

Kosovo's European integration prospects

By agreeing with Serbia on ways to normalise relations, a key demand of the EU, Kosovo took a major step on the path towards the EU in 2013. Kosovo has started negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU, with conclusion expected in spring 2014.

Improved relations with Serbia

On 19 April 2013, the EU-facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia led to the [Brussels Agreement](#). Serbia still does not recognise its former province as a sovereign state (nor do five EU Member States), but the two are willing to find a *modus vivendi*, sector by sector: [good progress](#) is being made on integrating Serb police officers into the Kosovo police. [Discussions](#) on the future location of the Mitrovica local court in north Kosovo are more difficult, but progress has been [reported](#). The EU is providing financial assistance for the agreement's implementation, e.g. [concerning](#) the civil registry, diploma recognition, land registers, and integrated border management. Customs cooperation has [started](#) at the Jarinje and Brnjak border crossings.

Elections

Kosovo's local elections on 3 November and 1 December 2013 were the first to include Serb-majority areas in north Kosovo. EU and UN representatives [hailed](#) the overall smooth running of the ballots. At [three](#) polling stations in north Kosovo, voting had to be rerun because of irregularities. Analysts at the European Institute for Security Studies [consider](#) these elections, despite their low turnout, a major opportunity for local politicians to tackle problems on the ground. In north Kosovo in particular, these include unemployment, crime, freedom of movement, and waste management. Nine out of ten municipalities in the north were won by candidates of the [Serb Civic Initiative](#), backed by Serbia.

The new mayor of the capital Priština, Shpend Ahmeti, of Vetëvendosje the nationalist Self-Determination Movement, [says](#) he will focus on the fight against corruption. The parties are discussing electoral law reform ahead of September 2014 parliamentary elections. Reserved seats for Serbs are a contentious issue.

Following the local elections, the way is clear for the formation of an Association of Serb Municipalities, as set out in the Brussels Agreement. This body should [cover](#) economic development, education, health, urban and rural planning, but Kosovo and Serbia are at odds over its legal status. Some [commentators](#) fear that a strong association could lead to a separatist "[Republika Srpska](#)" situation as in Bosnia and Herzegovina, however the British Ambassador to Kosovo dismisses this [danger](#).

Rule of law and other priorities

The EU Special Representative in Kosovo, Samuel Žbogar, [pointed](#) to priority areas for reform, as set out in the Commission's [progress report](#): the rule of law, including the fight against corruption and organised crime needs serious efforts, as well as prevention and prosecution of attacks against the media and minority communities. The Commission also states that Kosovo must refrain from political interference in the judiciary and in civil-service recruitment, and do more to combat human trafficking. Legislation is sufficient in many areas, but greater civil-service competence and more political will is needed for its implementation, Kosovo has been in dialogue on visa liberalisation with the EU since 2012. Under the [roadmap](#) towards liberalisation, laws on asylum, party financing, and human trafficking have been [adopted](#).

European Parliament

The Foreign Affairs Committee's [motion](#) calls for a more transparent and simplified electoral law and for better cooperation between the EU's rule of law mission, EULEX, Interpol, Europol and Kosovan authorities.

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130716REV1

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