

## BOOK REVIEWS

### **THE POLITICS OF RECOGNITION AND ENGAGEMENT: EU MEMBER STATE RELATIONS WITH KOSOVO**

Ioannis Armakolas, James Ker-Lindsay, *The Politics of Recognition and Engagement: EU Member State Relations with Kosovo*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, pp. 245.

Perception of countries towards Kosovo's unilateral independence, based on a binary distinction of recognizers and non-recognizers, is incomplete if not wholly wrong (Armakolas, Ker-Lindsay 2020, 2) claim editors of the volume devoted to analyzing the EU member state relations with Kosovo. *The Politics of Recognition and Engagement*, edited by Ioannis Armakolas and James Ker-Lindsay, explores the complex interactions of the European Union countries with Kosovo's unilaterally declared independence 2008 up to recent days. The book represents the product of a project entitled '*The Politics of (Non)Recognition-Lessons Learned and Knowledge Transfer*' carried out between 2016 and 2018 and made up of eleven chapters aimed at exploring the individual interactions of meaningfully chosen nine EU-member states with Kosovo's unilaterally declared independence. The first chapter provides a unique research framework with clearly elaborated criteria and thus categorization of the countries that will be separately analyzed in other chapters.

An act of recognition represents one of the most essential steps in establishing relations between countries. However, the significance of the recognition regarding both emerging new states and establishing relationships among them have been a highly debated topic within both international law and international relations disciplines. In this study, the phenomenon of recognition and its importance in establishing relations between countries has been thoroughly discussed by using a case of Kosovo's unilateral independence. A starting point in examining the topic is a claim that a 'simple binary explanation, based on a distinction between recognizers and non-recognizers is far from enough' (Armakolas, Ker-Lindsay 2020, 4) to understand the complexity of states' behaviours towards Kosovo's unilateral independence. Namely, as the authors assert, within these two categories of the countries can be identified as highly heterogeneous behaviours. This is because the simple act of recognition, although an initial one in establishing interaction within countries, is not the only one that determines them. It is an intensity and form of engagement of the

countries that make a difference in this regard. It is rightly pointed out that in the years after the unilateral declaration of independence has been shown that the ‘recognition does not necessarily mean an engagement’ (Armakolas, Ker-Lindsay 2020, 3). This is why the authors import in the equation another important criterion - engagement. By stating the importance of both recognition and engagement, as well as their indisputable interrelation, the authors construct four broad definitional categories, aimed at describing complexity of states’ interactions with Kosovo in the last decade: ‘*strong recognizers*’, ‘*weak recognizers*’, ‘*soft non-recognizers*’ and ‘*hard non-recognizers*’ (Armakolas, Ker-Lindsay 2020, 4). This thesis, the authors strive to prove, particularly in the case of the EU, in which the above mentioned has been particularly illustrated. Therefore, according to the presented criteria, they have chosen nine EU member states that clearly illustrate defined categories.

Namely, by categorizing Britain and Germany as *strong recognizers* and Poland and the Czech Republic as *weak recognizers*, together with Cyprus and Spain as *hard non-recognizers* and Greece and Slovakia, and to some extent Romania as *soft non-recognizers*, editors divided this study into additional nine chapters, each devoted to studying one state as a unique case study. The additional value of this research is that it strives to examine the overall connection between recognition, diplomatic relations and engagement in the sphere of international politics, with particular emphasis on the importance of internal political dynamics of each country in shaping these elements. Lastly, in the EU context, this study contributes to the understanding how the EU’s external policy is formulated and operationalized in cases where there are profound differences of opinion between the member states’. (Armakolas, Ker-Lindsay 2020, 16)

The book has ten main contributors, each exploring a position of the country previously classified in one of the four categories. However, the second chapter firstly analyzes the way in which Kosovo formulated its foreign policy from the proclamation of unilateral independence in 2008, with particular emphasis on the strategy of Kosovo’s diplomacy in the process of gaining recognition. As elaborated, this was a part of its effort to establish and strengthen both its international position, as well as internal sovereignty. The author claims that strengthening international support to recognise Kosovo’s sovereignty has been a top foreign policy strategic objective. Presented data, based on the interviews and analysis of important diplomatic documents (Foreign Policy Strategic Objectives, 2008) provide a unique insight into the strategic approach of the newly formed diplomatic service, as well as major achievements and obstacles in this regard. More importantly, in terms of previously defined distinctions, it shows that Kosovo has chosen ‘recognition’ strategy, rather than ‘engagement’ one, especially at the beginning of its efforts to gain international support. However, the decline in gaining new recognitions after the initial success has

shown that engagement is an important tool in filling out a recognition gap. As the author concludes, ‘the process of recognition lost its momentum’ (Demjaha, 2020, 23). Therefore one can expect that Kosovo will strive to improve overall interaction with other countries and organizations, instead of strictly focusing on gaining formal recognition.

Chapters 3 and 4 includes analysis of Britain and Germany, both considered as strong recognizers but with different roles in supporting Kosovo’s independence after 2008. The UK was at the forefront of supporting Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence and therefore played an important role in lobbying for Kosovo’s wider recognition and membership in various international organizations. Therefore, politically Britain has invested a great effort to support Kosovo on the international stage, particularly during the initial phases of an international campaign aimed at providing recognition. However, as it was presented, engagement of the UK in this regard has been reduced over the time, but it is rightly pointed out in the title of this chapter that Britain is the strongest supporter of Kosovo in Europe. Significantly, changed international environment and Brexit definitely shaped the UK’s foreign priorities, which have affected Kosovo’s engagement. Contrary to this trend, Germany, the second strong recognizer, thoroughly analyzed in chapter 4, has gone through the engagement process from ‘a cautious recognizer’ at the beginning towards ‘Kosovo’s key ally’ in the European Union. Despite this difference within the category of strong recognizers, it is interesting to underline the different framework of the engagement. Namely, unlike Britain, which assisted Kosovo in its wider international campaign, aimed at ensuring its international sovereignty, Germany was engaged mainly within the EU framework, especially throughout the EU’s enlargement policy opted for Kosovo’s European integration. Consequently, Germany has a major role in the process of the EU led negotiations and in pressuring Serbia combining instruments of the EU’ soft power’ in the region. However, the major contribution of this chapter consists in following Germany’s path in becoming Kosovo’s ally that was not straightforward, especially during the initial stage that was largely affected by internal political process and divisions. Referring to the role of premature recognition of secession in escalating the Yugoslav civil war, the author explains background of German initial hesitance and reasons that changed this position in favour of Kosovo. Claiming that ‘the Kosovo conflict has been defining foreign policy issue for Germany over two decades’ and ‘the case in which Germany foreign policy change after the Cold War has been most evident’ the author provides a broader picture on the way Germany formulated its approach towards Kosovo’s independence which is of great importance for understanding the future of the EU led to dialogue and Germany’s role within it.

Chapters 5 and 6 examine two lesser-known but quite interesting recognizers, perceived by the authors as ‘weak recognizers’ – the Czech Republic and Poland. As it has been presented, both countries’ behaviour towards Kosovo’s independence was largely influenced by internal political divisions between what was described as ‘pro-Western forces’ and ‘pro-Serbian sentiments’. In both countries, this division created a unique situation in which government decided to recognize unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo, while presidents of both countries denied appointing ambassadors and therefore to establish high-level diplomatic relations. Therefore, both countries remained minimal interactions regarding Kosovo, with poor chances for any significant change.

Starting from the group of the countries that willingly or reluctantly recognize Kosovo’s independence, the second part of the book is focused on the EU’s five member states that do not accept independence of Kosovo, with a profound analysis of the differences among them based on the previously elaborated ‘engagement criterion’. Namely, based on the degree of engagement, the countries are divided into the group of ‘soft non-recognizers’, including Greece, Slovakia and Romania and ‘hard non-recognizers’ consisting of Spain and Cyprus. In chapter 7, it has been elaborated a complex position of Greece, as a non-recognizer but highly interactive country in terms of its presence in Kosovo, as well as its role in the Balkans’ affairs as an important regional actor. Additionally, traditional ties with Serbia and special relations with Cyprus were highlighted as the major starting points in explaining the reasons behind the reluctance of Greece to recognize Kosovo, while at the same time being present in Kosovo in various forms. (Armakolas, 2020, 128) On the other hand, in the case of Slovakia, as chapter 8 assert, the decision was mainly influenced by several internal factors. Although Slovakia has been engaged in some of the regional initiatives regarding Kosovo, the overall cooperation has remained limited over time. In the case of Romania, both internal political perspective towards secession together with traditionally close relations with Serbia resulted in non-recognizing position. (Ivan, 2020, 175) However, in chapter 9, it is asserted that in terms of its interaction with Kosovo. Although started with a somewhat pragmatic position towards overall interactions in Kosovo, throughout the time, it has hardened its approach, which made the authors to qualify it ‘somewhere between’ soft and hard non-recognizers.

Lastly, in chapters 10 and 11 is presented the group of ‘hard non-recognizers’, including Spain and Cyprus. Described as the hard-line countries, each of them has been thoroughly elaborated in the two chapters. What has been identified as a common ground for understanding the countries’ positions is the problem of secessionist movements that each of them deals within their own borders. However, in terms of engagement, both countries remain reluctant to any interactions, whereas Spain seems to be at the forefront of the hard-line position

within the European Union, highlighting the division that will remain as the significant obstacle for any further common position of the EU, despite its proven pragmatism in dealing with the issue of Kosovo. Having in mind unresolved issues in Kosovo and the prospect role of diplomacy in gaining further recognition or withdrawal from Kosovo's recognition, this study is significant for both academics and practitioners. Although focused on the EU member states, it illustrates a wider perspective in the way countries formulate decision towards the highly sensitive issue in international politics and strive for compromises in this regard.

### **References:**

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- Foreign Policy Strategic Objectives*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kosovo, Prishtina, 2008.

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