

Advancing Political Interethnic Dialogue in Kosovo

On July 6, 2026, the Council for Inclusive Governance (CIG), with the support of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, convened a workshop in Pristina bringing together civil society representatives and policy experts to discuss issues underlying the interethnic relations in Kosovo. The discussion focused on how to create conditions for more constructive engagement between Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb political representatives amid limited communication and persistent mistrust.

Although participants differed in their assessments of recent developments and the factors contributing to the current impasse, the discussion revealed broad convergence around several practical priorities that could help rebuild confidence and gradually create space for renewed political dialogue. These themes are reflected in the brief outline below.

Participants generally agreed that, despite several positive developments over the past two years, interethnic relations have seen little meaningful progress at the political level. The return of Kosovo Serb representatives to municipal institutions in the north and to the Kosovo Assembly, the peaceful transition of power following local elections, and the phased implementation of the Law on Foreigners were cited as examples demonstrating that pragmatic solutions remain possible when sufficient political will exists.

At the same time, participants noted that these developments have yet to produce tangible improvements in citizens' everyday lives or more sustained political communication. While some observed that the current situation is less tense than during the 2020–2023 period, many argued that recent developments reflect recurring patterns rather than a genuine shift in interethnic relations. Although community-level interaction and local cooperation continue in many areas, meaningful engagement between political representatives remains limited.

Participants also acknowledged that Kosovo's ongoing political uncertainty has narrowed the space for dialogue. They emphasized, however, that this should not prevent continued discussion on practical priorities and shared challenges. Such discussions could help ensure, once political conditions become more conducive, that a clearer agenda for renewed engagement is already in place.

This brief report summarizes the principal themes that emerged during the meeting which was conducted under the Chatham House Rule. The report was prepared by Jeta Loshaj, CIG's Senior Associate.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Political Will and Practical Progress. Participants agreed that political discourse in Kosovo has become increasingly dominated by competing positions rather than shared priorities. As one participant noted, "politicians everywhere talk more about positions than priorities," arguing that dialogue should focus on practical issues rather than political narratives.

Although views differed on recent developments, there was broad agreement that communication among political actors has become increasingly limited, reinforcing mistrust and polarization. Several participants thus argued that rebuilding communication will require greater openness from Kosovo Albanian political parties to engage with the Serb List and move away from the narratives that establish red lines against such communication. At the same time, meaningful engagement equally depends on the Serb List too, which must should address and distant itself from the Banjska attack and participate more actively and constructively in Kosovo's institutions.

Participants nevertheless pointed to several positive developments, including the return of Kosovo Serb representatives to the four northern municipalities and to the Kosovo Assembly, the peaceful transition of power in northern municipalities, and the postponement and phased implementation of the Law on Foreigners. These examples demonstrate that political will can produce positive practical outcomes. However, many participants stressed that such isolated developments have yet to generate broader political engagement or sustained confidence between communities.

Building Trust Through Practical Cooperation. Participants emphasized that rebuilding confidence requires moving beyond crisis management toward practical cooperation that improves citizens' daily lives. Rather than relying on political declarations, participants argued that confidence grows through consistent implementation of practical measures.

Frequently mentioned priorities included the return of judges and prosecutors, the return of Kosovo Serb officers, sustainable legalized arrangements for Serbian education and healthcare institutions, the preservation of decentralization, and the restoration of stronger multiethnic representation within the Kosovo Police. This should include, for example, the appointment of Kosovo Serb police station commanders and regional police leadership in the north.

In terms of representation more broadly, some participants expressed concern that most employees in the Municipality of North Mitrovica are currently ethnic Albanians. They argued that this reflects a significant imbalance in the local public administration in a municipality that is majority ethnic Serb and underscores the need for municipal institutions to reflect the northern municipalities' ethnic composition.

Participants also emphasized that Kosovo's multiethnic character should also be reflected more consistently at the central level as well. They highlighted the importance of ensuring Kosovo Serb representation in institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense, while stressing that the perspectives of all communities should be meaningfully incorporated into key state processes.

In this context, several participants observed that the current institutional deadlock could provide an opportunity to approach the election of the President, an office intended to represent all citizens of Kosovo, in a manner that promotes broad political consensus and inclusive participation.

Finally, participants also highlighted the importance of youth initiatives, cultural exchanges, and local cooperation, noting that municipalities remain an underused platform for strengthening interethnic relations.

Implementation Before New Agreements. Participants broadly agreed that the principal challenge is no longer negotiating new agreements, but implementing those already reached through the EU-facilitated dialogue. They argued that practical progress is more likely to result from fulfilling existing commitments than reopening political negotiations.

Frequently mentioned priorities included the functioning of local institutions, judicial integration, police structures, education, healthcare, and property rights. Participants also stressed that greater transparency regarding the implementation of agreements would help counter misinformation, improve public understanding of the dialogue process, and increase accountability.

Some participants noted that earlier phases of the dialogue were accompanied by regular six-month implementation reports and periodic briefings to Kosovo Assembly's Committee on Foreign Affairs. They argued that more consistent monitoring and institutional oversight could contribute to greater transparency and public confidence. While future discussions will increasingly, and perhaps inevitably, address political questions, participants agreed that they should remain grounded in practical outcomes that directly benefit citizens.

Making Political Engagement Worthwhile. Participants agreed that there is a perception that political costs of dialogue currently appear to outweigh its benefits, creating incentives for leaders to maintain confrontational narratives rather than pursue cooperation. However, referring to the current phased implementation of the Law on Foreigners, one participant remarked that "you can compromise and people will still understand," suggesting that pragmatic decisions need not carry significant political costs when they produce visible results.

Participants therefore stressed that any renewed political dialogue should be structured around clear and achievable objectives, rather than pursued as an end in itself, with a focus on practical outcomes that improve governance and citizens' daily lives.

Participants also identified Kosovo's European integration, including greater access to the EU Single Market, as a potential incentive for constructive engagement. At the same time, they acknowledged that the legacy of the Banjska attack and continued disagreements over implementation continue to constrain the political space for dialogue. The legacy and the impact of the Banjska attack should be addressed in a future dialogue.

Building Consensus Before Dialogue. Participants noted that sustainable interethnic dialogue requires stronger internal dialogue within both the Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb political communities. They argued that political representatives often enter discussions without a sufficiently broad domestic consensus on priorities, limiting their room for compromise and making engagement politically more difficult.

Several participants suggested that greater communication within each community could help identify shared interests, clarify common objectives, and reduce polarization before engaging across communities. In particular, they emphasized the importance of fostering more inclusive dialogue among Kosovo Albanian political actors on relations with the Kosovo Serb community, while also encouraging greater discussion among Kosovo Serb representatives on their role within Kosovo's institutions and the practical needs of the communities they represent.

Strengthening these parallel internal dialogues was therefore seen as an important step toward creating the conditions for more sustainable and meaningful interethnic political engagement.

Civil Society as a Bridge, not a Substitute. Participants viewed civil society as an important facilitator of future political engagement, while emphasizing that sustainable progress ultimately depends on political leadership. Civil society organizations can create informal spaces for communication, identify shared priorities, and broaden participation by involving municipalities, youth, women, and a wider range of civil actors.

Several participants also suggested framing future discussions around governance, human rights, and citizens' everyday concerns, while strengthening transparency through regular monitoring of dialogue implementation. At the same time, participants cautioned that civil society cannot substitute for political representatives. Its role is instead to help create conditions in which dialogue becomes politically feasible by promoting evidence-based discussion, broader public participation, and cooperation based on shared interests rather than competing narratives.

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Participants concluded that there is no single or immediate path to renewed political engagement. However, the Government of Kosovo and the largest Kosovo Serb political party bear particular responsibility for creating the conditions for progress through launching a sustained communication, implementation of existing commitments, and constructive engagement on practical issues. Greater transparency and tangible improvements in citizens' everyday lives could gradually rebuild confidence and create more favorable conditions for dialogue between Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb political representatives.

Participants

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