

Political Relations between Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina

By Harun Nuhanović, RYPP Exchange Participant and Independent Researcher

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BACKGROUND

The political interactions between Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) are deeply intertwined with their shared history in the Yugoslav era. Some tensions date back to 1981, when Kosovo commenced protests against repression, demanding recognition as a republic within Yugoslavia, which later developed into a movement for independence. This was met with opposition from the BiH communist leadership, reflecting concerns over potential implications for BiH. Kosovo's declaration of independence on February 17, 2008, marked a significant moment in the region's history. However, BiH, along with Serbia, remain the two Western Balkan countries that have not formally recognized Kosovo's independence. This stance is primarily influenced by Bosnian Serb politicians from Republika Srpska, who have expressed strong opposition to any recognition or formal cooperation between the two countries. Due to the constitutional framework of BiH, Republika Srpska holds veto power over federal decisions, including the recognition of Kosovo. Despite these political complexities, there have been notable instances of engagement between Bosnian and Kosovan politicians. These interactions have included official visits to Prishtina by members of the BiH parliament and government, albeit limited to Bosnian representatives. Additionally, dialogues and exchanges often take place on the fringes of summits, regional initiatives, and through informal gatherings. These discussions, primarily focused on regional cooperation and shared interests, reflect ongoing efforts to navigate the intricate political landscape of the Western Balkans.

Kosovo is home to a significant Bosnian community, which holds the status of a constituent community within the state. This distinction affords them extended political rights, a notable aspect of which includes reserved seats in the Kosovo Assembly. Furthermore, this community is also represented in the government. Bosnian community in Kosovo has also been a strong advocate for recognition of Kosovo's independence by BiH as well as facilitating greater cooperation.

CHALLENGES

Implementation of the mobility agreements. On 3 November 2022, Western Balkan countries, within the framework of the Berlin process, signed

three mobility agreements: ID travel within the region, recognition of qualifications for certain professions and recognition of academic qualifications. BiH did not ratify agreement so far and disable citizens from benefits of these mobility agreements. Noteworthy, ratification lags behind other participants due to Bosnian Serb representatives have been blocked it.

Institutional cooperation. Kosovo and BiH are aspirants for the EU accession. Precondition for the EU accession is regional cooperation getting countries closer to the EU membership. Further, direct import and export of goods and materials are going to improve economic situation as well as exchange of information would improve security situation in the region.

WAY FORWARD

- **BiH should ratify the mobility agreements reached in the framework of the Berlin Process summit in Berlin in November of 2022, effectively enabling travel with ID card between Kosovo and BiH.**
- **Opening Liaison Office would facilitate Kosovans if they have some issues in BiH.** This office would work as a consular office without diplomatic status providing help service to those who need it in BiH. Further, by opening the office, visa procedure would be accelerated and politicians would get it faster than usual. It is going to ease relations between politicians and their attendance on conferences in BiH.
- **NGOs from Kosovo and BiH should advocate for institutional cooperation.** They should launch campaign dealing with this issue. Campaign would have to include politicians from both countries as well. As a part of campaign, NGOs can launch own media platform (web site, social media accounts) showing benefits from cooperation between countries. Organizing roundtable, seminars and publishing policy papers would draw media attention making more pressure in public for institutional cooperation.