

THE RESOLUTION OF THE KOSOVO QUESTION: A SWOT ANALYSIS FROM A GREEK PERSPECTIVE

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The latest EU enlargement strategy document, released in February 2018, attempted to give a new impetus to the EU accession of the Western Balkans. Symbolically, it gave indication as to an approximate date (the year 2025) in which Serbia and Montenegro, the frontrunners, could, in the best-case scenario, become EU members. At the same moment, it conveyed a sense of urgency on the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo, an explicit condition for the advancement of Serbia's EU accession process (European Commission, 2018a, p. 8). While negotiations for the conclusion of a comprehensive and legally binding agreement between Kosovo and Serbia have barely started, we can discern from various statements of local and international decision-makers where each side stands and what it advocates. For purely analytical purposes, we argue that the interaction of different perspectives about the conflict may lead to one of the following three policy outcomes: a) The status quo will prevail and the resolution of the problem will be postponed for later on, b) The two sides will reach an agreement that will revolve around some kind of border change, and c) The two countries will normalize relations within the framework set by the Brussels Agreement and the EU-mediated negotiations. The present study examines the security implications of each of these three scenarios, focusing primarily on Greece and, by extension, on the entire Balkans.

1. Preservation of the status quo

The first possible outcome of negotiations to resolve the Kosovo question might be that the two sides would not reach an agreement. Although it might be externally seen as a policy failure, it could indeed represent for both parties an acceptable second-best option, preferable to what they might consider an unsatisfactory deal with which they would make greater concessions than what they are actually prepared to. In this regard, the no deal scenario is a very probable outcome.

Strengths

Athens is not an advocate of the preservation of the status quo in the Kosovo question. To the extent that Greece wants to develop relations with Kosovo without

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impairing its traditionally close ties with Serbia, the protraction of the Kosovo conflict perpetuates an adverse environment for the conduct of Greek foreign policy. Still, Greece may prefer the prolongation of the status quo over the conclusion of a perilous agreement for its interests and regional security.

The postponement of the settlement of the Kosovo question promises the preservation of stability in the region and of some predictability in Greece's northern external environment. Greece has traditionally viewed with anxiety any radical change in the Balkans (e.g. dissolution of Socialist Yugoslavia, the outbreak of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Kosovo) owing to its sense of vulnerability from its northern borders, from where it was last time invaded, in the Second World War.

Besides, Athens has so far managed with some success to perform a delicate balancing act between Belgrade and Pristina. While Greece has not acknowledged Kosovo statehood, it has opened a Liaison Office in Pristina at ambassadorial level, and it has accepted Kosovo's request to establish an Economic and Commercial Affairs Office in Athens (Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). Greece has also recognized the Kosovar travel documents and car license plates (Armakolas, 2017, p. 31). In addition, Athens has supported Kosovo's membership in international organizations such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.), and it does not oppose to Pristina's bid to get membership in Interpol and UNESCO (B92, 2015). Therefore, Greece has eventually learnt how to perform the role of "soft non-recognizer".

In terms of Greek interests, the postponement of a Kosovo settlement might also imply a quest for a more convenient international context, that is to say, when the EU would no longer be preoccupied with other more pressing issues (e.g., Brexit, migration and rise of populism etc.) and when a US administration, following more predictable policies, is elected in Washington. To be sure, bilateral relations between Greece and the United States have recently become closer than ever, driven by a series of initiatives and plans in the field of military and security cooperation (Athanasopoulos, 2018a). Still, while the Athens-Washington ties are deepening (in a context marked by the parallel strengthening of Russian-Turkish relations), the unease of many Greek decision-makers with Trump's unpredictable policies is not dissipated.

Opportunities

The greatest advantage of a postponement of the Kosovo question resolution is that regional actors would have the opportunity to settle other pending issues, without fearing that developments in Kosovo (e.g. land swap) may serve as a dangerous precedent. This is not to say that the Kosovo question should be left aside, to be solved when everything else has been dealt with in the region. Rather, it implies that if a Kosovo deal is planned to

deviate in anyway from established European rules and norms, it should have the smallest possible contagion effect over other issues in the region.

With respect to the Cyprus question, the postponement of the resolution of the Kosovo dispute would give some time to the Greek and Turkish Cypriots to make a new attempt to reach a power-sharing settlement, following the collapse of the Crans-Montana negotiations last year. Although the International Court of Justice (ICJ) decision on Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence explicitly distinguished the Kosovo case from the Cyprus question (ICJ, 2010, p. 449), the Greek Cypriots have not ceased being worried about developments in Kosovo.

As far as the Athens-Skopje name dispute is concerned, the implementation of the Prespa Agreement would not be destabilized by a solution to the Kosovo question that might change the calculus of the ethnic Albanian community of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). To the extent that the Slav-Macedonian people remain divided over the benefits of the deal, the ratification of the Prespa Agreement in Skopje is largely dependent on the overwhelming support of the Macedonian Albanians. It should be emphasized here that Greece has constantly considered the stability of FYROM to be of paramount importance for its own security policy, even in times of great Athens-Skopje animosity. Hence, the more the Euro-Atlantic integration of FYROM advances following the conclusion of the Prespa Agreement, the more its statehood will be consolidated, and the least Skopje may be negatively affected by a Kosovo settlement.

A postponement of the Kosovo settlement may also be beneficial for the negotiations currently taking place for the resolution of all open issues between Greece and Albania. Not only will these talks be preserved from the influence of an unpredictable external factor that may affect the thinking of Albanian decision-makers. Some Greek analysts also think that Athens may even use in these negotiations the deferral of Kosovo recognition as a 'trump card' to obtain more gains from Tirana. To the best of our knowledge, Greece has not played the Kosovo card in bilateral talks with Albania and, in general, the Greek-Kosovar relations have been insulated from ups and downs in the Athens-Tirana relations, thanks to the efforts of both Athens and Pristina.

In terms of regional security, some analysts have claimed that if the resolution of the Kosovo question involves some kind of change of borders, it should come at a time when Bosnia and Herzegovina is more stable (Joseph, 2018). Last, but not least, in theory, if Serbia and Kosovo were to concentrate their efforts on the fulfillment of all other Copenhagen criteria (e.g. rule of law), it would be easier for both of them to reach a deal at a later stage, when EU accession would be in sight and the political cost of a compromise could be offset by the reward of EU membership. However, this window of opportunity presupposes that contemporary leaderships (or those who will succeed them in the near future) in Belgrade

and Pristina are reform-oriented. According to all indications, this is an opportunity not being exploited at the present.

Weaknesses

Although the Kosovo question is not a priority issue for Greece, Athens comprehends that it assumes some political cost from the preservation of the status quo. The Greek balancing act between Belgrade and Pristina is not always easy and it is anyway an unsustainable position in the long run. Serbia has constantly suspected that Greece may at any time reverse its policy of no recognition and, thus, the Kosovo question has been a source of discomfort in the Athens-Belgrade bilateral relations (see, for instance, Jovanovic, 2015).

Likewise, the policy of non-recognition represents an insurmountable obstacle to the full development of the Greek-Kosovo relations. In terms of economic relations, there is a huge underexploited potential between the two countries, which are separated by just a 170 km long highway (i.e., the exact distance between the Greek and Kosovar borders). To illustrate, in 2017, Greek exports to Kosovo amounted to 43.5 million euro, whereas the value of the corresponding imports was just 1.2 million euro (Panagiotou and Tzifakis, 2019).

Furthermore, Greece's ability to take initiatives for the advancement of the Western Balkans EU accession (i.e., a constructive role performed with much success in the past) is limited for as long as the country belongs to the group of the EU-5 non-recognizers. In addition, Athens has occasionally been under gentle external pressure from the European Parliament and countries belonging to the group of recognizers to change its stance on Kosovo independence.

Threats

The prolongation of the status quo carries non-negligible threats to regional security. Considering that the EU has qualified the normalization of the Serbia-Kosovo relations as an EU accession condition for both countries, we may reasonably expect that the process of their EU integration would stall. Such a development may contribute to the enhancement of accession fatigue in both Serbia and Kosovo. This is particularly worrying in Serbia's case, where accession fatigue is already very high. In addition, an interruption to the EU accession of both countries will obliterate the most important external influence in favor of the implementation of political reforms and will increase the likelihood of consolidation of democratic backsliding in the region.

Moreover, for as long as there is no dispute settlement, maximalist positions articulated in both countries will not be defeated. Nationalism will continue to represent the central political ideology in the region, poisoning several sets of bilateral relations such as

those between Greece and Albania. Nationalist discourses will also continue to dominate over discussions about the real socio-economic problems of the people in the Balkans.

The postponement of conflict solution may also imply that Kosovo will not become member of key international organizations that combat serious and organized crime. North Kosovo will also not be fully and efficiently integrated in the rule of law institutions either of Kosovo or of Serbia. As a result, organized crime will continue to thrive in Kosovo (especially in the North), posing a threat to the entire region. As the European Commission 2018 Progress Report noted, “Kosovo continues to be a storage and transit country for heroin and cannabis. Seizures remain very low, especially for heroin and cocaine [...]. Organized crime groups (mainly Albanian-speaking) continue to play a predominant role in large-scale heroin trafficking and its subsequent distribution in the EU” (European Commission, 2018b, p. 37).

Very importantly, the uncertainty and frustration with the lack of conflict resolution may lead to an eruption of violence in Kosovo by groups or people on either side who may want to create a fait accompli for the attainment of their objectives. There is also a danger that ethnic tensions may erupt in South Serbia due to the fact that the whole discussion about territorial swaps has generated some expectations in the Albanian-majority areas.

Finally, the postponement of conflict resolution may imply the loss of momentum. We should not exclude the possibility of the emergence of leaderships in either country who may be less inclined to accommodate (e.g., the Self-Determination Movement in Kosovo), or equipped with less power and legitimacy to reach a compromise (e.g., a politically weakened Vučić, or a new, less powerful, leader in Serbia).

2. A border change agreement

In recent months, Hashim Thaçi and Aleksandar Vučić, the Presidents of Kosovo and Serbia respectively, have generated many expectations that they can resolve the dispute with a deal that would revolve around some kind of border change. Interestingly, although the two leaders publicly disagree about what such a border change could entail, they have so far refrained from releasing any concrete plan or proposal of their own. What we can discern from what we know so far is that the dominant border change scenario is about the transfer of North Kosovo to Serbia in return for Belgrade’s consent to the normalization of bilateral relations. According to Thaçi, the same conflict resolution scenario additionally implies the transfer of the Albanian-majority municipalities of Preševo valley to Kosovo. Out of space and clarity considerations, we disregard different variations of this scenario and we analyze the security implications of a land swap between the two countries.

Strengths

The greatest advantage of a dispute settlement with a border change is that it is driven by the political leaderships of the two countries. As such, it appears to be a reachable agreement that promises to end a zero-sum frozen conflict, where all previous international efforts have failed, and where a compromise is desperately needed. Moreover, it has good chances to obtain international approval as the United States, Russia and EU institutions are not categorically against it, each of them for its own reasons. Proponents of the land swap scenario also point out to the fact it would not be against international law. Although the Helsinki Final Act stipulated the inviolability of frontiers, it has not forbidden peaceful and consensual border changes (Roberts quoted by Tanner, 2018).

Furthermore, the land swap scenario will preventively neutralize a potential source of regional instability, stemming from the process of integrating the Serb-majority areas located north of the Ibar river into the Kosovo state structures. In that area, Pristina has cautiously refrained from assuming full control, while Belgrade has established parallel institutions. The EU-mediated solution for the establishment of a Community of Serb Municipalities (ZSO) in Kosovo has not been implemented with the two countries bickering over the extent of powers that the ZSO should have. As a result, the Serbs residing in North Kosovo have been left to believe that they would not come under the Kosovo state jurisdiction and the process of their integration into Kosovo structures might cause tensions.

From Greece's perspective, a settlement of the Kosovo question will signify the elimination of a problem that has complicated its own foreign policy. If Serbia and Kosovo normalize their relations, Athens will no longer need to perform a balancing act between them. In this regard, Alexis Tsipras, Greek Prime Minister, argued in mid-September that "if there is an agreement between the Serbian government and the Kosovo side that will offer a [conflict] resolution perspective, we will have no reason not to salute it" (*Kathimerini*, 2018).

To be sure, Greece is not a supporter of border changes. A land swap is not a type of solution that the Greek diplomacy could have proposed itself. However, Athens comprehends that it cannot meaningfully influence the outcome of the Belgrade-Pristina negotiations and it pragmatically directs its attention to the security implications of such a solution. If a Kosovo land swap scenario could be precluded from creating a dangerous precedent, it would resolve a protracted conflict and it would eliminate a grey zone in the Balkans. Therefore, under these circumstances, Greece seems to have come to terms with the border change scenario. As Nikos Kotzias, the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs, put it:

"We do not want to have border changes in the region. We do not want to have actions that may lead to negative dominoes. On the other hand, we wish that the two countries resolve their problems. And, of course, it is up

to them [to determine] the way that they will resolve them” (Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018).

Reportedly, Kotzias has already communicated to António Guterres, the UN Secretary General, and Federica Mogherini, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission, his support for a resolution of the Kosovo question with a consensual border change (Athanasopoulos, 2018b).

Opportunities

The resolution of the Kosovo dispute will offer Greece an opportunity to fully develop its relations with both countries. At a time in which the Serbia-Turkey relations are substantially upgraded, the Greek-Serbian relations will be emancipated from the sole issue causing discomfort to both sides. As for the Athens-Pristina relations, Greece’s recognition of Kosovo’s statehood will allow for the full development of bilateral economic relations which are at present at a very low level.

The normalization of the Kosovo-Serbia relations will open the way for the advancement of the EU accession of both countries and, by extension, of the entire region. Moreover, having resolved their bilateral dispute, Belgrade and Pristina will be able to concentrate their EU accession efforts on where it matters more, i.e. the implementation of political and economic reforms. Likewise, the EU scrutiny of the accession path of Serbia and Kosovo will also turn to the fulfillment of political and economic criteria and, in particular, to the democratic backsliding and the deficiencies in the rule of law.

The settlement of the Kosovo dispute will also weaken the Russian influence in Serbia and in the Balkans. Many decision makers currently consider Russia as a spoiler of all western initiatives and peace processes in the region, from the Dayton Accords to the Prespa Agreement. In this regard, it is argued that, once Serbia ceases being dependent on the Russian veto to Kosovo’s UN membership, Belgrade will be able to follow a more independent foreign policy from Moscow and align better with EU foreign policy decisions much like all other EU candidate member-states.

Finally, the resolution of the Kosovo question (in addition, hopefully, to the implementation of the Prespa Agreement) will permit the international community to concentrate all its efforts for the stabilization of the region to just one pending issue, the impasse in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Weaknesses

The swap of territories between the two countries according to the demographic profile of different areas (i.e., the ethnicity of the majority of people living there) signifies a

major deviation from all previous peacebuilding efforts in the region which revolved around the idea of the establishment of multi-ethnic societies. In case of Kosovo, conflict resolution will not be about the protection of human rights but about a territorial arrangement. It will signify a defeat of all previous efforts to promote ethnic reconciliation as well as a step backwards in the attempt to build democratic inclusive societies. Instead of seeking for ways to empower and protect ethnic minorities, the message that will be sent to them is that they should better live on the right side of the border. In many respects, such a scenario represents an *a posteriori* justification of the ethnic cleansing policies that were carried out during the Yugoslav wars, in the nineties (Phillips, 2018).

A land swap is also a solution that runs against core European values and norms. The whole EU integration project is based on the respect and protection of ethnic and national diversity. EU membership, resting on the fulfillment of the Copenhagen criteria, explicitly presupposes the protection of minority rights. In this regard, treating ethnic heterogeneity as a problem in itself is a deeply anti-European stance to conflict solution that is reminiscent of interwar diplomacy. It is indeed peculiar that EU decision-makers such as Johannes Hahn and Federica Mogherini have even increased the odds of such a scenario by not ruling it out in principle.

Finally, the border change scenario, as a recipe for the resolution of Albanian-Serbian problems, is an exercise in futility. For there is no way to draw a line on the map that will perfectly separate the two people. In Kosovo, the majority of Serbs do not reside in the region that will be transferred to Serbia, whereas North Kosovo contains ethnic Albanians as well. As for South Serbia, any transfer of areas to Kosovo will result either in some towns with Albanian people staying behind, or in some towns with Serbs falling henceforth in Kosovo jurisdiction. In other words, ethnic separation between Albanians and Serbs is practically impossible. Still, the smaller the size of each minority residing in these two countries, the lesser will be its legitimate claim to collective rights. Therefore, Albanian and Serb minorities staying behind in these countries would probably be worse off following a border change solution.

Threats

The Greek (admittedly reluctant) support to the change of borders between Kosovo and Serbia rests on the assumption that this deal won't be a precedent for other cases. It testifies a conviction that the international community will make sure that the agreement will not destabilize the region. However, this assumption is on shaky grounds. While the parties to an agreement may meticulously provide for its legal consequences, they cannot exercise control over its political repercussions. Countries routinely attempt to impose those interpretations of international agreements that best suit their own interests. Revisionist powers may use the Kosovo settlement to justify their efforts to challenge international

borders. For instance, Russia will most probably use the precedent of such a deal to strengthen its case for the legitimization of its annexations in Georgia and Ukraine. Turkey will be encouraged to keep questioning the relevance in our times of the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923, with which its borders with several neighboring countries were fixed. Such a development will be particularly troubling for Greek security policy.

In the Balkans, a change of borders will strengthen the voices of nationalists who have not yet come in terms with the region's territorial status-quo. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Milorad Dodik has already warned that Republika Srpska would demand its secession and its unification with Serbia (Kovacevic, 2018). Bosnian Croats' nationalists, who have been asking for the formation of a third entity in Bosnia, may also follow suit. Indeed, three former High Representatives for Bosnia and Herzegovina, namely Carl Bildt, Paddy Ashdown, and Christian Schwarz-Schilling, sent an open co-authored letter to Federica Mogherini and the Foreign Ministers of EU member-states, urging them to take seriously into account Bosnia's situation and oppose to a border change deal (Bildt, Ashdown, and Schwarz-Schilling, 2018).

Likewise, Albanian and Kosovar nationalists may feel encouraged to press on with the idea of the unification of their countries into Greater Albania. In that case, one may not exclude the possibility that FYROM, a country where ethnic Albanians represent a quarter of the population, gets destabilized too. Therefore, several analysts have plausibly expressed the fear that a border change deal (even if consensual) would have a chain effect in the region that might result in the outbreak of ethnic tensions (Rossi, 2018; Mahmuti, 2018; Joseph, 2018).

The land swap scenario may also negatively affect the Cyprus question. It may be seen as legitimizing the idea of creating mono-ethnic states and it may run against diplomatic efforts for the reunification of the island. The Greek Cypriots (and Greece by extension) have defied the *de jure* partition of Cyprus into two ethnically homogenous independent states as the worst possible outcome of the UN-mediated negotiations with their Turkish counterparts.

Some Greek analysts also think that a border change deal between Kosovo and Serbia may also affect negatively the prospects of the Athens-Pristina relations. If Kosovo obtains international recognition as a more ethnically homogenous country that does not need to give credentials of its multiethnic character, it can fall under the influence of Turkey. To comprehend this fear, we need to take into consideration the great social distance that characterizes the relationship between Greek and Kosovar people (Konstantinidis and Armakolas, 2014, pp. 11-22).

Finally, we should not exclude the possibility that negotiations between the two presidents, even if they culminate in a deal, will not translate into a ratified agreement. This can happen for various reasons (Kursani, 2018; *Economist Intelligence Unit*, 2018). President Thaçi does not have the authority or the legitimacy to give away Kosovo territory. Serbia has not given any indication that it discusses the idea of ceding territory to Kosovo. Referenda in either country may have negative outcomes; and constitutional revisions, requiring qualified majorities, may be unsuccessful. However, the mere discussion of border changes has already commenced generating expectations and, thus, it has been creating political results on the ground. Therefore, there is a high probability that the negative repercussions associated with the land swap scenario may be brought to life, irrespectively of whether an agreement carrying any sort of benefits would eventually come into force.

3. Normalization of relations through the ongoing EU-moderated Serbia-Kosovo negotiations

This scenario concerns the possibility that the two countries would normalize relations within the framework of the Brussels process and the EU-moderated negotiations. Presumably, the two countries would sign a legally binding comprehensive agreement with which Pristina would undertake the commitment to award greater collective rights to ethnic Serbs residing in Kosovo (with the establishment of ZSO) and Belgrade would more or less explicitly recognize Kosovo statehood. While this has been the dominant scenario until mid-2018, it appears at the present to be the least possible of all three scenarios.

Strengths

This has been the preferred scenario for all western countries, recognizers and non-recognizers alike, as it entails that the territorial status-quo in the region would not be critically affected. Kosovo's recognized statehood would be according to the *uti possidetis juris*, the principle of customary international law prescribing that the international borders of newly established states should be their preceding administrative borders as colonies or constituent parts of federal states. It would also be in conformity to the decision of the ICJ on the legality of Kosovo's declaration of independence. Moreover, such a deal would be consistent with all peacemaking processes in the region from the Dayton Accords to the Ohrid Agreement. Not only have these processes maintained the inviolability of former Yugoslav administrative borders, they have also previewed substantial collective rights for ethnic groups residing in these counties. Very importantly, the normalization of relations through the EU-moderated negotiations would be congruous with the Kosovo peace process and, specifically, the UN "standards for Kosovo" policy, the Ahtisaari Plan, and the Brussels Agreement. These three documents invariably prescribed the preservation of Kosovo's multicultural character by vesting its minorities with substantial collective rights (Rossi,

2018). Therefore, this scenario would dash the hopes of all those nationalist political forces in the region that have been fomenting instability through appeals for border changes along ethnic lines.

The conflict resolution scenario that builds on the Brussels Agreement would also be in line with European values and norms as well as with the EU accession criterion for the protection of minority rights. It would respect ethnic diversity in the region and it would put emphasis on the living conditions and rights of Serbs living in Kosovo as opposed to a deal that would seek to bypass those people's problems with a transfer of territory. It would also be compatible with all efforts previously undertaken in the region to promote ethnic reconciliation and transitional justice.

The normalization of Kosovo-Serbia relations within the EU-moderated negotiations has been Greece's preferred scenario. It promises to eradicate an impediment to the Greek foreign policy in the Balkans without threatening to upset the territorial status quo in the region. In this regard, Evangelos Venizelos, then Greek Foreign Minister, argued in a visit to Pristina, in February 2014:

"The dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, is an historic event, and I admire the courage and the determination of the leadership of Kosovo and, of course, of Serbia, because this type of dialogue is something very important not only for this region, but also for the global situation."
(Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014).

Opportunities

The conflict resolution scenario that builds on the Brussels Agreement carries all opportunities mentioned previously in the land swap scenario. Greece would be able to fully develop its diplomatic and economic relations with both countries. In addition, the process of EU integration of Serbia and Kosovo would advance and accession negotiations would concentrate on the implementation of democratic reforms. What is more, Serbia's reliance on Russia would be diminished and the international community might be given the opportunity to shift its full attention to the stabilization of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Weaknesses

Contrary to the land swap scenario, the normalization of Kosovo-Serbia relations within the EU-moderated negotiations does not seem to have any weakness in terms of regional security. That said, we ought to acknowledge that the greatest disadvantage of this scenario is that it has not advanced so far. Although the EU has put all its leverage on it by tying Serbia's accession perspective to the normalization of Belgrade-Pristina relations,

Serbia has not been eager to recognize Kosovo's statehood without getting something in return (beyond, of course, the establishment of ZSO in Kosovo). For Vučić, the Brussels Agreement-driven normalization of relations implies an unacceptable political cost. According to a survey released in March 2018, 81% of Serb citizens stand against the recognition of Kosovo independence, even if such an action was required for Serbia's EU accession (Institut za evropske poslove, 2018). Nevertheless, the longer these negotiations last, the more difficult it gets for both parties to reach an agreement, and the greater is the loss of EU credibility and influence in the region.

Threats

The greatest challenge in such a scenario would be the full and functional integration of North Kosovo in the Kosovo state jurisdiction. If this process is not carefully planned, one may not exclude the possibility of renewed ethnic tensions in the region due to actions of either side in the conflict. The contemporary discussion of border changes has generated expectations in both North Kosovo and South Serbia, which would remain unfulfilled under the scenario examined here. In other words, Serbs in North Kosovo and Albanians in South Serbia are reasonably expected to increasingly get less and less cooperative in the implementation of an agreement that does not preview border change.

Considering that the majority of Serbs disapprove their country's recognition of Kosovo, an agreement that would not have any tangible gain for Serbia may discredit Vučić and cause political turmoil in the country. What is worrisome here is not that a regime in democratic backsliding may fall, but that its main challenge would most likely come from more nationalist and Eurosceptic forces that may try to capitalize on what they would present as a national treason. In that case, Serbia's EU accession path and political stability might be imperiled.

4. Conclusions

All three scenarios of policy outcomes carry non-negligible advantages. However, in terms of threats to regional security, they may be clearly classified in a proper order. The scenario of the normalization of Kosovo-Serbia relations within the EU-moderated negotiations is the least dangerous for the preservation of the regional territorial status quo. It builds on all previous international efforts to stabilize the Balkans and it is in line with the region's EU accession perspective. Its main drawback is that it presupposes concessions that Belgrade has been reluctant to make. Still, according to a recent survey, most Serbs believe that Belgrade no longer has any influence in Kosovo and, thus, they do not want to make any personal sacrifice for it (Zivanovic, 2018). While the overwhelming majority of Serbs does not maintain any unrealistic expectations on the Kosovo question, the recent

discussion of border changes has been rendering even more elusive the conclusion of an agreement within the framework of the EU-moderated negotiations.

In theory, the second-best scenario should be an agreement revolving around some kind of border change that would masterfully avoid creating any precedent for the region. This policy outcome garners the more or less implicit approval of the United States, Russia, EU institutions and some countries such as Greece. Its main advantage is that such an agreement appears to be within reach according to the Presidents of Serbia and Kosovo. However, as this study demonstrated, one cannot possibly assure that the land swap scenario would not be used as a precedent elsewhere. If that happens, it would become the most dangerous scenario that may seriously destabilize the entire region. Moreover, it rests on questionable ethical and normative grounds. In this regard, it is of little wonder that the border change scenario has been dismissed by key decision-makers from the region, such as the Prime Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and FYROM, as well as the President of Albania.

The preservation of the status-quo seems to be a less dangerous policy outcome in comparison to a land swap scenario that may serve as a precedent in the region. Although the Kosovo frozen conflict stands as an impediment in the EU accession of both countries, it does not pose an imminent security threat in the region. To be sure, the status quo is not sustainable in the long run and one cannot exclude the possibility of either side growing impatient and trying to impose its will with a *fait accompli*. Still, no deal may be preferable to a bad deal in the Balkans.

To conclude, while no scenario in the Kosovo-Serbia relations is entirely risk free, there is a noticeable variation of advantages and drawbacks among them.

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