

Advancing Kosovo's EU Path: Steps Forward

Introduction

On October 8, 2026, the Council for Inclusive Governance (CIG) convened a regional roundtable in Pristina, Kosovo, bringing together political party representatives, government officials, diplomats, civil society representatives, and regional experts from Kosovo, neighboring countries, and EU member states. The meeting, organized as part of a CIG regional project supported by the German Federal Foreign Office (AA), examined practical steps that Kosovo, the European Union (EU), and key member states could take over the next 12–24 months to advance Kosovo's European integration, including in the absence of an immediate breakthrough on formal candidate status. Participants took part in their personal capacities.

The discussion addressed three interrelated questions: what Kosovo can advance through domestic reform and political consensus; what forms of gradual integration and political support the EU can realistically provide; and how both sides can agree on credible, reciprocal steps. Particular attention was devoted to institutional stability, rule of law, minority inclusion, the EU-facilitated dialogue with Serbia, the EU Growth Plan, access to EU mechanisms, and the role of EU member states that recognize and do not recognize Kosovo.

This report presents key recommendations followed by an extended summary of the discussion. These recommendations do not necessarily reflect a consensus among participants or the views of CIG or AA. The roundtable was conducted under the Chatham House Rule. The report was drafted by Jeta Loshaj, CIG's Senior Associate.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Recommendations for Kosovo

- **Build a durable cross-party commitment to European integration.** Adopt a parliamentary declaration reaffirming Kosovo's European and Euro-Atlantic orientation and establish a standing mechanism for government–opposition coordination on EU-related priorities beyond electoral cycles (e.g. a National Council on EU Integration). Maintain political consensus on the EU membership as the key strategic goal for Kosovo.
- **Improve track record on EU reforms and prioritize the Reform Agenda.** Accelerate implementation of the Reform Agenda, SAA commitments, and public administration and rule-of-law reforms. Kosovo can advance much of this work domestically, without awaiting candidate status, and thereby strengthen its ability to benefit from the €882.6 million allocated under the EU Growth Plan, subject to the applicable conditions. Assign clear institutional

responsibilities, set implementation deadlines, and regularly monitor progress on outstanding reforms, particularly those linked to EU financing.

- **Strengthen the institutional leadership of EU integration.** Give the process a clearer political and administrative center. Consider a dedicated ministry or stronger central coordination structure (e.g. a deputy prime minister), with clearly defined responsibilities, adequate expertise and resources, and regular reporting on reform progress to the parliament. Begin preparing for eventual accession negotiations by assessing gaps in alignment with the EU acquis and identifying the institutional capacity and resources needed to close them.
- **Navigate Challenges of Transitional Justice.** Several participants cautioned that developments surrounding the Kosovo Specialist Chambers and the broader issue of dealing with the past could pose additional challenges for Kosovo in the coming years. In this context, membership in the Council of Europe was seen as particularly important for strengthening human rights protections and providing additional mechanisms to address these challenges.
- **Improve relations between Kosovo's institutions and Kosovo Serbs.** Ensure dialogue with Kosovo Serb political representatives, improve access to institutions and services, and develop concrete proposals for non-majority accommodation and local self-government consistent with Kosovo's constitutional framework and existing commitments. Avoid allowing disagreements over the Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities to prevent other confidence-building steps as part of the broader process of normalization of relations with Serbia. Implement its obligations stemming from the EU-facilitated dialogue.
- **Pursue a more strategic and proactive diplomatic outreach.** Engage systematically with EU institutions, recognizing and non-recognizing member states, and potential political sponsors of Kosovo's EU path, such as Germany or Croatia. Draw on parliamentary diplomacy, regional experience, and Kosovo's diaspora, while maintaining Kosovo's 100% alignment with EU foreign and security policy.
- **Keep EU decision makers informed.** Prepare and circulate regular quarterly reports to EU member states and EU institutions on Kosovo's progress on EU-related reforms, political developments, the situation of Kosovo Serbs, the implementation of the Reform Agenda and commitments made in Brussels. Highlight concrete achievements supported by evidence, while explaining outstanding problems and obstacles and next steps. Follow up through Kosovo's diplomatic missions and parliamentary contacts.

Recommendations for the EU and EU Member States

- **Provide a clear political signal on Kosovo's EU membership application.** Hold substantive discussions on Kosovo's application in the Council of the EU and clarify the steps needed for the Council to request a European Commission opinion, making the path forward more predictable.
- **Set transparent, achievable benchmarks.** Specify the political and reform-related steps expected of Kosovo, distinguish legal requirements from political considerations, and apply conditionality consistently. Acknowledge progress and avoid shifting expectations.
- **Advance Kosovo's participation in European institutions and mechanisms.** Renew diplomatic support for Kosovo's Council of Europe membership and identify additional

feasible forms of participation in EU programs, agencies, and cooperation frameworks, including operational law-enforcement cooperation where legally possible.

- **Use member-state diplomacy more actively.** Encourage a coordinated effort by supportive EU capitals to engage with both non-recognizers and other hesitant member states. Tailor this engagement to the different positions of the five non-recognizers, while also addressing obstacles arising among recognizing states.
- **Support Kosovo's internal resilience.** Assist with rule-of-law reform, interethnic confidence-building, dealing with the past, and institutional capacity-building. Avoid messages that suggest every aspect of Kosovo's relationship with the EU depends on a single unresolved bilateral issue.

Joint Recommendations for Kosovo and the EU

- **Develop a jointly owned action plan with clear benchmarks.** Agree on a limited sequence of feasible measures for the next 12–24 months, with clear responsibilities, measurable milestones, and regular reviews. Such an action plan can be developed jointly with the EU or with one of the EU member states, e.g. Germany. Specify what additional EU access or support would follow verified progress. Frame gradual integration as a step toward eventual EU membership.
- **Fully use existing integration instruments.** Unblock implementation of Growth Plan commitments, improve the absorption of available funding, and make fuller use of the SAA and other EU programs. Prioritize practical benefits in payments and Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA)-related preparations, the Single Market, digital services, energy, transport, investment, education, and research.
- **Create a more constructive framework for dialogue and non-majority inclusion.** Rebuild trust through practical commitments by Kosovo, active EU facilitation with the current EUSR, and a clearer distinction between obligations that each party can fulfill independently and issues requiring cooperation between them. Support tangible improvements in the lives of Kosovo Serbs while maintaining engagement on normalization.
- **Address concrete barriers to regional economic integration.** Work together to remove obstacles to trade, transit, energy transmission, transport links, and administrative recognition, including those Kosovo can resolve on its own. Explore practical ways for Kosovo to participate in European transit, standardization, and accreditation mechanisms, supported by technical assistance to strengthen Kosovo's customs and certification capacities.
- **Improve communication and mutual accountability.** Publicly explain realistic milestones, acknowledge reforms as they are implemented, and establish regular, predictable exchanges between Kosovo institutions, the European Commission, and supportive EU member states. Use these exchanges to address unmet expectations before they deepen public mistrust.

Joint Recommendations for Kosovo and other candidate countries

- **Increase exchange of experience with EU candidates.** Establish regular exchanges between Kosovo and EU candidates, particularly Albania and Montenegro, on coordinating reforms,

aligning legislation with EU rules, using EU funding effectively, and resolving political and bilateral issues. Draw lessons from both successful reforms and those that have stalled. Follow up on these exchanges by identifying which practices can be adapted domestically and assigning responsibility for applying them in Kosovo.

Extended Discussion

A political opening, but no assured candidate status anytime soon. The formation of Kosovo's institutions just one day before the roundtable offered an opportunity to regain momentum after a prolonged political paralysis. Participants differed, however, on whether candidate status was achievable soon. Some urged EU institutions and supportive EU capitals to secure a Council request for a Commission opinion on Kosovo's application; others considered this politically unrealistic in the next 12–24 months. Several stressed that the five EU non-recognizers do not share identical positions and that hesitation among recognizing states also matters. A more realistic immediate objective, many argued, would be a clear political signal and a concrete, benchmark-based path rather than a promise of candidate status, especially since it has been ten years since the SAA with Kosovo entered into force. Participants also discussed the limits of geopolitical momentum: Russia's war against Ukraine helped accelerate the EU paths of Ukraine and Moldova, while Georgia's candidate status illustrated the weight of political considerations. Yet several cautioned that the same geopolitical urgency would not automatically extend to Kosovo or the region. Kosovo therefore cannot rely on geopolitical necessity alone and must build a stronger case through reforms and sustained diplomacy.

Domestic delivery as the most immediate opportunity. Participants repeatedly contrasted Kosovo's strong public support for EU membership with inconsistent reform implementation. The Growth Plan was cited as an especially tangible opportunity, alongside improvements in public administration, justice, education, and implementation of the SAA commitments. These reforms could advance even without candidate status, provided that the government and opposition sustain cooperation and improve institutional coordination. Proposals included a parliamentary declaration on EU integration, stronger oversight, and a more effective central coordinating structure. The experience of Croatia and Montenegro suggested that political continuity, political consensus, and administrative capacity matter as much as diplomatic advocacy.

Normalization, non-majority inclusion, and the past. The sharpest disagreements concerned the establishment of the Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities (ASM) and the most recent judgement of the Kosovo Specialist Chambers. Some participants challenged the existing Association proposal as a mono-ethnic model such as the ASM and favored solutions rooted in Kosovo's local self-government structure; others argued that Kosovo must present a credible concept addressing its commitments and Kosovo Serb concerns. On the Specialist Chambers, views differed on the amendments, accountability, and the implications for judicial independence. Yet participants broadly recognized the need for meaningful Kosovo Serb inclusion, constitutional safeguards, and a more constructive approach to dealing with the past. These issues were considered difficult to avoid in any renewed EU engagement.

Gradual integration with tangible benefits. Participants considered the Growth Plan, SAA, SEPA preparations, and participation in European programs among the most realistic avenues for progress over the next two years. Further opportunities were identified in digital services, energy, transport, education, research, and operational cooperation. Several barriers to trade and regional connectivity would require active EU facilitation. At the same time, participants warned against gradual integration becoming a permanent substitute for EU membership: the economic benefits should be paired with visible political milestones and reciprocal commitments.

A reciprocal roadmap to restore trust. The discussion converged on the need for a limited, jointly developed action plan for the next 12–24 months. Kosovo would commit to measurable reforms, institutional stability, and minority inclusion; the EU would clarify expectations, recognize delivery, and pursue feasible steps such as deeper sectoral integration and renewed support for Council of Europe membership. Participants saw this as more realistic than relying on an immediate breakthrough on candidate status. As one intervention put it, Kosovo and its partners needed to move beyond the “blame game” and identify what each side could deliver—and deliver it.

Participants

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Jasmin Bojadzic, International Secretary, Democratic Party of Socialists (Montenegro)
Ditmir Bushati, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Albania; Member, Presidency, Socialist Party of Albania
Matthias Conrad, Deputy Head, Western Balkans Division, German Federal Foreign Office
Liza Gashi, Member of Parliament of Kosovo; Self-Determination Movement
Besar Gergi, Research Fellow, Group for Legal and Political Studies
Lutfi Haziri, Member of Parliament of Kosovo, Deputy Chairman, Democratic League of Kosovo
Enver Hoxhaj, Member of Parliament of Kosovo, Member, Presidency, Democratic Party of Kosovo
Alexis Hupin, Deputy Head of EU in Kosovo
Ramadan Ilazi, Head of Research, Kosovar Center for Security Studies
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David Marchesin, Political Advisor, Embassy of France in Kosovo
Engjellushe Morina, Senior Policy Fellow, European Council on Foreign Relations
Igor Novakovic, Senior Adviser, Council for Inclusive Governance
Aleksandar Andrija Pejovic, Former Minister of European Integration of Montenegro
Ivan Racan, Member of Parliament of Croatia; Social Democratic Party
Alex Roinishvili Grigorev, President, Council for Inclusive Governance
Veton Surroi, Publicist
Besnik Tahiri, Member of Parliament of Kosovo; Vice President, Alliance for the Future of Kosovo
Jeton Zulfaj, Chief Negotiator of Kosovo with the EU; National Coordinator for the Reform and Growth Instrument, Government of Kosovo; Self-Determination Movement