Border agreement with Montenegro

The signing of a border demarcation agreement between Kosovo and Montenegro signed in 2015 resulted in further protests led by LVV. The agreement was aimed at settling a border dispute between the two countries and followed the recommendations of a joint expert boundary commission.¹⁰⁸ Some deputies from the governing PDK-LDK coalition also rejected the

¹⁰⁴ European External Action Service, [Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities-in-Kosovo-general-principles/main-elements](#) (PDF) [accessed 11 April 2024]; See also European Centre for Minority Issues Kosovo, [The Association / Community of Serb-majority Municipalities: Breaking the impasse](#) (PDF), 29 November 2020

¹⁰⁵ The Dialogue, [Association/Community of Serb - Majority Municipalities](#) [accessed 18 April 2024]

¹⁰⁶ Republic of Kosovo, Constitutional Court, [Judgment In Case No. K0130/15](#) (PDF), 23 December 2015. See also Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, [The Normalisation of Relations between Kosovo and Serbia](#), 15 March 2023

¹⁰⁷ Europa World, [Kosovo, Recent History](#) [accessed 11 April 2024]

¹⁰⁸ China-CEE Institute, [Montenegro External Relations briefing: Kosovo-Montenegro border demarcation problem and its implications for Montenegro](#) (PDF), March 2018; Open Democracy, [The Kosovo-Montenegro border agreement: what you need to know](#), 23 February 2017

agreement, meaning the government was unable to secure ratification by the Kosovo Assembly. These divisions led the LDK-PDL government to lose a no confidence vote, resulting in early elections in June 2017, and a new government being formed by a coalition involving the PDK, AAK and NISMA with Ramush Haradinaj as Prime Minister.¹⁰⁹

The border agreement with Montenegro was then approved by the Kosovo Assembly in March 2018, following an agreement between Kosovo's President Hashim Thaci and Montenegro's President Filip Vujanovic on creating a working group to correct "mistakes" in the document.¹¹⁰

LVV continued to oppose the agreement and sought to obstruct proceedings during the vote, including through the release of tear gas in the Assembly chamber. Ratification of the agreement was presented as a condition for the EU agreeing a visa-liberalisation agreement with Kosovo.¹¹¹

LVV has subsequently led governments in Kosovo and its leader and Prime Minister Albin Kurti (for a brief period in 2020, and then again since 2021) said in 2021 that Kosovo would not implement the agreement.¹¹²

2.6 Proposed land swap with Serbia

In the summer of 2018 there were reports that representatives from Serbia and Kosovo were discussing proposals for a land swap deal which would involve a Serb-majority area in Northern Kosovo (north of the Ibar river and cutting through the city of Mitrovica) being ceded to Serbia while a majority-Albanian area in southern Serbia (the Presevo valley) would be ceded to Kosovo.¹¹³ Serbia's President Vučić and Kosovo's President Thaçi indicated in August 2018 that they were both considering the proposal.¹¹⁴ While there was some encouragement from the USA for the proposal, it was opposed by Germany and other EU Member States.¹¹⁵ There were fears that such a deal would set a precedent for redrawing other territorial boundaries in the Western Balkans and lead to further instability in the region, notably in Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁹ Al Jazeera, [Kosovo ex-fighters declare victory in general election](#), 12 June 2017

¹¹⁰ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, [Kosovo, Montenegro Announce Deal To Settle Border Disputes](#), 17 February 2018

¹¹¹ Reuters, [Kosovo parliament ratifies border deal with Montenegro after stormy session](#), 21 March 2018

¹¹² Balkan Insight, [Montenegro Rules out Changes to Kosovo Border Agreement](#), 23 July 2021

¹¹³ BBC News, [Kosovo-Serbia talks: Why land swap could bridge divide](#), 6 September 2018

¹¹⁴ Politico, [Serbia, Kosovo presidents broach border changes for historic deal](#), 25 August 2018

¹¹⁵ Politico, [Serbia, Kosovo presidents broach border changes for historic deal](#), 25 August 2018; AP News, [Germany, some EU partners oppose Serbia-Kosovo land swap](#), 31 August 2018

¹¹⁶ BBC News, [Kosovo-Serbia talks: Why land swap could bridge divide](#), 6 September 2018; The Guardian, [US-backed Kosovo land-swap border plan under fire from all sides](#), 3 September 2018

The land swap proposal also met with opposition within Kosovo. Kosovo's Prime Minister Haradinaj was highly critical of the idea, saying an exchange of territories would be dangerous and "an invitation for new tragedies in the Balkans".¹¹⁷ The proposal for a Serbia-Kosovo land swap has been raised again subsequently but has not gained momentum. After becoming Prime Minister of Kosovo in 2020, Albin Kurti dismissed the idea, saying Kosovo had suffered enough "losses of people and territory" and criticising pressure from Serbia for the deal.¹¹⁸

2.7

Deteriorating relations in 2018

Aside from the land swap discussions, relations between Kosovo and Serbia appeared to deteriorate over the course 2018.

In January, the leader of Kosovo Serb party Oliver Ivanović, was murdered in Mitrovica. The murder was denounced by Serbia, leading to the temporary suspension of the EU-mediated dialogue.¹¹⁹ However, investigations later led to the indictment naming a former prominent member of the Serb List, the main Kosovo Serb party, as involved in criminal conspiracy to kill Ivanović, along with other Serbs. Members of the Kosovo police force were indicted for tampering with evidence. A trial of some of those accused was ongoing in early 2024.¹²⁰ Ivanović was an opponent of Serb List and critical of the Serbian Government.¹²¹

In March 2018, the Kosovo authorities deported the head of the Serbian Government's Office for Kosovo and Metohija in March, after police arrested him for alleged illegal entry.¹²² In September, the Kosovo authorities barred Serbia's President Vučić from visiting a Serb-majority area in Kosovo.¹²³

In November 2018, Kosovo placed a customs tariff of 100% on Serbian and Bosnian goods after Serbia had blocked Kosovo from joining the international police agency, Interpol. It also required the authorities to prevent goods entering Kosovo if they did not use its constitutional name, the Republic of Kosovo.¹²⁴ Kosovo complained that Serbia was conducting a fierce campaign

¹¹⁷ Al Jazeera, [Serbia proposes territorial swap with Kosovo](#), 26 July 2018

¹¹⁸ Euronews, [Kosovo PM slams idea of Serbia land-swap deal vital for opening door to EU membership](#), 30 April 2020. See also Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, [Slovenia Raises Uncomfortable Questions With Talk Of Bosnia's 'Dissolution'](#), 15 April 2021

¹¹⁹ Europa World [Kosovo, Profile](#) [accessed 11 April 2024]

¹²⁰ Balkan Insight, [Evidence-Tampering Denied at Trial for Kosovo Serb Politician's Murder](#), 18 January 2024

¹²¹ Balkan Insight, [Candles Lit for Kosovo Serb Politician on Murder Anniversary](#), 14 January 2024

¹²² Europa World, [Kosovo, Recent History](#) [accessed 11 April 2024]

¹²³ Europa World, [Kosovo, Recent History](#) [accessed 11 April 2024]

¹²⁴ Reuters, [Kosovo hits Serbia, Bosnia with 100 percent customs fees after Interpol snub](#), 21 November 2018

to prevent international recognition of its independence and had influenced the decision by some states to reverse their recognition of Kosovo.¹²⁵

The measure was criticised by the EU which it said was in clear violation of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA). The USA also criticised the move.¹²⁶ Kosovo imported around some €400m worth of goods from Serbia annually and the decision was seen as bringing trade between the countries to a halt and harming both sides.¹²⁷

The Kosovo government ended the 100% tariff on Serbian and Bosnian goods in April 2020.¹²⁸

2.8 Economic normalisation agreement

Following US sponsored talks, Kosovo and Serbia signed an economic normalisation agreement in Washington (also known as the Washington Agreement) on 4 September 2020. The agreement was signed by Kosovo's Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti and Serbia's President Vučić and observed by US President Donald Trump.¹²⁹ The agreement was described by the Trump administration as a "major breakthrough" in Kosovo-Serbia relations.¹³⁰

The Agreement comprised 16 points covering economic and transport links, including the resumption of direct flights and rail links and construction of connecting roads, border management and mutual recognition of qualifications. Serbia agreed a one-year moratorium on its lobbying campaign of states to derecognise Kosovo, while Kosovo agreed a one-year moratorium on seeking membership of international organisations. Both parties would also work together to locate and identify missing persons and find solutions for refugees and displaced persons. In addition, Kosovo would join the "mini-Schengen" zone announced by Serbia, Albania and North Macedonia in October 2019.¹³¹

Kosovo agreed to recognise Israel (with Israel recognising Kosovo), and both Kosovo and Serbia agreed to designate the Islamic group Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation.¹³² Separately, Serbia committed to follow the USA in moving its Israel embassy to Jerusalem by July 2021, and Kosovo said it would

¹²⁵ BBC News, [Kosovo hits Serbia with 100% trade tariffs amid Interpol row](#), 21 November 2018

¹²⁶ Europa World, [Kosovo, Recent History](#) [accessed 11 April 2024]

¹²⁷ BBC News, [Kosovo hits Serbia with 100% trade tariffs amid Interpol row](#), 21 November 2018

¹²⁸ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, [Kosovo Lifts 100 Percent Tariff On Serbia; Belgrade Calls It 'Fake News'](#), 1 April 2020

¹²⁹ Balkan Insight, [Kosovo and Serbia Sign 'Historic' Deal Under Trump's Auspices](#), 4 September 2020

¹³⁰ American Society of International Law, [The "Washington Agreement" Between Kosovo and Serbia](#), 12 March 2021

¹³¹ Balkan Insight, [Kosovo and Serbia Sign 'Historic' Deal Under Trump's Auspices](#), 4 September 2020

¹³² Balkan Insight, [Kosovo and Serbia Sign 'Historic' Deal Under Trump's Auspices](#), 4 September 2020

also do so.¹³³ The EU warned Serbia against moving its embassy to Jerusalem, as this was contrary to the EU's common position on Jerusalem.¹³⁴ The July 2021 deadline passed without Serbia having moved its embassy in Israel and with President Vučić refusing to commit to the move.¹³⁵ The Serbian government also indicated that Serbia would not move its embassy if Israel recognised Kosovo.¹³⁶ Kosovo, however, opened its embassy in Jerusalem in March 2021, the first European country to do so.¹³⁷

The so-called mini-Schengen zone, later known as the Open Balkan initiative, would bring together Balkan countries seeking EU membership in an area for free movement of goods and people. The leaders of Serbia, Albania and North Macedonia signed an agreement to establish the zone in July 2021. Kosovo, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina were identified as potential members. However, after returning as Kosovo's Prime Minister in 2021, Albin Kurti dismissed the Open Balkan initiative as "a Balkan open to autocracy, corruption and war criminals".¹³⁸

2.9 Elections and changes of government in Kosovo since 2019

Vetëvendosje takes office

Following Prime Minister Haradinaj's resignation in July 2019, there were early elections in October 2019, in which Vetëvendosje (LVV) emerged as the leading party with 26% of the votes, followed by the LDK with 24% and the PDK with 21%.¹³⁹ Commentary on the election suggested that the PDK and other governing parties were punished by voters over perceptions of corruption, with the election resulting in PDK losing government office after 12 years.¹⁴⁰

After four months of negotiations, LVV and the LDK signed a coalition agreement with a new government led by LVV leader Albin Kurti approved by the Kosovo Assembly on 3 February 2020.¹⁴¹ The government was however very short-lived, collapsing on 25 March 2020 after losing a vote of no confidence. The vote was brought by the LDK after Kurti had dismissed one of its ministers without consultation and following disagreements over how to tackle the

¹³³ American Society of International Law, [The "Washington Agreement" Between Kosovo and Serbia](#), 12 March 2021

¹³⁴ Al Jazeera, [EU warns Serbia over Jerusalem embassy move](#), 7 September 2020

¹³⁵ Balkan Insight, [Serbian President Voices Hesitation Over Embassy's Jerusalem Move](#), 1 July 2021

¹³⁶ Europa World, [Serbia, Recent History](#) [accessed 16 April 2022]

¹³⁷ Al Jazeera, [Kosovo opens Israel embassy in Jerusalem](#), 14 March 2021

¹³⁸ Euronews, [As EU membership stalls, Balkan countries make controversial move to create their own mini-Schengen, 31 August 2021](#)

¹³⁹ Balkan Insight, [Kosovo Final Election Result Confirms Vetëvendosje Victory](#),

¹⁴⁰ LSE Blog, [Five lessons from Kosovo's parliamentary elections](#), 18 October 2019

¹⁴¹ Balkan Insight, [Kosovo Parliament Backs New Govt Under Kurti](#), 3 February 2020

Covid-19 pandemic.¹⁴² There had also been divisions over the 100% tariff on Serbian goods and the EU-brokered talks with Serbia, with the LDK supporting calls by the US Government for Kosovo to lift the 100% tariff. Prime Minister Kurti and President Thaçi also clashed over the management of Kosovo's external affairs, with Kurti accusing the latter of doing clandestine deals with Serbia's President.¹⁴³

On 3 June 2020 a new coalition government bringing together the LDK, the AAK, NISMA and Serb List was approved by the Assembly, with Avdullah Hoti of the LDK as Prime Minister. The new government lifted the 100% tariff on Serbian goods, and then later in the year signed the economic normalisation agreements with Serbia in Washington (see section 2.8).¹⁴⁴

Early elections to the Kosovo Assembly were held again on 14 February 2021. This followed a constitutional court ruling that the Assembly's appointment of the government in June 2020 was invalid as one of the deputy's voting had a recent criminal conviction.¹⁴⁵ In January 2021, the court barred Kurti from contesting the elections, as he had received a suspended prison sentence in January 2018 for involvement in the 2015 tear gas protest in the Assembly against the border agreement with Montenegro.¹⁴⁶

LVV received just over 50% of the votes cast in the election, the highest vote share recorded by any party since 1999, with 58 out of the 120 deputies. The PDK received 17% and the LDK received 13%.¹⁴⁷ LVV was then able to form a government in March 2021 with the support of parties from minority communities. This was the first Kosovo government since 1999 not based on more than one of the ethnic Albanian parties. Despite being barred from contesting the election, Kurti returned as Prime Minister as he did not need to hold an Assembly seat to be appointed.¹⁴⁸ The new government said that the fight against corruption and job creation were its priorities.¹⁴⁹

Indictment and resignation of President Thaçi

In November 2020, President Thaçi resigned after the Kosovo Specialist Chamber in The Hague confirmed his indictment on charges of committing war crimes as a KLA commander in the 1990s.¹⁵⁰ Vjosa Osmani, Speaker of the Kosovo Assembly, then became Acting President, before being replaced as Speaker and Acting President by Glauk Konjufca following the February 2021

¹⁴² BBC News, [Coronavirus row helps topple Kosovo government](#), 26 March 2020

¹⁴³ Europa World, [Kosovo: Recent History](#) [accessed 18 April 2024]

¹⁴⁴ Europa World, [Kosovo: Recent History](#) [accessed 18 April 2024]

¹⁴⁵ Europa World, [Kosovo: Recent History](#) [accessed 18 April 2024]

¹⁴⁶ Balkan Insight, [Kosovo Ex-PM Albin Kurti Barred from Running in Election](#), 26 January 2021

¹⁴⁷ Europa World, [Kosovo: Recent History](#) [accessed 18 April 2024]

¹⁴⁸ Balkan Insight, [Kosovo Parliament Elects Albin Kurti as Prime Minister](#), 22 March 2021

¹⁴⁹ Europa World, [Kosovo: Recent History](#) [accessed 18 April 2024]

¹⁵⁰ Al Jazeera, [Kosovo president resigns to face war crimes charges](#), 5 November 2020; Politico, [Thaçi quits as Kosovo's president after war crimes indictment](#), 5 November 2020

election.¹⁵¹ Osmani was however then elected President by the Assembly in April 2021.¹⁵²

The trial of Thaçi and three other KLA commanders for war crimes began in April 2023. Thaçi pleaded not guilty to all charges.¹⁵³ The trial was still ongoing in early 2024.¹⁵⁴

2.10

License plate dispute, 2021-2022

In June 2021 Kurti and President Vučić of Serbia met for a new round of EU-brokered talks. However, the process soon stalled as new tensions developed over a vehicle license plates disputes. Protestors from the Serb community in Kosovo blockaded the border with Serbia after drivers of vehicles with Serbian licence plates were told by the Kosovo authorities that they had to replace them with temporary “RKS” Republic of Kosovo plates.¹⁵⁵ The Kosovo government sent special forces to keep the border open, leading the Serbian government to send military jets and tanks to the scene. Both Kosovo and Serbia were asked to calm tensions by the EU and US. Following an [EU-mediated agreement](#) at the end of September 2021, the two sides agreed to allow NATO KFOR troops to guard the border crossings.¹⁵⁶

Tensions continued over the issue in 2022, with the Kosovan government continuing to insist ethnic Serbs replace Serbian license plates with Kosovo ones. After the Kosovo government said it would impose fines on those refusing to replace their license plates and the suspension of an ethnic Serb police chief for refusing to implement the policy, there was a mass resignation of ethnic Serbs from all of Kosovo's national institutions in November 2022. This included resignations from 600 ethnic Serb police officers.¹⁵⁷ Serb magistrates, mayors and members of the Assembly also resigned.¹⁵⁸

In December 2022 the Serbian army said it was at its “highest level of combat readiness” following the escalating tensions and President Vučić said he would “take all measures to protect our people and preserve Serbia”.¹⁵⁹ The Serbian government accused Kosovo of plotting “terrorism against Serbs” in the Serb-majority areas.¹⁶⁰ Kosovo said Serbia was behind “paramilitary

¹⁵¹ Balkan Insight, [Kosovo Parliament Elects Albin Kurti as Prime Minister](#), 22 March 2021

¹⁵² Al Jazeera, [Kosovo parliament elects Vjosa Osmani as new president](#), 4 April 2021

¹⁵³ Al Jazeera, [Ex-Kosovo president Hashim Thaci pleads not guilty to war crimes](#), 3 April 2023

¹⁵⁴ Balkan Insight, [Former Kosovo Guerrilla Officer Bolsters Defence Case in Hague Trial](#), 22 February 2024

¹⁵⁵ The Guardian, [Tensions rise at Kosovo border as number plate row escalates](#), 2 October 2021

¹⁵⁶ Euronews, [NATO-led mission at Kosovo-Serbia border after deal to ease tensions](#), 3 October 2021

¹⁵⁷ BBC News, [Kosovo: Serbia puts troops on high alert over rising tensions](#), 27 December 2022

¹⁵⁸ Europa World, [Kosovo: Recent History](#) [accessed 18 April 2024]

¹⁵⁹ BBC News, [Kosovo: Serbia puts troops on high alert over rising tensions](#), 27 December 2022

¹⁶⁰ BBC News, [Kosovo: Serbia puts troops on high alert over rising tensions](#), 27 December 2022

formations” that had set up roadblocks in the majority Serb areas of north Kosovo.¹⁶¹

2.11

New Kosovo-Serbia agreement on normalisation of relations

Following pressure from the EU and the USA, Kosovo and Serbia began discussions on the basis of an EU proposal (known as the “European proposal”) for the normalisation of relations originally presented by France and Germany in September 2022. The proposal was based on the 1972 agreement to normalise relations made by East and West Germany.¹⁶² Kosovo’s Prime Minister Kurti and Serbia’s President Vučić reached an agreement on “the path to normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia” on 27 February 2023.¹⁶³ Under the agreement, while Serbia would still not recognise Kosovo as an independent state it would recognise certain features of Kosovo’s statehood.¹⁶⁴ This would involve recognition of official Kosovo documents and agreement not to block Kosovo’s membership of international organisations.¹⁶⁵

The 11-point agreement provides that the two sides will “develop normal, good-neighbourly relations with each other on the basis of equal rights” and mutually recognise their respective documents and national symbols, including passports, diplomas, licence plates, and customs stamps. Serbia will not object to Kosovo’s membership of any international organisation, neither party will block the other’s path towards EU membership and the two sides will exchange Permanent Missions.¹⁶⁶ There will be “an appropriate level of self-management for the Serbian community in Kosovo”, protection of Serbian religious and cultural heritage sites and formalisation of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo.¹⁶⁷

The two sides would also deepen co-operation in a range of policy sectors, including the economy, science and technology, transport and

¹⁶¹ BBC News, [Kosovo: Serbia puts troops on high alert over rising tensions](#), 27 December 2022

¹⁶² Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, [The Normalisation of Relations between Kosovo and Serbia](#), 15 March 2023

¹⁶³ European External Action Service, [Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: Press remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell after High-Level Meeting with President Vučić and Prime Minister Kurti](#), 27 February 2023. See also Euronews, [Serbia, Kosovo leaders back EU plan, top diplomat says](#), 28 February 2023

¹⁶⁴ Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, [The Normalisation of Relations between Kosovo and Serbia](#), 15 March 2023

¹⁶⁵ BTI blog, [Serbia and Kosovo: EU-Backed Agreement Seeks Regional Stability](#), 31 May 2023

¹⁶⁶ European External Action Service [Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: Agreement on the path to normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia](#), 27 February 2023

¹⁶⁷ European External Action Service [Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: Agreement on the path to normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia](#), 27 February 2023

communication and law enforcement. A joint committee chaired by the EU would be established to monitor implementation of the agreement.¹⁶⁸

According to EU High Representative for foreign and security policy Josep Borrell, this would mean “that people can move freely between Serbia and Kosovo using their own passports — mutually recognised — IDs, and license plates” and also allow for mutual recognition of qualifications, while the rights of the Serbian community in Kosovo would be protected.¹⁶⁹ There was also a commitment from Vučić and Kurti to ensure that Serbia and Kosovo “refrain from any uncoordinated action that could lead to renewed tensions on the ground and derail these negotiations”.¹⁷⁰

Borrell said work was still needed on how to implement the agreement. This would come in an annex to the agreement, which was yet to be agreed.¹⁷¹ Vučić said that there had been no talk on how to put the plan into action and that he “hoped we would be able to agree to some compromises”, but that “Kurti was not ready for that”. Kurti, on the other hand said that both leaders accepted the text but that the “Serb side was not ready to sign it”.¹⁷²

On 18 March 2023, Borrell said that the leaders of Kosovo and Serbia had reached an agreement on the implementing annex to the February deal, although Vučić said that there had not yet been agreement on all points.¹⁷³ The implementation annex included a commitment by Kosovo to launch immediate negotiations within the EU-facilitated dialogue “on establishing specific arrangements and guarantees to ensure an appropriate level of self-management for the Serbian community in Kosovo”. The parties also committed to setting up the joint monitoring committee chaired by the EU, and the EU said it would organise a donor conference to set up an investment and financial aid package for Kosovo and Serbia. However, these funds would not be released until the EU had determined that all provisions of the agreement had been fully implemented.¹⁷⁴ Doubts remained over the commitment of the two parties to the annex, with the agreement being made orally and without any documents been signed by either leader.¹⁷⁵

The establishment of the Association/Community of Serb Municipalities continues to be a sticking point, with ethnic Serbs in Kosovo and the Serbian government complaining that Kosovo has not honoured the commitment for

¹⁶⁸ European External Action Service, [Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: Agreement on the path to normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia](#), 27 February 2023

¹⁶⁹ European External Action Service, [Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: Press remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell after High-Level Meeting with President Vučić and Prime Minister Kurti](#), 27 February 2023. See also Euronews, [Serbia, Kosovo leaders back EU plan, top diplomat says](#), 28 February 2023

¹⁷⁰ Euronews, [Serbia, Kosovo leaders back EU plan, top diplomat says](#), 28 February 2023

¹⁷¹ Reuters, [Serbia, Kosovo back normalising ties but need more talks -EU's Borrell](#), 27 February 2023

¹⁷² Euronews, [Serbia, Kosovo leaders back EU plan, top diplomat says](#), 28 February 2023

¹⁷³ Reuters, [Serbia, Kosovo reach agreement to implement EU-backed deal normalising ties](#), 19 March 2023

¹⁷⁴ European External Action Service, [Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: Implementation Annex to the Agreement on the Path to Normalisation of Relations between Kosovo and Serbia](#), 18 March 2023

¹⁷⁵ Europa World, [Kosovo: Recent History](#) [accessed 18 April 2024]

its establishment in the 2013 normalisation agreement. Kosovo's Prime Minister Kurti has previously expressed his opposition to the Association/Community, claiming that it would result in a mini-state within Kosovo controlled by Serbia, endanger Kosovo's sovereignty and destabilise the country.¹⁷⁶ He has also demanded that Serbia first establish a similar association of Albanian-majority municipalities in the Presevo Valley.¹⁷⁷

There is a broader concern in Kosovo that such an entity might promote the goal of a Greater Serbia and/or develop in a similar way to the Republika Srpska (RS), the Serb-majority territory within Bosnia and Herzegovina whose leadership has adopted an assertive secessionist stance in recent years.¹⁷⁸ In May 2023, Kurti said Kosovo would not allow the creation of anything that would look like the RS or with "a destructive essence that would undermine the citizenship of Kosovo".¹⁷⁹

2.12

Further escalations in 2023

Violence following local elections in April 2023

Tensions escalated again in April 2023, when ethnic Serbs boycotted local elections in Kosovo. These had been held to replace the vacant posts created after the withdrawal of Kosovo Serbs from Kosovo's public bodies in November 2022.¹⁸⁰

The boycott was supported by Serbia. The boycott allowed ethnic Albanians to win control of local councils in these areas, on a turnout of 3.7%.¹⁸¹ Ethnic Albanian mayors were then escorted to their offices by armed Kosovo police, leading to violent clashes with ethnic Serbs. The EU and US criticised the Kosovo authorities for exacerbating the tensions by seeking to install the mayors in office in this way.¹⁸²

KFOR troops were also injured in subsequent clashes with Serb protestors, with attacks on the troops condemned by the USA and NATO.¹⁸³ NATO subsequently sent a further 700 peacekeeping troops to Kosovo, bringing its contingent up to 4000, and said it was ready to send more troops if necessary.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁶ BBC News, [Kosovo: Serbia puts troops on high alert over rising tensions](#), 27 December 2022

¹⁷⁷ Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, [The Normalisation of Relations between Kosovo and Serbia](#), 15 March 2023

¹⁷⁸ European Policy Centre, [The Association of Serb Majority Municipalities: The crux of tensions](#), 14 June 2023

¹⁷⁹ Euronews, [Serbia angry after Kosovo gets closer to joining Council of Europe](#), 17 April 2024

¹⁸⁰ European Policy Centre, [The Association of Serb Majority Municipalities: The crux of tensions](#), 14 June 2023

¹⁸¹ BBC News, [Kosovo: Fresh clashes as Nato troops called in to northern towns](#), 30 May 2023

¹⁸² BBC News, [Kosovo: Serbia puts troops on high alert over rising tensions](#), 30 May 2023

¹⁸³ Reuters, [NATO soldiers injured in Kosovo clashes with Serb protesters](#), 30 May 2023

¹⁸⁴ BBC News, [Kosovo: Nato ready to send more troops after unrest](#), 1 June 2023

A joint EU and Quint (the USA, UK, France, Germany and Italy) statement at the end of May condemned the Kosovo authorities' decision to force access to municipal buildings in order to install the mayors, cautioned against further threats or actions and called on the mayors to show restraint and commit to represent all communities.¹⁸⁵ Serbia's President Vučić called for the mayors' removal.¹⁸⁶

The EU High Representative, Josep Borrell, invited Kurti and Vučić for urgent talks at the end of June 2023 to try to resolve the crisis and end the violent clashes in Kosovo. However, the two leaders refused to meet each other and instead held separate talks with Borrell.¹⁸⁷

Borrell said the EU had repeatedly called on the two sides to help restore calm and return to the negotiating table, but that so far "all we have been witnessing is just the opposite". He said there was however agreement on the need for new local elections. The EU had threatened Kosovo with political consequences, including suspension of high-level visits and financial cooperation if it did not change its position on the elections.¹⁸⁸

Following the talks Vučić said that Serbs in Kosovo no longer want to live under "Kurti's terror," and that no face-to-face talks were likely anytime soon. Tensions had continued in June, with grenades exploding near Kosovo police stations in the north of the country, and Kosovo Serbs staging protests in front of municipality buildings. Vučić also said that there could be no negotiations until Serbs who had been arrested for attacks on Kosovo police and NATO-led peacekeepers were released.¹⁸⁹

After pressure from the EU and USA, the Kosovo government agreed in September 2023 to annul the local election results. However, it then held a referendum on 21 April 2024 in the Serb areas of northern Kosovo on whether the mayors should be dismissed. This was boycotted by the Kosovo Serbs, with the Serb List party saying that the mayors should simply have resigned ahead of new elections.¹⁹⁰

Monastery shooting in September 2023

There were further tensions at the end of September 2023 when 30 heavily armed men clashed with police after blocking a road near the border with Serbia. They then barricaded themselves in a monastery. Kosovo police eventually cleared the monastery, shooting three of the armed men, later

¹⁸⁵ European External Action Service, [Statement from the Embassies of France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States and European Union in Kosovo](#), 28 May 2023

¹⁸⁶ BBC News, [Kosovo: Nato ready to send more troops after unrest](#), 1 June 2023

¹⁸⁷ Al Jazeera, [No breakthrough at EU talks to ease Serbia, Kosovo tensions](#), 22 June 2023

¹⁸⁸ Al Jazeera, [No breakthrough at EU talks to ease Serbia, Kosovo tensions](#), 22 June 2023

¹⁸⁹ Al Jazeera, [No breakthrough at EU talks to ease Serbia, Kosovo tensions](#), 22 June 2023

¹⁹⁰ Reuters, [North Kosovo Serbs boycott referendum on removing ethnic Albanian mayors](#), 21 April 2024

confirmed to be Kosovo Serbs. One police officer was also killed.¹⁹¹ There were several arrests and a significant number of weapons seized.¹⁹²

Kurti said the gunmen were “Serbia-sponsored criminals” with a “military and police background”, financed and motivated by Belgrade. Vučić said Kurti bore responsibility for the incident after months of “provocations” and said that Kurti’s “only wish is to drag us into a war with Nato and that’s the only thing he does all day”.¹⁹³

The Russian Foreign Ministry also blamed Kurti for inciting conflict and warned that any attempt to escalate the situation was likely to take “the entire Balkan region over a dangerous precipice”. It also said that the Kosovo police had “discredited themselves through systematic punitive acts against the Serbian community” and warned of “ethnic cleansing” by “Kosovo Albanian regions”.¹⁹⁴

Milan Radoicic, a leading figure in Serb List, later admitted organising the armed group but said that the Serbian government was not involved.¹⁹⁵

Following the incident, the NATO contingent in Kosovo was reinforced, with 200 British troops and 100 Romanian troops bolstering the KFOR presence in October 2023.¹⁹⁶ This brought KFOR troop numbers up to over 4500, drawn from 27 NATO partners.¹⁹⁷

At the beginning of October, the US Government said that Serbia had sent a “large military deployment” of tanks and artillery to its border with Kosovo and urged the Serbian government to withdraw them.¹⁹⁸ The Serbian government later said it had reduced its troop presence on the border.¹⁹⁹

2.13

EU attempts to revive talks

The EU sought to revive peace talks with the leaders of Kosovo and Serbia at the end of October 2023, presenting a plan for the normalisation of relations based on the previous agreement in February.²⁰⁰ Kurti and Vučić separately met with EU officials and the leaders of France, Germany and Italy on 26 October. Borrell said that the two parties were unable to agree to a proposal

¹⁹¹ Euronews, [Kosovo PM supports more NATO troops in the Balkans as tensions with Serbia flare](#), 30 September 2023

¹⁹² BBC News, [Kosovo and Serbia row over monastery gun battle](#), 25 September 2023

¹⁹³ BBC News, [Kosovo and Serbia row over monastery gun battle](#), 25 September 2023

¹⁹⁴ Euronews, [Russia's Balkan power play continues as Kosovo tensions flare](#), 27 September 2023

¹⁹⁵ BBC News, [Kosovo: Why is violence flaring between ethnic Serbs and Albanians?](#), 2 October 2023

¹⁹⁶ NATO, [NATO reinforcements arrive in Kosovo](#), 6 October 2023.

¹⁹⁷ NATO, [NATO's role in Kosovo](#) [accessed 23 April 2024]; Ministry of Defence, [UK reinforcements arrive in Kosovo for NATO peacekeeping mission](#), 6 October 2023

¹⁹⁸ BBC News, [Kosovo: Why is violence flaring between ethnic Serbs and Albanians?](#), 2 October 2023

¹⁹⁹ Euronews, [Withdrawal of Serbian troops from Kosovo border 'welcome'](#), 2 October 2023

²⁰⁰ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, [Leaders of Serbia, Kosovo End Talks In Brussels With No Sign Of Progress On Normalizing Relations](#), 26 October 2023

on the key sticking point of establishing the Association/Community of Serb Municipalities Kosovo “without preconditions that were unacceptable to the other party”. Borrell said that the EU would continue working in order to get an agreement.²⁰¹

Following the meeting, the two sides blamed each other for the lack of progress. The Kosovo government said that Kurti was ready to sign the agreement for the normalisation of relations with Serbia reached in February, but that Vučić had refused to sign the agreement and asked for an accompanying letter to be accepted. The Kosovo government said that Vučić’s letter would practically annul the principles of the basic agreement and other proposals. Vučić said that someone was “playing games” to shift the blame, that Serbia was ready to sign an agreement on the formation of the Association/Community but did not accept Kosovo’s membership in international organisations or its independence.²⁰²

At the beginning of February 2024, the Kosovo authorities closed down some Serbia-funded parallel institutions providing social and health services in Serb municipalities.²⁰³ This was criticised by the USA, and by the Organization for Security and Cooperation Mission in Kosovo which said the sudden closures risked “having a negative impact on individuals and families by restricting their access to some essential services”.²⁰⁴

Vučić again refused to sign the agreement when challenged by Kurti at a meeting with the United Nations Security Council on 9 February 2024.²⁰⁵ In an interview on 19 March, Kurti said that Kosovo would allow the formation of an Association of Serb Municipalities once Serbia signed the normalisation agreement. He said that Serbia had violated eight out of the 11 articles of the agreement.²⁰⁶

On 17 March 2024, Borrell issued a statement marking the one-year anniversary of the agreement of the normalisation agreement implementation annex the following day. He said it was “regrettable” that despite extensive efforts by the EU and the broader international community, there had been “so far very limited progress by both Kosovo and Serbia in implementing the obligations they accepted under this Agreement”. He restated the EU’s view that the agreement was “binding in its entirety under international law” and that the lack of implementation endangered the

²⁰¹ France 24, [Kosovo, Serbia leaders break off talks despite EU pressure for breakthrough](#), 27 October 2023

²⁰² Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, [Leaders of Serbia, Kosovo End Talks In Brussels With No Sign Of Progress On Normalizing Relations](#), 26 October 2023

²⁰³ Balkan Insight, [Kosovo Euro Rule, Closure of Belgrade-Run Offices, Draw International Criticism](#), 5 February 2024

²⁰⁴ Security Council Report, [What’s in Blue: Kosovo Briefing](#), 7 February 2024; US Embassy in Kosovo, [Statement By Ambassador Of The United States To The Republic Of Kosovo, Jeffrey M. Hovenier](#), 3 February 2024

²⁰⁵ Euractiv, [Vucic refuses to sign EU agreements with Kosovo during showdown at UN Security Council](#), 9 February 2024

²⁰⁶ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, [Kurti Says Won't Change Suspension Of Serbian Dinar Use In Kosovo](#), 19 March 2024

parties' integration with the EU and "their reputation as credible and reliable partners". He said it was time for both Kosovo and Serbia to "break the current vicious cycle of crises and tensions and move into a new - European - era".²⁰⁷

The EU agreed on 15 April 2024 to amend the negotiating chapters for Serbia's accession to the EU, so that implementation of the March 2023 implementation agreement becomes a condition for Serbia joining the EU.²⁰⁸

2.14

Kosovo central bank decision to make euro only valid currency

Following the NATO intervention in 1999, Kosovo adopted the German Deutsche mark as its common currency. Upon its entry into circulation at the beginning of 2002, it then adopted the euro as its currency.²⁰⁹ However, the Serbian dinar has remained in circulation in the majority Serb areas of the country, particularly in northern Kosovo, with many Kosovo Serbs receiving payments or financial assistance from Serbia.²¹⁰ On 18 January 2024, the Central Bank of Kosovo announced a new policy on cash operations which made the euro "the only valid currency for conducting cash payment transactions".²¹¹ This effectively suspended the use of the Serbian dinar in Kosovo. Serbian President Vučić described the decision as an attempt to "ethnically cleanse" Kosovo Serbs and said that Serbia would continue to send pensions and salaries to Kosovo Serbs in Serbian dinars.²¹²

A statement by the Quint said the decision would have a "direct impact on the everyday lives of the overwhelming majority of Kosovo Serbs who receive payments/ financial assistance from Serbia" and would impact in particular on schools and hospitals. It called for Kosovo to suspend the decision and allow for a "sufficiently long period of transition" with clear and effective public communication, and that the issue should be discussed further in the framework of the EU Facilitated Dialogue.²¹³ The European Commission also

²⁰⁷ European External Action Service, [Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: Statement by the High Representative on the anniversary of the Agreement on the Path to Normalisation and its Implementation Annex](#), 17 March 2024. See also European External Action Service, [Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: Time to take responsibility and move towards the EU](#), 16 March 2024

²⁰⁸ European Western Balkans, [EU Permanent Representatives agree on amending Chapter 35 with Serbia to include Ohrid agreement](#), 16 April 2024

²⁰⁹ Central Bank of the Republic of Kosovo, [Kosovo's Experience in euroisation of its economy](#) [accessed 24 April 2024]

²¹⁰ Financial Times, [Kosovo defies western pressure that it delay Serbian currency ban](#), 31 January 2024

²¹¹ Financial Times, [Kosovo defies western pressure that it delay Serbian currency ban](#), 31 January 2024

²¹² Security Council Report, [What's In Blue: Kosovo briefing](#), 7 February 2024

²¹³ US Embassy in Kosovo, [Statement of Quint Embassies on recent regulation of the Central Bank of Kosovo \(CBK\)](#), 28 January 2024

expressed regret at the decision.²¹⁴ The Kosovo government said on 1 February that it would allow a transitional period for the decision to take effect.²¹⁵

In March 2024, the US envoy to the Western Balkans said he was very concerned that the decision to ban the use of the dinar could cause “an emerging humanitarian issue” for Kosovo Serbs.²¹⁶ Kurti said the decision was made by the Central Bank to combat financial crime as Kosovo “cannot allow bagful of dinars in cash to enter our country”. However, money could be sent through official channels “with full transparency”. He said that Serbia could send dinars and “we will exchange them into euros and Serbs in Kosovo can benefit from that financial aid”.²¹⁷

²¹⁴ Euronews, [Phasing out dinar in Kosovo: European Commission calls for transition period](#), 2 February 2024

²¹⁵ Reuters, [Kosovo Serbs carry on using dinars as government allows transitional phase](#), 1 February 2024

²¹⁶ AP News, [US official says Kosovo's ban on dinar use may spark a 'humanitarian issue' for ethnic Serbs](#), 14 March 2024

²¹⁷ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, [Kurti Says Won't Change Suspension Of Serbian Dinar Use In Kosovo](#), 19 March 2024

3 Recognition and international organisations

3.1 International recognition of Kosovo

Kosovo's declaration of independence on 17 February 2008 was recognised the next day by a group of states, including the USA, UK, France, Albania and Turkey. Other countries, including Australia, Germany and Italy followed in the next few days and by the end of 2008, the majority of EU Member States and all G7 countries had recognised Kosovo's independence.²¹⁸ Other Western Balkan states, including Montenegro, North Macedonia and Croatia had also recognised Kosovo by the end of 2008. As of 24 April 2024, 90 countries had recognised Kosovo, and 78 did not recognise Kosovo. Russia, China and most Asian, African and Latin American countries do not recognise Kosovo.²¹⁹

In addition, 13 countries that had previously recognised Kosovo have later derecognised it, and the position on recognition by some states remained unclear. The derecognitions occurred between 2018 and 2020, mainly from African and Pacific island states and followed a campaign by Serbia to persuade states to derecognise Kosovo.²²⁰

UK and US position on recognition

At the emergency session of the United Nations Security Council on 18 February 2008, the UK representative set out the UK's position on recognition of Kosovo, and explained that it "was not ideal for Kosovo to become independent without the consent of Serbia and without consensus of the Council" but that the "unique circumstances of the violent break-up of former Yugoslavia had made it a sui generis case, which created no precedent".²²¹ He also said that the legacy of Milosevic's oppression of Kosovo in the 1990s "had made it impossible for Kosovo to return to control by Belgrade".²²²

²¹⁸ Chatham House, [Kosovo: International Law and Recognition](#) (PDF), Summary of the Chatham House International Law Discussion Group meeting held on 22 April 2008.

²¹⁹ See [Status of Kosovo, Recognitions & Derecognitions](#), and interactive map and timeline produced by political scientists and legal scholars from the University of Belgrade and Union University (Belgrade).

²²⁰ See [Status of Kosovo, Recognitions & Derecognitions](#) and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, [Kosovo: Between universal non-recognition and 'derecognitions'](#) (PDF), September 2020

²²¹ United Nations, [Security Council meets in emergency session following Kosovo's declaration of independence, with members sharply divided on issue](#), 18 February 2008

²²² United Nations, [Security Council meets in emergency session following Kosovo's declaration of independence, with members sharply divided on issue](#), 18 February 2008

The US representative set out the case for US recognition of Kosovo in a similar way and said that the USA “would stand with Kosovo as it assumed responsibility for its destiny”.²²³

Recognition within the EU

Among the states not recognising Kosovo are five Member States of the EU: Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain.²²⁴ Commentaries on the position of these states note that some have their own secessionist movements (notably Spain) or large national minorities which they do not wish to encourage or set a precedent for. Parallels have been drawn in Romania between Kosovo and the breakaway state of Transnistria in neighbouring (and largely ethnic-Romanian) Moldova. In the case of Cyprus, parallels have been drawn with the establishment of a separate state in northern Cyprus (not recognised internationally other than by Turkey) after the 1974 Turkish invasion, while the position of Greece is interpreted as in solidarity with Cyprus.²²⁵

EU statement on recognition

The Council of the EU (Ministers of the EU Member States, which included at the time the UK) met on 18 February 2008 (the day after Kosovo’s declaration of independence). Its conclusions noted that “Member States will decide, in accordance with national practice and international law, on their relations with Kosovo”. Its conclusions also stated that:

The Council reiterates the EU's adherence to the principles of the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act, *inter alia* the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity and all UN Security Council resolutions. It underlines its conviction that in view of the conflict of the 1990s and the extended period of international administration under SCR 1244, Kosovo constitutes a *sui generis* case which does not call into question these principles and resolutions.²²⁶

EU documents and statements when referring to Kosovo usually include an asterisk referring to a note that the designation “is without prejudice to positions on status” and is in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1244/1999 (which authorised the UN transitional administration and said this would facilitate a political process to determine the future status of Kosovo²²⁷) and to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence (see section 3.2).

²²³ United Nations, [Security Council meets in emergency session following Kosovo’s declaration of independence, with members sharply divided on issue](#), 18 February 2008

²²⁴ European Parliament, Fact Sheets on the European Union, [The Western Balkans](#), November 2023

²²⁵ Emerging Europe, [Why do Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia, Spain not recognise Kosovo?](#), 3 February 2021; Europa World, [Kosovo, Profile](#) [accessed 25 April 2024]

²²⁶ Council of EU, [2851st Council meeting, General Affairs and External Relations, External Relations, Brussels, 18 February 2008](#), 18 February 2008

²²⁷ United Nations Peacemaker, [Security Council Resolution 1244 \(1999\) on the situation relating Kosovo](#) [accessed 29 February 2024]

3.2 International Court of Justice Opinion on Kosovo's declaration of independence

On 8 October 2008 the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution, drafted by Serbia, to seek an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on whether the “unilateral declaration of independence by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government of Kosovo” was in accordance with international law. There were 77 votes in favour of the referral and 6 against (including the USA and Albania) with 74 abstentions (including the UK).²²⁸

The ICJ Advisory Opinion delivered on 22 July 2010 concluded that the 2008 declaration of independence by Kosovo “did not violate international law”. It also concluded that it was not required by the question posed to decide whether international law conferred a positive entitlement upon Kosovo to declare independence. The ruling therefore solely addressed the question of whether a rule of international law prohibited such a declaration.²²⁹

3.3 Potential membership of United Nations

In January 2008, Russia warned that an independent Kosovo could never join the United Nations.²³⁰ Both Russia and China have continued to oppose Kosovo's independence. The opposition of these two permanent members of the United Nations Security Council would obstruct any attempt by Kosovo to join the United Nations (UN) given that UN membership requires the recommendation of nine of the 15 members of the UN Security Council (UNSC) which is subject to the veto of any permanent member. Following a UNSC recommendation, admission of a new member state requires a two-thirds majority vote in the United Nations General Assembly.²³¹

3.4 Membership of other international organisations

Kosovo has been able to join some international organisations. These include the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which it joined in 2009, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development which it joined in 2012. In June 2014, it was admitted to the Council of Europe's advisory body

²²⁸ United Nations, [Backing request By Serbia, General Assembly decides to seek International Court of Justice ruling on legality of Kosovo's independence](#), 8 October 2008

²²⁹ International Court of Justice, [Accordance with international law of the unilateral declaration of independence in respect of Kosovo](#) [accessed 24 April 2024]

²³⁰ New York Times, [An independent Kosovo can never join UN, Russia warns](#), 17 January 2008

²³¹ United Nations, [About UN Membership](#) [accessed 24 April 2024]

on constitutional law matters, the Venice Commission.²³² Kosovo was also admitted as an observer to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe from January 2017.²³³

Serbia has worked to block Kosovo's membership of other organisations. In 2015 Serbia, with the support of Russia, persuaded enough states to vote against Kosovo's application to join the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which needed two-thirds of member votes in favour.²³⁴

3.5 Application to join Council of Europe

In May 2022, Kosovo's government indicated it would be applying for membership of the Council of Europe (CoE) as it believed it would now have enough support among member states for its accession following Russia's expulsion from the organisation.²³⁵ Russia was expelled from the CoE in March 2022 in the wake of its invasion of Ukraine.²³⁶

Accession to the CoE requires approval by a two-thirds majority in the Committee of Ministers (foreign ministers of the Member States).²³⁷ In April 2023, the CoE Committee of Ministers voted by a two-thirds majority to initiate the accession process, forwarding Kosovo's application to the Parliamentary Assembly of the CoE (PACE) for an opinion. 33 members of the CoE voted in favour, with seven against and five abstentions.²³⁸

President Vučić of Serbia reacted angrily to the vote, and said Serbia would vote against Kosovo's membership, also accusing other countries of thinking "they have the right to lie and deceive us and interpret things as they see fit, not as written or agreed upon".²³⁹

PACE adopted a report setting out its opinion on Kosovo's application on 16 April 2024. The report, adopted by a large majority, recommended that Kosovo be invited to become a member of the CoE. This would also involve monitoring its fulfilment of a set of commitments for accession, including on the establishment of the Association of Serb municipalities. The report acknowledged the "unprecedented circumstances" of the application, given that a number of CoE states do not recognise Kosovo as a state. It invited the Committee of Ministers to ensure that Kosovo's membership was "without

²³² Europa World, [Kosovo, Recent History](#) [accessed 24 April 2024]

²³³ Balkan Insight, [Kosovo Hails CoE Observer Status as Diplomatic Win](#), 14 October 2016

²³⁴ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, [Serbia Claims 'Victory' As Kosovo Is Kept Out Of UNESCO](#), 9 November 2015

²³⁵ Euronews, [Kosovo hopes to join Council of Europe after Russia's exit](#), 13 May 2022

²³⁶ Council of Europe, [The Russian Federation is excluded from the Council of Europe](#), 16 March 2022

²³⁷ Article 4 and Article 20c, [Statute of the Council of Europe](#) (PDF), 5 May 1949

²³⁸ Euractiv, [Kosovo progresses to next stage of Council of Europe membership](#), 25 April 2023

²³⁹ Euractiv, [Kosovo progresses to next stage of Council of Europe membership](#), 25 April 2023

prejudice to individual member states' positions as regards the statehood of Kosovo".²⁴⁰

Serbia was highly critical of the decision, with its foreign minister describing it as "a day of shame" for PACE as "for the first time in history the membership of something that is not a state [Kosovo] and which does not meet the basic requirements in the domain of human rights and freedoms, has been recommended".²⁴¹ In March 2024, in discussing the prospect of Kosovo joining the CoE, President Vučić said "go with that and then we'll see if Serbia stays in the Council of Europe or not".²⁴²

3.6 Application to join EU

The EU has a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Kosovo which has been in force since April 2016.²⁴³ As with all other included in the EU's stabilisation and association process for the Western Balkans, Kosovo is considered a "potential candidate" to join the EU.²⁴⁴ All other Western Balkan countries have subsequently been granted EU "candidate" status by the European Council (heads of state and government of the EU). However, this has not occurred for Kosovo.²⁴⁵

In December 2022, Kosovo formally submitted its application for EU membership.²⁴⁶ Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the EU has accelerated the accession process for the Western Balkans and moved quickly to assess suitability for membership and grant candidate status to other new applicants for membership. This has not been the case for Kosovo.²⁴⁷ Council of the EU conclusions on enlargement and the stabilisation process in December 2022 and December 2023 discuss developments in Kosovo and refer to its "European path" but do not refer to its application to join the EU.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁰ Council of Europe, [PACE recommends that Kosovo* becomes a member of the Council of Europe](#), 17 April 2024

²⁴¹ Euronews, [Serbia angry after Kosovo gets closer to joining Council of Europe](#), 17 April 2024

²⁴² bne IntelliNews, [Serbia threatens to quit Council of Europe if Kosovo is allowed to join](#), 24 March 2024

²⁴³ Council of EU, [Stabilisation and Association Agreement \(SAA\) between the European Union and Kosovo signed](#), 27 October 2015. See also European Commission, European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiation, [Kosovo](#) [accessed 25 April 2024]

²⁴⁴ European Commission, [Stabilisation and Association Agreement](#) [accessed 21 February 2024];

European Commission, [Steps towards joining](#) [accessed 21 February 2024]

²⁴⁵ For further discussion of the EU accession process for the Western Balkans, see House of Commons Library briefing paper, [EU enlargement: Ukraine, the Western Balkans and the accession process](#)

²⁴⁶ DW, [Kosovo formally applies for EU membership](#), 15 December 2022

²⁴⁷ See House of Commons Library briefing paper, [EU enlargement: Ukraine, the Western Balkans and the accession process](#)

²⁴⁸ European Commission, [Council conclusions on enlargement and stabilisation and association process](#), 13 December 2022

The December 2023 Council conclusions stated that normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia and implementing their dialogue commitments are essential conditions on the European path of both parties and both risk losing important opportunities in absence of progress”.²⁴⁹

3.7

Potential membership of NATO

In March 2022, shortly after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Kurti stressed that Kosovo would like to join NATO as soon as possible. He referred to Russian influence over Serbia and suggested this might be used to provoke a proxy conflict in the Western Balkans.²⁵⁰ He also said he feared a longer war in Ukraine would increase chances of spillover in the Western Balkans “because it is in the interest of the Russian Federation to have new battlegrounds”. Kurti added that “[Russian President] Putin still considers [NATO] intervention in Kosovo as the most important recent international single event” and that Putin “wants the state of Kosovo to fail in order to show that NATO success was temporary, just like in Iraq and Afghanistan”.²⁵¹

A NATO official said in the same month that membership for Kosovo appeared highly unlikely due to a lack of consensus between existing members of NATO.²⁵² NATO membership would have to be agreed and ratified by all member states.²⁵³ In April 2023, a member of the US Senate foreign relations committee said that Kosovo would need to implement the normalisation agreement with Serbia before it could be considered for NATO membership. He also said the four members of NATO that did not recognise Kosovo could be convinced to accept Kosovo as a member if differences with Serbia were settled.²⁵⁴

²⁴⁹ Council of EU, [Council conclusions on Enlargement](#) (PDF), 12 December 2023

²⁵⁰ The Independent, [Russia shows ‘genocidal intent’ in Ukraine war, Kosovo’s PM warns](#), 2 March 2022

²⁵¹ The Guardian, [Russia may pressure Serbia to undermine western Balkans, leaders warn](#), 11 March 2022

²⁵² Euractiv, [Kosovo’s NATO membership unlikely for now amid calls for accession](#), 8 March 2022

²⁵³ House of Commons Library briefing paper, [How do countries join NATO?](#)

²⁵⁴ Reuters, [Kosovo must implement Serbia peace deal before it can join NATO](#), 22 May 2023

2 NATO Kosovo Force (KFOR)

The NATO Kosovo Force (KFOR) was deployed in Kosovo following the end of NATO intervention in Yugoslavia in 1999, which forced Yugoslav and Serbian forces to withdraw from Kosovo. KFOR's mandate is derived from United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999) and the Military-Technical Agreement between NATO, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Serbia.²⁵⁵

KFOR's original objectives were to deter renewed hostilities, establish a secure environment and ensure public safety and order, demilitarise the Kosovo Liberation Army and support the international humanitarian effort. Following Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, it also assisted in the standing down of the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) and the establishment of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF).²⁵⁶

KFOR was initially composed of around 50,000 men and women from NATO member countries, partner countries and other non-NATO countries under a unified command. The improved security environment over time enabled NATO to reduce KFOR troop levels to around 5000 at the beginning of 2012.²⁵⁷

KFOR was later reduced to under 4000 troops before increased tensions in 2023 resulted in the additional deployments bringing the number back up to 4500.²⁵⁸ Figures from January 2024 indicated there are 4443 KFOR troops in Kosovo, drawn from 28 countries. The largest contingent is from Italy (1322) followed by the USA (572) and Hungary (365). The UK contingent numbers 45.²⁵⁹

The UK deployed 200 men and women of 1st Battalion Princess of Wales' Royal Regiment (1PWRR) to bolster the KFOR presence in October 2023, joining 400 soldiers from 1PWRR that were already in Kosovo taking part in an annual exercise. These forces subsequently returned from this deployment in mid-December 2023.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁵ NATO, [NATO's role in Kosovo](#) [accessed 25 April 2024]

²⁵⁶ NATO, [NATO's role in Kosovo](#) [accessed 25 April 2024]

²⁵⁷ NATO, [NATO's role in Kosovo](#) [accessed 25 April 2024]

²⁵⁸ NATO, [NATO's role in Kosovo](#) [accessed 25 April 2024]

²⁵⁹ NATO, [KFOR, Contributing Nations](#), updated January 2024

²⁶⁰ Ministry of Defence, [Defence Secretary awards medals to UK troops for Kosovo NATO peacekeeping mission](#), 26 January 2024

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