

Hungary to Block Kosovo's EU and Council of Europe Membership Application

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The decision by Budapest to block the so-called European integration of Kosovo, despite already recognising Serbia's southern province as an independent state, is motivated by the sovereign foreign policy enforced by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who not only seeks to defend international law, but also preserve friendly relations with Serbia.

Hungary is not among the five EU members (Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain) that refuse to recognise Kosovo's independence. Hungary's recognition of Kosovo was carried out by Orbán's predecessors in 2008. None-the-less, Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said on January 10 that his country will vote against Kosovo's membership in European bodies.

Despite recognising Kosovo, Hungary is perhaps the only country in the EU today that truly pursues a sovereigntist policy. Serbia, a non-EU member, is one of the few countries in all of Europe to also pursue a sovereign policy. With both countries being neighbours and having deep historic links, it is only natural that they are friendly today.

With Kosovo applying for EU membership in December and announcing its intentions to do the same with the Council of Europe, moves that have overwhelming support in Brussels, Hungary has not shied away from defending Serbia.

Responding to these actions in a joint press conference with his Serbian counterpart Ivica Dačić, Szijjarto said that:

"The premature admission of Kosovo by various European entities may jeopardise the search for reconciliation. Therefore, if there is a vote on whether to accept Kosovo as a member of the Council of Europe, the government will vote no."

For his part, Dačić said that the Kosovo issue can only be resolved through concessions.

“We believe that the issue of Kosovo can only be resolved by compromise and we are very sensitive that it is approached in accordance with the policy of double standards when it comes to territorial integrity,” said Dačić. “Either territorial integrity is a principle, or it is not. You can’t be in favour of preserving territorial integrity in one case, and say it the other way around.”

Belgrade and Pristina have been in an EU-led dialogue on the normalisation of relations since 2011, and naturally little progress has been made since Brussels is unrelenting in its recognition and support for Kosovo’s separation from Serbia. This is despite the fact that it violated international law, specifically UNSC Resolution 1244, which established a temporary international administration in the province and guaranteed the territorial integrity of Serbia.

The Serbian foreign minister then stressed that the security of ethnic Serbs in Kosovo must be ensured.

“If KFOR does not want to do this and if the Kosovo police do not want to do it, then do not take us to the point that the Serbian police and army must guarantee security and peace in Kosovo. This is something we would not want,” he stressed.

The Orbán administration is aware that it is nearly impossible for Kosovo to become an EU member as there are five states which will VETO such a move. None-the-less, given that Kosovo is nothing more than a NATO military occupation and a hub for Albanian narcotics and human trafficking, Orbán fears the repercussions that such a country could have on his own if it were to become an EU member.

Just as importantly, there is a personal friendly relationship between Orbán and Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić, which is reflective of the strong relations that modern Hungary and Serbia have developed. Despite this development though, even Orbán has limitations and it is unlikely that Budapest will reverse its recognition of Kosovo as an independent state in the foreseeable future. It must be taken into account that Hungary is an EU and NATO member and has certain obligations towards its partners.

As the majority of EU and NATO members recognise Kosovo’s independence, we cannot expect Hungary to reverse its recognition overnight, especially since the country is already under intense pressure for its position on the war in Ukraine.

Despite the West’s unwavering position, it has not stopped pressure from mounting on the ruling Albanian authorities in Kosovo. Serbia demands for the establishment of the Association of Serb Municipalities, a structure that would have executive powers, but something that Kosovo’s so-called Prime Minister Albin Kurti and the Constitutional Court have ruled out.

This has not, surprisingly, stopped the West from pressuring Kosovo, with a senior US Department of State advisor, Derek Chollet saying on January 11 that

“Kosovo must fulfill all commitments within the dialogue, including the formation of the Association of municipalities with a Serbian majority”.

None-the-less, with more and more countries withdrawing their recognition of Kosovo, albeit all non-European countries, the West are desperately trying to conclude an agreement between Belgrade and Pristina. For this reason, Chollet uses language like

“We believe that the government of Kosovo should celebrate that diversity and should establish policies that bring success to all Kosovars, regardless of their ethnicity.”

But Pristina is not interested in building an inclusive state, but rather an Albanian supremacist state, a prospect that Hungary absolutely refuses to support, and for this reason is standing by its Serbian partner in a strong way.

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