

# INTRODUCTION

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**R**ussia's aggression against Ukraine brought war back to the European continent for the first time since the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. It has also become the first war involving major countries in Europe since the end of the Second World War. The Russian invasion is reshaping the geopolitical, security and public policy landscape in Europe, and in an unprecedented manner. Countries associated with international neutrality for many decades are in the process of joining NATO. The transatlantic relationship is again strengthening, after the negative experience of the Trump presidency. The EU has for the first time formally extended the accession perspective to Eastern Neighbourhood Policy countries, accepting as official candidates the embattled Ukraine and Moldova. Europe is facing major economic and inflation pressures and an energy crisis unseen at least since the 1970s. Domestic policy pressures in the EU countries are multiplying.

In the context of such earth-shattering developments, policy making in the Western Balkans has become much more complicated, especially for Kosovo, a new country challenged domestically in its state-building process and internationally in its efforts to consolidate its statehood status. The enormous pressures brought about by the war in Ukraine came to sit on top of previous crises, from the COVID-19 pandemic, to energy transition, the permanent crisis mode in bilateral relations with Belgrade, the difficulties in integrating the Serb community of Kosovo and many others. This 'multiple crises' landscape of policymaking seems to be becoming a permanent state of affairs for Kosovo and deserves its place in the title of our book.

The edited volume is made up of five parts. All chapters are engaged with the crisis-ridden reality in response to which Kosovo needs to develop its policymaking. Even though the concept of crisis per se is not theoretically or conceptually elaborated in this volume, it is clear that all chapters are analysing policy areas that are challenged by the complex geopolitical and socio-economic setting. Part I, entitled 'Old and New Boundaries: Community Dynamics and Identity Constructions', focuses on community and societal questions. Four chapters in this part tackle various aspects of community boundary-making; not only along the traditional ethnic dimension and its official manifestations epitomised in the Prishtina-Belgrade negotiations, but also in relation to how young Kosovars negotiate their identity, their place in and relationship to Europe, how school textbooks deal with the recent traumatic past and how feminist civic activisms in Kosovo and Serbia rediscover cross-border solidarities.

The next two parts of the volume deal more directly with key problems in the new crisis-ridden policy agenda. Part II, entitled 'COVID-19 Crisis: Education and Social Policy Response' focuses on the current global pandemic and the policy dilemmas and pressures it exerts on Kosovo's limited financial and governance resources. This part includes two chapters, which focus on gender perspectives of the impact of the pandemic on business and on the challenges that the pandemic poses for educational authorities, education practitioners, pupils and parents respectively. Part III, entitled 'The Challenges of Climate Change and Energy Transition', tackles the policy area that has been possibly affected the most from the Russian aggression on Ukraine. Two chapters in this part focus on the policy landscape of energy transition in Kosovo and on energy poverty and the dire state of many energy consumers respectively. Put together, the two chapters illustrate the major difficulties facing Kosovo's authorities and population even before the dramatic changes brought about by the Russian invasion.

The final two parts of the volume deal with European integration and Kosovo's foreign relations respectively. Part IV, entitled 'Revisiting European Integration in Times of Crises', reviews the difficult terrain of EU enlargement in the Western Balkans, in which, arguably, Kosovo has received the rough end of the stick, given the fact that it remains unrecognised by five of the Union's member states.

The two chapters included in this part focus on the issue of rule of law in the context of the EU's new enlargement methodology and on the place of the Western Balkans in the agenda of the current Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU respectively. The analyses demonstrate that the European perspective of the Western Balkans, and of Kosovo in them, has not strengthened, despite the new methodology that was introduced only a couple of years ago and despite the calls for a 'geopolitical enlargement' of the EU in light of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. In fact, the EU seems to continue its sleepwalking to geopolitical disaster in the Balkans, despite the frequent 'wake-up calls' in recent years.

Finally, Part V, entitled 'Kosovo's Foreign Relations in a Volatile International Environment', turns our attention to two under-studied elements of Kosovo's foreign relations. One is the role of Chinese diplomacy in Kosovo's efforts to consolidate its international status. The other is the question of Turkey's soft power policy in Kosovo and Romania. Relations with both of these important countries, China a global power and a key non-recogniser and Turkey an important regional player and a significant recogniser of Kosovo's independence, are crucial for Prishtina's foreign policy.

In what follows, the editors of the volume engage conceptually and critically with the themes of the five parts of the book as well as provide brief outlines of the different chapters.

**PART I**

## **OLD AND NEW BOUNDARIES: COMMUNITY DYNAMICS AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTIONS**

What do we mean by 'the local'? The concept of 'the local' has long been defined in contrast to, and as mutually constitutive with, 'the global', marked by the transfer of people, technologies, ideas, finances, information and more. Anthropologist Appadurai (1995) famously suggested exploring 'translocal'

'flows' or 'scapes' (ethnoscapes, technoscapes, ideoscapes, financescapes, and mediascapes) as global sites of such transfers between different localities. Notable for this approach, 'the local' cannot be studied without 'the global': community dynamics and identity constructions at local level are always related to, and interlinked with, wider, translocal or transnational, movements, processes and dynamics.

By this token, the concept of 'the local' clearly lends itself to discussions of how international and national policies affect the intended beneficiaries ('the locals') and how people at local levels respond to, integrate, or transform, the intended idea-transfers. These questions have been subject of the 'local turn' in peace studies (Mac Ginty & Richmond 2013). Such an approach advocates a focus on the interrelatedness and practices of the intended beneficiaries, both among each other, and within the wider networks of international intervention scenarios. Mac Ginty (2015, 851) defines 'the local' in this school of thought as "a system of beliefs and practices that loose communities and networks may adopt". He emphasises that 'local agency' in this might be under the radar of "statist or institutional domains" (2015, 848) which guide international intervention aims, yet such agency in all its forms is powerful, shape and transform intended outcomes, and it is to be taken seriously not least as a matter of epistemic justice. For critical analysis, according to this argument, the term's contingency from power and interests at any level requires decoupling it from static territorial notions and, instead, focussing on the complexity and fluidity of people's actions and activities, ideas and imaginations, networks and relationships, social capital, and resources.

In contrast to these post-modernist approaches, recent sociological expansions of the concept, inspired by human geography and phenomenology, re-emphasise the need to recognise the distinctiveness of 'the local' as 'a place'. According to Roudometof (2019), 'the local' should not be understood in relation to processes of globalisation or 'glocalisation' alone. He emphasises that 'place' is different from the more generic concept of 'space', exactly because it is imbued with meanings, experiences, and memories by

those who inhabit and relate to it. Although epistemologically reterritorializing the concept, this approach has in common with the above that a local 'place', either way, results from the agency and imagologies of people associated with a place. 'The local', in this argument, emerges from social processes of 'place-making', which can be simultaneously physical and symbolic.

The social constructivist and interactionist underpinnings of all of the above approaches are reminiscent also of cultural anthropological classics such as Barth's (1969) seminal work on the construction of ethnic boundaries as a social process. Here, ethnic boundaries (symbolically demarcated as well as materialising in physical separations) result from the locals' agency in continuously ascribing and self-ascribing criteria of cultural distinction. The approaches described above, including Roudometof's (2019) focus on the agency of place-making, are predicated on social (sometimes political) processes of, both, physical and symbolic boundary constructions: 'locals' construct communities and identities, define inclusion and exclusion, similarity, and difference, in relation to place and shared meaning associated with it, be this in terms of legal entitlements or their emplaced, collective memories.

The contributions assembled in Part I explore changing boundary constructions at the interface of global and local, social and political agency in 'place-making' (ideologically or concrete) from different disciplinary angles, united by the weighting given to taking into account local perspectives from within Kosovo. Both, symbolic and physical, 'place-making' processes described are all related to, and interlinked with, wider dynamics - national, regional, international, translocal or transnational - yet they are simultaneously anchored in, and shape, local community and identity constructions.

Rooted in IR and political studies, Ardit Orana's chapter falls well within the 'local turn' associated with peace studies. It skilfully unpacks the dissonance between internationally brokered 'place-making' and its local reception, contestations, and transformations. He exemplifies this process through the failed implementation of the EU-facilitated *First Agreement on the Normalization between Prishtina and Belgrade*, specifically those

policy components relating to the creation (2013) and implementation (2015) of the Association of Serb-majority Municipalities (ASM). However, his focus is only partly on local resistance to, and local contestations of, this agreement (as previously studied by Troncota 2018; cf. also Beysoylu 2018). The originality of Orana's contribution lies in exploring Kosovo's new, local, political actor constellations as a critical juncture out of which new opportunities might arise for reframing the ASM and possibly overcoming the protracted deadlock of the EU-facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia.

Intriguingly, in his problem analysis, Orana traces the deadlock to the agreement's linguistic elasticity which he identifies as part of a deliberate EU strategy known in the literature as 'constructive ambiguity'. On the one hand, this refers to the EU's lack of clarity regarding the scope of the agreement, which Orana shows to effectively obstruct ownership for relevant stakeholders, such as the Kosovo Serbs. On the other hand, it is evident in terminological choices found in translations: what translates as 'community' in Serbian, translates as 'association' in Albanian. Such 'elasticity of language' has long facilitated negotiations between international, regional, and national stakeholders in Kosovo since the internationally facilitated peace and disarmament agreements in 1999 (Schwandner-Sievers 2010, 163). As Orana demonstrates for the *Normalization Agreement*, such linguistic elasticity imbues the same locally situated rights with different meaning for the two main local ethnic communities, respectively. The stalemate between Belgrade and Prishtina appears doomed to continue unless such divergence of meaning can be unpacked, renegotiated, and synchronised.

Jeta Abazi Gashi's contribution shifts attention to young local Kosovars' identity negotiations vis-à-vis the metaphorical space of hegemonic Europe. Her study can be situated within the field of semiotic sociology (Heiskala 2021), which is rooted in the symbolic interactionist tradition of Erving Goffman (1959). Aware of the sensitivities involved in generating local young people's discourses of 'Europe' and 'Self' as well as of their perceptions of how 'Europe' sees them, she introduces the method of photo-elicitation, here orig-

inally applied for the first time to the critical study of Kosovar identity constructions. The method has long been known to respond well to sensitive and emotive themes, in this case arising out of a geopolitical context perpetuating an exclusionary visa regime and local isolation. Abazi Gashi used photos selected by her student research participants; a range of pre-selected photos depicting the plurality of European religions; and, finally, the 2010 'Young Europeans' self-branding campaign video, to trigger responses and generate discursive data.

On the one hand, it emerges that this young generation's simultaneously local and translocal forms of 'place-making' might have changed from the older generations of Kosovars who tended to emphasise strongly their European belonging through metaphors, symbols and tropes highlighting a common Christian heritage. Abazi Gashi's discourse analysis suggests that the older generation's concrete references were missing from the young people's utterances. Religion, overall, was not a theme they raised without prompting; yet, when prompted, they still downplayed (stereotypical) Muslim identity signifiers. On the other hand, establishing commonality – one strategy of affirming collective self-worth – remained a strong antidote to experiences of, or perceived, rejection, exclusion, or humiliation by 'Europe' and the underpinning symbolic hierarchies long evidenced for the wider region (Spasić 2017; Luci and Schwandner-Sievers 2020). The pertinence of underpinning sensitivities became evident in local, everyday nationalism constructions (e.g. highlighting Kosovar sports personalities' success) in the young people's discourses. They were also evident in the semiotic dichotomies distilled from the discursive material (e.g. old/young; weak/strong; progressive/backward; safe/unsafe) as well as in distinct emotions expressed (anger, shame etc.). For example, the respondents asserted their place as Europeans by conveying a strong identification with liberal values such as human rights, including specifically LGBT+ rights, and religious pluralism. Some also highlighted their potential as a group (their youth as a value of benefit and juxtaposed to 'old Europe'). Conversely, 'place-making' was also evident in expressions of anger and shifted preferences (the US is more important!) in one student's reaction to the exclusionary politics experienced.

Rodoljub Jovanović's work falls again within the wider framework of peace studies, here, specifically the fields of Transitional Justice and Dealing with the Past. The focus of his study is on history teaching in Kosovo. Based on existing critical analyses of Kosovo Albanian textbooks (e.g. Gashi 2012), Jovanović explores particularly the ways in which local teachers fulfil the Kosovo Albanian majority's internationally required 'special responsibility' to "promote interethnic dialogue and tolerance at central and local level in order to bridge divides between communities and promote reconciliation" (OSCE 2021). His original research, including in-depth interviews with twelve local Kosovo Albanian teachers about how they teach the subject, specifically, of the 1999 war at levels 9 and 12, benefits from strong theoretical guidance. His findings identify specificities of history teaching practices in Kosovo through comparison with, and learning from, studies on such practices in other fragile (post-)conflict contexts, namely Israel and Rwanda.

The specific Kosovar example suggests a generally weak background in local teachers' training of how to navigate complex and painful local and national histories both sensitively and critically; and it stands out through a strong and unpredictable reliance on individual teachers' personal experiences, initiatives, and interpretations of this history. Their practices and messages were found to differ according to generation (only older teachers were able to convey personal stories of pre-war, interethnic coexistence). The teachers improvised and moderated learning contents according to their individual knowledge of a given local community, its memories and perceived social-psychological needs. The unstructured reliance on personal interpretations furthermore led to unintended transformations even where multi-perspective contents had been introduced (albeit patchily only) via NGO-led teacher training initiatives: rather than critically and reflectively contextualising and juxtaposing different perspectives as anticipated, some individual teachers used the introduction of multiple perspectives to validate their own ethno-national position alone. They thereby affirmed, rather than bridged, symbolic and political boundaries of difference.



Jovanović's conclusion logically points to the need for systematic teacher training in contemporary history education. Specifically, training is needed to boost understanding of how to better balance 'patriotic' and criticality requirements. However, he also highlights the importance of the local teachers' own insights. Accordingly, promoting a better balance might remain inevitably thwarted as long as the political situation between Belgrade and Prishtina remains unsolved. Peace education, as made explicit in some of the local teachers' views, can only come after political stability (recognition) has been achieved.

Finally, IR scholar Adelina Hasani investigates the new symbolic and social boundaries that have emerged between local feminist activists from Kosovo and Serbia since 2000. In the 1990s and earlier, feminists from either locality collaborated in transnational solidarity against Milosević's oppressive regime, nationalism, war, and war denial. It was the shared purpose of anti-war and anti-Milosević activism which provided strength and the ground for feminist, political solidarity beyond borders. Closely relying on Fridman's (2011) observations, Hasani posits that the loss of the common enemy explains why nowadays this solidarity seems diminished, fragmented, and less 'organic'. She also points to generational changes that diminished communication, such as the disappearance of a common language (previously Serbian, or Serbo-Croatian, which is not anymore part of Kosovo Albanian curricula). Clearly, the 'place-making' references shifted from the shared geographical space of the former Yugoslavia to two separate spatial reference points, Serbia and Kosovo, respectively.

Hasani describes how nationalist discourses prevail in both countries today. Cross-border activists risked being branded 'traitors' in the past just as in the present. After 2000, as her literature review suggests, the classic feminist slogan 'the personal is political', for example, in Serbia was translated into 'the personal is national' (Papić 2002, 193). Hasani points to the existence of a handful of cross-border feminist NGO-initiatives active still today. As one of her contemporary research respondents, who attended an associated event, explains: "I realised that you are either a feminist or a nationalist; you cannot

be both”. However, Hasani argues that such views and initiatives nowadays are isolated. Overall, nationalism has divided post-Yugoslav feminism: feminist ‘place-making’ now seems mostly inward-looking and bound to either Serbia or Kosovo alone. Hasani, however, ends on a positive note regardless, suggesting discernible potentials for future cross-border solidarities in the fields not just of feminism, but also of environmental or cultural activism.

As all four contributions discussed in this section demonstrate, local ‘place-making’ – physically or symbolically – must be studied both at micro, meso, and macro levels to understand its power, impact, and potentials. On the one hand, attention needs to be paid to local actors’ ideations and experiences, practices, and agency from within, when exploring local community dynamics and identity constructions. On the other, the ways in which these are simultaneously contingent on, responding to, and shaping, the wider contexts require keeping their interrelatedness with policies and processes in view at different scales, ranging from local, to national, regional, translocal, or international.

**PART II**

## **COVID-19 CRISIS: EDUCATION AND SOCIAL POLICY RESPONSE**

Frequent border changes and state transformations and (violent) dissolutions in the past thirty years have had a profound impact on citizenship rights of individuals, often resulting in political oppression, economic deprivation, forced migration, and violence. While issues of conflict, state-building, inter-ethnic relations in Kosovo have drawn extensive attention locally and internationally, social policy areas including but not limited to welfare, work, education and healthcare have, to a large degree, been overlooked in both scholarship and policy analysis. In other words, there has been little attention on the way Kosovo institutions and society responds to people’s needs for security, education, work, health and wellbeing.

All these important aspects form the backbone of social citizenship and the welfare state. According to T. H. Marshall (1950), the welfare state—with social citizenship as its hallmark—synthesises community and state. Moreover, social citizenship is an important precondition for democratic inclusion. Social inclusion and participation in democratic institutions don't depend only on civic and political rights, but on socio-economic rights and wellbeing, too. In the case of Kosovo, as well as the Balkans more broadly, due to the past thirty years' national(ist) and ethnic struggles, institutions of the educational system and social services have been on a downward spiral, with tremendous consequences for citizens. Therefore, the idea of social citizenship remains fundamental in recasting key concepts such as democracy, human rights, and citizenship.

The role of social citizenship and social policy has been spotlighted in the past two years as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has had a profound impact on societies worldwide with many social sectors facing multiple shocks. While the long-term impacts of these shocks require time to be accurately estimated, the short-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on businesses and education is particularly devastating in developing countries, such as Kosovo. The pandemic has deepened pre-existing inequalities and exposed vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath have posed a myriad of challenges to businesses in Kosovo, but these challenges have been different depending on the sectors and owners of the businesses. Hana Bacaj's study suggests that in Kosovo the pandemic had a greater impact on women-led businesses, since women are under-represented as entrepreneurs in Kosovo and so tend to operate smaller businesses that are concentrated in sectors that were hit hardest during the pandemic. Based on interviews with Kosovo women entrepreneurs, the five key challenges faced during the pandemic included a fall in customer purchases, the need to remodel the business, the threat to existence, and decreased business size.

The unprecedented impact of COVID-19 measures on businesses left many owners struggling and without answers to pressing issues. The crisis prompted a government response – but often this was too late, inadequate or short

sighted. Kosovo institutions adopted various policy measures in response to COVID-19, focusing on social wellbeing, business support, and grant supervision but, overall, they had a limited impact. Politically unstable Kosovo was unprepared when the pandemic struck. The government proved unable to create a well-thought-out strategy and implementation plan that took into consideration all the relevant factors when designing its measures. Considerable shortcomings emerged due to the misreading of the situation and of the specific problems that women-led businesses faced. Importantly, since most institutions in Kosovo do not have gender-disaggregated data, it was difficult for it to create policies that took the gender factor into consideration.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted structural issues and inequalities in Kosovo's education sector. In response to COVID-19 lockdown, Kosovo's educational authorities made attempts to ease the process of transitioning to online learning by providing lessons which were broadcasted on the national TV and created a platform (*E-shkollori*). They also provided one-day trainings for the teachers to understand and be able to use this platform. However, the hastily introduced online teaching during the pandemic found the schools lacking the needed infrastructure for successful teaching and learning, and most teachers unprepared in terms of using technology in learning. Successive governments in Kosovo have focused on building new school premises rather than developing teaching capacities of the schools that already exist. In education institutions across Kosovo there is a general lack of information and communications technology (ICT) equipment, teaching materials, school libraries, labs and computers. The problem is particularly acute in rural schools, which also lack reliable internet.

Nora Nimani Musa's study has identified numerous challenges that teachers faced during online learning, the chief among them being lack of knowledge in using technology, which, in turn, undermined their confidence and raised anxiety and stress during this period of teaching. Therefore, it is unsurprising that all the teachers who participated in this study have reported to prefer classroom-based schooling to online teaching. Parents seem to share similar views, too. Almost all of them stated that their children are more motivated

during school-based learning. Data suggests that problems with internet connection, inability to access online learning without direct supervision from parents, lack of information available to them, and the inability to express themselves clearly during online classes have all contributed to low children satisfaction with online learning.

## **PART III** **THE CHALLENGES OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY TRANSITION**

The juxtaposition of global energy and climate crises creates a unique challenge for policy-makers and citizens in Kosovo, due to the country's historical and geo-economic circumstances. Kosovo is one of the world's most coal-dependent states – a specific infrastructural legacy that can be attributed to a series of choices made over a prolonged period of time, partly in response to the country's rich endowments with the hydrocarbon resource. The predominance of solid fuels in Kosovo's energy mix, however, has led to a series of policy and environmental issues as a result of interactions with broader social, economic and spatial problems during post-communism in particular.

Throughout Central and Eastern Europe, the movement towards a market-based economy in the early 1990s was followed by the institution of a new energy regulation landscape, inspired by the principles of the Washington consensus. Among other dynamics, this entailed changes in energy pricing structures, as well as the privatization of energy companies (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe 1991). The role of the state in the formulation and delivery of energy policy was radically transformed, with private and third sector actors increasingly taking centre stage to the detriment of roles previously assumed by central or local government. Post-communism also saw the dismantling of the centrally planned system of infrastructure development, and the introduction of market-oriented frameworks of residential supply and demand (Bouzarovski 2010). In cultural terms, there was

a backlash against the dense public transport and energy provision systems inherited from the centrally planned economy, in favour of individualized energy provision and greater automobile use.

In the case of Kosovo, the post-communist transformation, the gaining of independence, and the process of European Union accession have all led to deep infrastructural and policy reforms in the energy sector. The electricity sector has been formally unbundled and liberalized, with different legal entities being charged with separate activities relating to the generation, transmission, distribution and supply of electrical power. The existence of a parallel energy regime in the north of Kosovo has posed a series of challenges, in addition to unresolved regulatory and ownership issues between Kosovo and Serbia (Obradovic-Wochnik and Dodds 2015). Internal dynamics to the energy market, including corruption, vested interests and the need for technological upgrades, have also been associated with distinct impacts, aside from broader processes linked to the expansion of income poverty and social inequality, and the relatively low level of networked infrastructure provision and economic development in the country as a whole.

As a whole, Kosovo provides a unique window to study how political, material and institutional path-dependencies can influence the operation and evolution of large technical systems (Marvin 2012; Rutherford and Coutard 2014). Following broader scholarship in science and technology studies, these dynamics show how infrastructural formations are capable of driving political choices and trade-offs at multiple scales of governance, the provision of infrastructure services to various economic sectors, as well as deeper processes of exclusion and marginalization. In contrast to approaches that view energy poverty and environmental degradation as relatively narrow phenomena linked to particular forms of energy use or air pollution, such thinking highlights the embeddedness of health or material deprivation in the entire system of energy policy, regulation and service delivery (Ban et al. 2021).

The two chapters in this section powerfully illustrate the systemic nature of ongoing challenges at the climate-energy nexus in Kosovo, and their immer-

sion in multiple crises. Blin Berdoniqi uses a multi-level governance framework to explore decarbonization challenges and trajectories in Kosovo's energy sector. Using interviews with EU and Kosovo officials, policy researchers, academics and civil society representatives – as well as a multitude of secondary evidence – the chapter interrogates both the positions of, and interrelations among, different institutional actors on the path to a low-carbon future. It provides a governance map to scrutinize the complex roles of different stakeholders in this process, as well as the types of organizations that either promote or hinder transformation dynamics. The chapter also traces the contours of a substantial shift of power and authority from the central state onto a wider range of local, non-governmental and trans-national structures.

Marta Szpala focuses on both the regulation and lived experience of energy use to explain how domestic energy deprivation in Kosovo is connected to wider injustices of policy recognition and resource distribution. Her chapter is based on interviews with stakeholders who represent vulnerable groups, as well as desk research and discussions with energy policy experts. It analyses the socio-technical and regulatory contexts in which domestic energy inequalities arise, while illuminating the multiple strategies that households use to overcome the structural vulnerabilities that they face. The chapter is permeated by insightful comments on the mismatch between donor and government priorities, on the one hand, and the actually existing patterns of inequality, on the other.

**PART IV****REVISITING EUROPEAN  
INTEGRATION IN TIMES OF  
CRISES**

The processes of European Integration in the Western Balkans have long been held as the anchor keeping the region tied to ongoing reforms as much as the goal of regional stability and good neighborly relations. The 'transformative power' of Europe, more recently, has been under question as the enlargement towards the Western Balkans has stumbled and delayed. The

promise of enlargement itself is being questioned amidst EU member states citizens' waning appetite for enlargement, concerns on the EU's capacity to absorb new members, looming international crises in the Eastern flank of the Union, and growing evidence about the fake style of reforms across the region.

EU members' veto to progress of enlargement -more recently Bulgaria's veto to opening accession negotiations with North Macedonia, years after the Commission's assessment that the country had complied with the load of required conditions - shows the EU's difficulty to maneuver between a formal commitment to enlargement, the lack of consensus on the issue and the complicated EU decision making process. Alejandro Esteso Pérez's and Petr Čermák's chapters take stock of the setbacks of Balkan enlargement and bring in new evidence of the EU efforts to reinvigorate the process, but also of the many factors that hinder actual progress.

Both chapters acknowledge the many struggles and dilemmas that overshadow the Western Balkans' EU accession. Čermák, who focuses on the power of EU presidencies to set the agenda and prioritise the enlargement issues, suggests that even Balkan-friendly presidencies have not been able to push forward the issue given "the long-term ambiguity of the EU approach maneuvering between the commitment to enlargement and the emphasis on EU's capacity to absorb new members". Perez's chapter on the rule of law as the focus of enlargement conditionality also notes that the EU's approach to the issue left much to desire for: "bureaucratic reform process that did not allow for thorough evaluation and a well-thought feedback, the mistaken implementation of a one-size-fits-all model of rule of law reform, and the lack of reliable monitoring instruments together with a lack of political will in candidate countries led to an unpolished transition [and]... a wave of democratic backsliding in the target countries soon after enlargement."

The chapters by Čermák and Perez also pinpoint at the EU efforts to re-envision and reinvigorate its enlargement policy. Perez's analysis shows that the EU continuously sought innovative avenues to its rule of law policy and its



conditionality framework in general. Accordingly, “Conditionality, as such, has transformed in form and substance and it has introduced new aspects, broadening its span while evidencing the EU’s internal concerns and balances.” The new enlargement methodology, adopted more recently, seeks to make the process “more predictable, more dynamic and more political.” The new methodology is, thus, a potentially new stage in the process of transformation of the EU’s rule of law and anti-corruption conditionality because of its explicit focus on the *monitoring* dimension and the *involvement of Member States*.

Čermák analysis of the priorities of the Czech presidency (July-December 2022) notes that the new Czech government has inherited the Balkan priority from the outgoing government. Accordingly, “the agenda-setting of the previous government, albeit a populist one, already positioned the Czech Republic as a prospective active player in the Western Balkans during the 2022 Presidency.” The region has been a permanent issue within the Czech foreign policy agenda because of both strategic and normative concerns. “Strategically, the Czech Republic perceived the region as a latent source of instability that could potentially spill into its own neighborhood and threaten the security of the European space. Normatively, the special interest in Southeast Europe was based on a combination of perception of historical ties with the South Slavic nations and a newly formulated universal emphasis on democracy promotion and development assistance.”

Last but not least, both chapters reveal the many hurdles that continue to hamper the progress of European integration. These hurdles are even more pertinent in the case of Kosovo. The chapter on the rule of law highlights both the EU- and domestic-related obstacles. Accordingly, the EU’s failure to approve the visa liberalisation for Kosovo, despite the Commission’s affirmation of the country’s progress on required reforms, including those in rule of law, shows that even when and where the country has delivered, the EU has not. Still, Kosovo is also a case that shows reform implementation remains the utmost pending subject. Under these conditions, the advancements brought about by the new enlargement methodology will most likely put further into question the current enlargement framework. The chapter on the

the Czech presidency's priorities to push forward the Western Balkans' EU accession, also shows that the war in Ukraine "has quickly overshadowed the Western Balkan agenda". The new priorities have mainly concentrated on "issues of energy security, management of migration flows as well as accelerated European integration of Ukraine and other post-Soviet states." Overall, the two chapters portray a not very optimistic picture of the Western Balkans' European integration, especially in light of more urgent issues loading the European foreign policy agenda.

**PART V**

## **KOSOVO'S FOREIGN RELATIONS IN A VOLATILE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT**

The illegal and unprovoked aggression of Russian forces has not only violated Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, but it has also undermined the European and international security. It has also shown to the entire international community how precarious and fragile is the peace in the world when faced with aggressive acts of the rogue big powers. At the same time, concerns were raised that Russia might also try to destabilize the Western Balkan region to deflect attention from its military aggression in Ukraine. Russia has for years strengthened its influence in the region through strong political, military, and soft power (Pan-Slavism and Christian Orthodoxy) connections, as well as energy dependency. Given its strong relationship with Serbia and Republika Srpska, there are justified fears that Western Balkans might turn into a new source of turmoil in Europe.

The European Union, NATO, the United States, United Kingdom, and other liberal democracies around the world have responded with unprecedented unity to Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression on Ukraine. From the very beginning they have consistently demanded that Russia immediately cease its military actions and unconditionally withdraw all its forces and military equip-

ment from Ukraine. At the same time, wide-range sanctions have been adopted by the Western countries and institutions against Russia, including a significant number of persons and entities. These measures aimed at weakening Russia's economic base by depriving it of critical technologies and markets, while also significantly curtailing its ability to wage war. On the other hand, the West has provided Ukraine with political, financial, military and humanitarian support.

In such a reality, Kosovo, where public sentiment is strongly pro-Western and anti-Russian, has fully aligned its position with the EU and US, and was the first country in the Western Balkans to adopt sanctions on Russia. Among others, the sanctions included freezing the assets of sanctioned persons, banning their travel and the movement of their assets outside of Kosovo. Kosovo also condemned Russian invasion, showed support to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and expressed its readiness to host up to 5,000 Ukrainian refugees. However, the crisis in Ukraine has also greatly increased concerns over Kosovo's own security.

As a result, the Kosovo Assembly has asked the government to take all the necessary measures to submit applications for membership in NATO, the European Union, the Council of Europe and other international organizations. Consequently, the government has called for the country's faster path toward NATO membership and for opening of a permanent US military base on Kosovo territory. In light of the current conflict, it has also pledged to bring defence spending up to the NATO benchmark of 2 percent of GDP, and has even established a "security fund" in which citizens and private companies can contribute to the budget of armed forces.

Furthermore, following the Russia's suspension from the Council of Europe, Kosovo has on 9<sup>th</sup> of June 2022 applied to become a member of the organisation. Only a day later, Prime Minister Kurti announced that Kosovo will apply for European Union candidate status by the end of this year. However, it seems that Kosovo's hopes for membership with accelerated procedures in NATO and the European Union are not too realistic. According to NATO officials, Kosovo's request to join NATO appears highly unlikely due to a lack of consensus

between members, and because there are no mechanisms in place that would speed up the process. On the other hand, a resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 6<sup>th</sup> of July 2022 stresses that “there is no fast-track procedure for any candidate or potential candidate country and recalls that all countries aspiring to become Member States will be judged on their own merits in terms of fulfilling, implementing and complying with the set of criteria and common European values.” Still, the same resolution “fully supports Kosovo’s application for membership of the Council of Europe and calls on all the EU Member States to support its bid, as well as its bids to join other international organizations”.

Following the war in Ukraine, the Western Balkan countries had high hopes on the EU-Western Balkans meeting that was held in Brussels on 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 2022. However, the outcome of the meeting again left Balkan leaders disappointed and frustrated. Albania and North Macedonia did not get a breakthrough to begin accession negotiations, Kosovo was not granted visa liberalization, and contrary to Ukraine and Moldova, the EU countries showed apparent disunity on granting Bosnia and Herzegovina a candidate status. The EU’s continuous apathy and lack of a coherent strategy towards the Western Balkans has enabled Russia, Turkey and China to engage more actively in the region and increase their influence.

In recent years, Russia has invested heavily to stop the rapprochement between the Western Balkan states and the EU and NATO. In addition to more traditional soft power and trade approaches, its activities have also included widespread use of disinformation, cyberwarfare, as well as intelligence operations. On the other hand, since adoption of its neo-Ottomanist policy, Turkey has engaged in increasing its influence in the former Ottoman territories of the Western Balkans. It did so by fusing Ottoman culture, nationalism and Islamic values. Islam was utilized as a key power-element of Turkish foreign policy, especially in countries of the region with majority or considerable Muslim population. Finally, China has also in the past decade, increased its presence in the Western Balkan, especially since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative and the 17+1 cooperation platform between China and Central and Eastern European countries. To intensify its influence, China has tar-

geted countries in the region with various Chinese initiatives aimed to boost trade, investments, infrastructure projects and development cooperation. Unless, the EU steps up its engagement in the Western Balkans and tackles the integration of the region in a much serious manner, we might witness an ever growing influence of the above mentioned non-European powers.

The final Part of the volume begins with Ana Krstinovska's chapter which aims to shed light on China's role in the issue of Kosovo's international recognition, by analysing China's current position and the likelihood for China to become more active in obstructing Kosovo's recognition efforts. In doing so, the paper adopts the neoclassical realist lens and examines the external and internal factors in foreign policy making which could shape China's future role. The paper shows that under Xi Jinping's leadership, China has the power capabilities and willingness to be more engaged in global issues. Moreover, it also has specific experience in using "transactional diplomacy" tools for the de-recognition of Taiwan, which could be replicated to support Serbia in the case of Kosovo. Still, although China's domestic opinion is largely supportive of Serbia and negative towards Kosovo, the analysis has found no hard evidence that China has directly helped Serbia's de-recognition efforts to date. The chapter concludes that a potential increase in China's engagement on the Kosovo issue will depend on the global landscape and China's relations with the West, particularly the USA.

The chapter by Adriana Cupcea aims to analyse the role of religion in Turkey's kin state policy in the case of Muslims in Kosovo and of the Turkish and Tatar communities in the Dobruja region in Romania. The analysis draws on Rogers Brubaker's triangular relationship of the national minority, the nation state in which the minority lives, and the homeland to which the ethnic group belongs. Considering the post 9/11 context, when Turkey assumed the role of the moderate Islamic power in the region, a fourth element of relationship to the previous three was added: transnational Islam. The paper further examines whether Islam can be considered a main field of interaction between the Turkish state and the Muslims in Kosovo and Romania and one of the main sources of Turkey's soft power. The paper shows that Turkish and Tatar com-

munities in Romania depend on Turkey for the preservation of their Islamic religious identity and are soft-power sources constituted through the support mechanisms put in practice by Turkey. In Kosovo, according to the analysis, the religious influence of Turkey is more extensive and its various target groups are a basis for the continuous expansion of its religious soft-power. The paper concludes that belonging to the Ottoman-Turkish cultural-religious zone, practicing the Sunni Hanafi Islam that is supported by Romanian and Kosovar authorities as moderate and adapted to local specificities, remains a base for both Turkish-Kosovo and Turkish-Romanian relations.

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