
The Politics of Recognition and Engagement: EU Member States Relations with Kosovo

Edited by Ioannis Armakolas *and* James Ker-Lindsay
Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, 245 pages, € 59,49, ISBN: 9783030179441

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The Politics of Recognition and Engagement, edited by Ioannis Armakolas and James Ker-Lindsay, delves into the relations of almost a third of European Union countries with Kosovo, the youngest state in Europe. Declaring its independence on February 18, 2008, Kosovo received strong support from the EU as a whole, yet when it comes to individual states the degree of recognition and level of support vary. As of August 2019, 23 out of 28 EU member countries had recognized Kosovo, while five had not.



The book is made up of eleven chapters which can be separated in four categories as per their content. The first chapter is a sort of introduction by Ker-Lindsay and Armakolas on the independence of Kosovo and the role played by the EU. It opens up the path for other chapters by categorizing the EU countries based on their recognition (or not) of Kosovo's independence and their bilateral relations with Kosovo. The second chapter by Agon Demjaha, a Kosovo government adviser, brings up the other side of the coin: Kosovo's attempts at legitimizing its independence and getting more recognition. Chapters 3-6 are dedicated to 'recognizing' countries and their relations with Kosovo with a focus on the United Kingdom, Germany, the Czech Republic and Poland. Lastly, chapters 7-11 discuss the positions of the EU countries that do not recognize Kosovo's independence, namely Serbia, from which Kosovo declared its indepen-

dence, as well as Greece, Slovakia, Romania, Cyprus and Spain.

The authors suggest that the simple binary split between recognizers and non-recognizers is more complicated than it seems at first glance. For this reason, based on the recognition or not and the level of engagement with Kosovo, they divide the EU countries into four categories: strong recognizers, weak recognizers, soft non-recognizers, and hard non-recognizers.

The UK and Germany are considered strong recognizers. Specifically, the UK as an ally of the U.S. was at the forefront of the international intervention and recognition of Kosovo's independence. Until the Brexit announcement, a lot of lobbying had been done by UK on the international stage in support of Kosovo's independence. Now dealing with its own problems, the UK has sort of forgotten that there is a Kosovo. A contrary shift has happened with Germany. Once a careful recognizer, it has lately stepped up its engagement with Kosovo by pressuring Belgrade for dialogue and giving itself the role of assisting Kosovo on its path of European integration. This move is consistent with the struggle for de facto EU leadership between France and Germany.

The weak recognizers are represented in the book by the Czech Republic and Poland. In these countries, the authors note a clash between pro-Western (read: pro-EU) and pro-

Slavic tendencies with a pro-Serbian sympathy. The recognition from these countries came as a result of the upper hand of the pro-Western groups, although the interaction between these countries and Kosovo remains very low due to geographical distance and the inner political conflicts in these countries. For example, the Czech president refused to appoint an ambassador to Kosovo, so the Prime Minister found a work-around by appointing a *charge d'affaires*.

The third category of soft non-recognizers is represented by Greece, Slovakia and Romania. Greece has had the highest level of contact and good relations with Kosovo among the non-recognizers to the point that many thought it would recognize the independence. However, the case of Cyprus and its traditional ties with Serbia have made Greece reluctant to take such a step. The authors miss a third reason on the Greek side: the fear of so-called Great Albania; in other words, a fear that Kosovo would unite with Albania as a single state. For its part, Slovakia has declined to recognize Kosovo mostly due to domestic reasons. It is feared that recognition could ignite secessionist movements from the Hungarian national minority within Slovakia. Under the auspices of the EU there is a lot of cooperation among member countries, but at the level of national policies the engagement between them is very low. Romania echoes Slovakia's position due to internal and external factors. It has good historical relations with Serbia but at the same time fears secessionist movements by its Hungarian national minority and the possible re-integration of Transnistria within Moldova. Still, it has taken positive steps by accepting Kosovo membership in several international organizations, something Serbia has lobbied vigorously against.

The last category, that of hard non-recognizers, is represented by Cyprus and Spain. Due

to the issue of Northern Cyprus, Cyprus has had little room to maneuver so it has had to stick to non-recognition. The authors suggest that Cyprus is stuck between pro-EU recognition and its own "national problem." In contrast, Spain has changed its approach from a soft non-recognizer to a hard non-recognizer, refusing any diplomatic or social relations with Kosovo. This is explained with reference to the continued Basque secessionist sentiment and developments such as the Catalonia referendum.

Unlike many books where a summary and concluding chapter come at the end, the authors offer their conclusions at the very beginning. The thesis laid down by Ker-Lindsay and Armakolas is supported by the case studies of these countries. According to the authors, the recognition of Kosovo's independence has come mostly due to its alliance with the U.S. or its pro-EU orientation, keeping in mind that Kosovo is in the backyard of the EU and will soon aspire to be a member. The non-recognition mostly comes as a result of governments fearing domestic secessionist movements in their respective countries or is due to historical proximity with Serbia. The level of interaction between these countries and Kosovo is mostly dependent on the engagement of these countries within the EU, geographical distance and Kosovo's lack of human and financial resources.

Kosovo can be considered as an international relations and diplomacy laboratory with case studies interestingly depicted in this book. Although each chapter has a conclusion that provides ample information to readers, the in-depth information of the chapters should not be underestimated. The authors explain each country's engagement with Kosovo in great detail through case studies, describe the evolution of relations since 1999 and shed light on the current situation and future prospects.