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Engaged, yet Unofficial? Patterns of Engagement Without Recognition
of EU Member states with the Republic of Kosovo (2008-2024)

MA THESIS

Supervised by Eiki Berg, PhD

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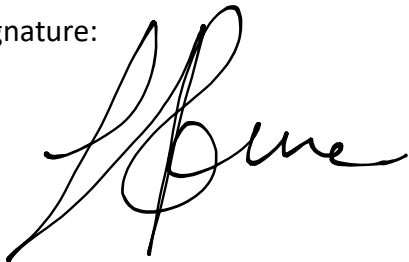
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Abstract

Kosovo's relationship with the European Union and its desire for membership is one of its most defining characteristics, shaping both domestic and foreign policy. Brussels expresses a duality, being both one of Pristina's closest allies but also counting among its member states five countries which do not recognise Kosovar independence from Serbia following its 2008 unilateral declaration of independence. Still, EU states and Kosovo are in contact, as displayed by the 2024 visa liberalisation regime with Pristina. At a time where de facto states play a large role in shaping the European geopolitics (as displayed by Russia's recognition of the Georgian and Ukrainian de facto states, near instantly followed by invasions of their neighbours' territory under international law), our assumption is that such entities need to be studied with attention; Kosovo in particular, as its existence is both a topic of contention at EU level and has been used by a belligerent Moscow as a precedent justifying their actions abroad. This thesis aims to study why non-recognisers (of which were retained three as case studies divided in two groups: Cyprus, Greece, and Spain) have refused to recognise Kosovo since 2008, and how (if they do) do they engage with Pristina and its nationals. For hard non-recognisers, we found political engagement to be limited but not null for both Cyprus and Spain, the former surprising by displaying remarkably high economic engagement levels, and non-recognition being based on fears of precedent setting for secessionism at home justified under the guise of morals, international law, and friendship with Serbia. For our soft-recogniser case Greece, we found expectations-exceeding levels of diplomatic engagement with Kosovo bilaterally and at EU level, the states' relation being similar to that of two confirmed states. Non-recognition here is found to be due to diplomatic relations with both historical ally Serbia and kin state Cyprus.

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List of Abbreviations

COE: Council of Europe
ECTS: European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EEA: European Education Area
EEAS: European External Action Service
EU: European Union
EUA: European University Association
FM: Foreign Minister
ICJ: International Court of Justice
KFOR: Kosovo Force
M: Million (for figures in Euros)
MFA: Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
PIO: Press and Information Office
PM: Prime Minister
PRC: People's Republic of China
RKS: Republic of Kosovo
ROC: Republic of China
TRNC: Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus
UDI: Unilateral Declaration of Independence
UN: United Nations
UNMIK: United Nations Mission In Kosovo
USA: United States of America

Introduction - Normalcy without normalisation: Pristina's place in the world.

In the early hours of September 23rd 2023, near Banjska in northern Kosovo, was carried out by ethnic Serb paramilitaries a deadly attack against Kosovar police personnel. This led to an armed clash in the surroundings of nearby Banjska orthodox monastery, where the assailants attempted to seek refuge (Bytyci & Sito-Sucic, 2023; European External Action Service Press Team (EEAS), 2023). The clashes killed four, among which a Kosovar police officer and three of the thirty Serb assailants, most of which having fled north to Serbia (Al Jazeera, 2023), and was the biggest escalation of violence in Kosovo in decades. Later that day, it was announced that found large stashes of military equipment assumed to be destined to further attacks against Kosovo were also found (ibid). The event shocked the country and in its immediate aftermath was declared a state of mourning: flags were lowered to half-mast in Albanian and Serb majority municipalities, honouring the fallen on both sides, and the social climate felt tenser, particularly in Serb majority areas. Coincidentally, I and other students from my university were conducting field research in the context of a course in Pristina at the time, where a feeling of normalcy similar as that experienced in any confirmed state predominated. These unexpected developments led to some of our plans to visit certain sensitive areas (North Mitrovica, Gračanica municipality and monastery...) being seriously reconsidered.

The sudden flare up of violence in Banjska was not completely out-of-the-blue: the previous months had been the theatre of worsening tensions between Belgrade and Pristina due to (among other things) the November 2022¹ Kosovar government decision to standardise vehicle license plates in the entire country, which Kosovo prime minister (PM) Albin Kurti presented as “an expression of the rule of law and legal order, sovereign right and our commitment to fair and just relations with our neighbours” (Eastern Western Balkans, 2022). Diplomatic links between had significantly worsened just under two weeks prior following a European Union-mediated (EU) meeting between Kurti and Serbia's president Aleksandar Vučić in Brussels where the former declared the talks as having reached a state of deadlock and expressed discontent at EU special envoy Miroslav Lajčák he accused of bias towards Serbia (Borger and O'Carroll, 2023). This was followed by the end of EU mediation between the two countries. However, whilst the paramilitary violence did not come as a complete shock, it was a chilling and sobering reminder of the Kosovo's disputed status: that of a partially recognised, de facto state. A state which under international law does not exactly exist, but that certainly does to any foreigner standing on Nene Tereza boulevard in the center of a Pristina covered in Albanian, EU, and American flags: the small state's ethnic kin and its three staunchest supporters.

¹ The decision was presented by the government on June 29th 2022 but was effective starting November 1st, with plans to remain effective until April 21st 2023. Kosovo cars with Serbian registration plates and RKS-plated vehicles entering Serbia were both subject since October 2021 (Bami & Stojanovic, 2022) to a sticker regime whereas state emblems were masked with white stickers. As of January 1st 2024, the regime has been abolished following a mutual decision to recognise the other's matriculation.

But even in among supporters in Brussels, not everyone is keen to agree about what they often refer to as Kosovo's statehood, using instead the name Kosovo* when mentioning it (examples: European Commission, 2013; European Council, 2023a; 2023b). Following the NATO intervention in Kosovo and its placement under United Nations (UN) administration through the establishment of UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) via UN resolution 1244 in 1999, Kosovo was likely on the path to a complete breakup from Serbia. Inevitably, it unilaterally declared independence in 2008, sending shockwaves throughout the world of diplomacy. States took stances regarding Kosovo statehood, offering it recognition or refusing to do so. And whilst eighteen of the twenty-seven EU member states recognised the newborn state's government in just over a month (with more to come for a total of twenty-three EU states), five members of the union did not: Cyprus, Greece, Slovakia, Spain, and Romania. They have not looked back since 2008 and continue at the time of writing not to recognise the Republic of Kosovo (RKS) as legitimate, independent state.

However, the situation is not as straightforward as it first may appear. Out of these five member states, some have upheld a very consistent foreign policy regarding Kosovo: Spain is likely the best example of this, as its stance has been argued to have hardened overtime (Sarriá & Demjaha, 2019; Ferrero-Turrión, 2020). Madrid has categorically denied Pristina the recognition of its statehood, issuing nothing more than a declaration to the press by FM Miguel Ángel Moratinos (Reuters, 2008a; 2008b; MFA of Spain, 2023) and submitting a written statement to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the context of its advisory proceedings regarding the legality of the Kosovar unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) (MFA of Spain, 2009). The former is nowhere to be found on the Spanish MFA's website. This position has stood firm since then, despite the alternance of both liberal and socialist governments in Madrid, with Spanish premier Pedro Sanchez re-emphasizing the hostile stance of his government in regard to recognition in 2022 (El Nacional, 2022), with no new developments in spite of the PSOE leader's increased reliance on separatist parties following his narrow victory in the 2023 election. Specific instructions have even been issued to diplomats not to acknowledge Kosovar officials nor to attend events which they attend (Ferrero-Turrión, 2020; Valero, 2018; Sánchez-Vallejo, 2018; McAulay, 2022). Cyprus also remained consistently opposed to the recognition of Kosovo's independence since 2008, due to its own issues with separatism and the presence of a de facto state (being the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus) (TRNC) on its sovereign territory (Armakolas & Ker-Lindsay, 2020; Armakolas, 2020).

Interestingly, the other three "soft non-recognisers" (Armakolas & Ker-Lindsay, 2020, 5) have not upheld a straightforward foreign policy towards the newborn state. If neither Greece, Romania, nor Slovakia recognised Pristina's independence since 2008, their positions regarding it have certainly evolved with different degrees of engagement. Romania's kin state Moldova's struggles with Transnistria and Slovakia's worries regarding its large Hungarian minority offers an easy assumption to make regarding their absence of support for Kosovo's UDI. Greece however, in spite of its tight-knit relation with strong non-recogniser Cyprus, has upheld a policy of extreme engagement with Kosovo (Armakolas & Ker-Lindsay, 2020;

Armakolas, 2020; MFA of Greece, October 17th 2023) without any formal plans for recognition (Ozturk, 2023). This is best exemplified by the many meetings between Pristina and Athens, which in theory should not occur as in the eyes of Greece, Kosovo is officially nothing but a breakaway, de facto state on Serbian sovereign territory. The latter being a state with whom Athens has entertained historically excellent, close ties with (MFA of Greece, 2024; MFA of Serbia, 2024), all the while expressing a certain degree of animosity towards Kosovo kin state Albania (Armakolas, 2020, 127). Greece's engagement even goes far beyond that of full recognisers such as Poland or Czechia (Armakolas & Ker-Lindsay, 2020, 14), with the Greek liaison office in Pristina serving as a de facto Hellenic embassy (Armakolas & Ker-Lindsay, 2020, 10). This is not the only confusing fact about the engagement of EU non-recogniser states with the Balkan de facto, especially since the January 1st 2024 entry in force of the EU decision allowing Kosovo passport holders to enjoy free travel to EU member states (European Commission, 2018; Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, 2023; Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, 2024) including Spain (Dunai & Jopson, 2024). Even for its most fervent adversaries in Brussels, the line between non-engaged and a degree of "engagement without recognition" (Ker-Lindsay, 2015; Berg, 2023) is becoming increasingly blurred: even Spain's "no interaction" rules arguably show cracks following the 2022 Madrid-held Socialist International conference, attended by both Kurti and Spain's then and current PM Pedro Sanchez (Socialist International, 2022a; 2022b).

Looking at the aforementioned elements seem to uncover a quite a puzzling state of affairs, especially when taking in consideration the non-engagement of some recognisers and the apparent lack of unity in the Kosovo policy of soft non-recognisers. Whilst engagement with Kosovo since its UDI as a topic has certainly been covered extensively by scholars of international relations (notably in Ioannis Armakolas, Eiki Berg, Nina Caspersen, James Ker-Lindsay, Scott Pegg, and Gerard Toal's works), a gap in our available knowledge could exist. We know of the initial position of EU non-recognisers and of their current stances, but what exactly was the journey of engaged non-recognisers, from the refusal to accept Pristina's independence to specific patterns of interaction, of engagement? Armakolas and Ker-Lindsay's 2020 book makes light of many of the cases we are interested in, but the study of said cases under the lens of engagement without recognition (Ker-Lindsay, 2015; Berg & Pegg, 2018; Berg, 2023) can perhaps teach us more on how and why states can engage with what is, if we are to believe their governments, a non-entity. Furthermore, the simple existence of soft non-recognisers engaged with Kosovo is in itself puzzling under the lens of international law. An absence of recognition should by its very nature lead to at best ignorance of the unrecognised state (and thus non-engagement) and at worst to a hostile position vis-à-vis Kosovo: Spain is a good example of this. But as stated above three of the five non-recognisers do or did engage with Kosovo, notably Greece (Armakolas, 2020; MFA of Greece, October 17th 2023). Even citizens from hostile non-recognisers such as Cyprus financially engaged with Kosovo (Central Bank of Kosovo, 2023, 177) more so than even Greece, who has openly been entertaining

warm relations with “Kosovo”. How does a state engage in with one that, in their eyes, is but a de facto state?

This issue strikes me as not only puzzling in nature, but also as profoundly relevant in current international geopolitics. The reason for this being that ever since Kosovo’s independence, de facto states and how states interact with them has been a capital issue in the world of international relations and political science. Russia’s foreign policy with these entities in its “near abroad” (Toal, 2016) and how Moscow instrumentalised what they called the “Kosovo precedent” (Toal, 2008; Ingimundarson, 2022) in Georgia and Ukraine has been at the very heart of European relations, security, and diplomacy due to the war in Ukraine (who’s 2014 attempted justification via international law by the Kremlin depended on the principle of self-termination of a so called independent Republic of Crimea which Russia had recognised). Continental Europe has certainly not been the only place in the world where de facto states are under the political limelight. Here can be cited the cases of the Republic of China (ROC)/Taiwan in Asia, a hot issue with the potential to cause war between the world’s premier powers, the United States of America (USA) and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) or Somaliland on the horn of Africa (where a deal with Ethiopia allowing them access to ports in exchange for likely recognition has met opposition from major world and regional powers) (Bakonyi, 2024)². It would be an error to underestimate the impact of these entities on today’s international stage and thus further academic research on how states engage, interact with such actors is not only relevant, but it is also necessary. Even more so at a point in history where the EU appears to warm up again on enlargement after a decade of rest due to fatigue, something of capital importance for decision makers in Pristina which firmly see their future in the union, to the extent of already being de facto part of the Eurozone and being Brussels most serious candidate without said status (having applied in 2022). Their relationship with the EU and its members is thus a topic worth putting into research, and this thesis’ goal is to focus on a specific angle being that of foreign engagement (or lack thereof) from non-recogniser EU member states with Kosovo. Why have they not changed their mind and recognised Pristina’s self-declared independence?

In our theoretical chapter, including the theoretical framework and literature review section, we will attempt to conceptualise what are “politics of recognition” (Fabry’s *Recognizing States*, 2010; Armatolas & Ker-Lindsay’s book *The Politics of Recognition and Engagement*, 2020; Poghosyan & Berg, 2021) (when is there a state? Is recognition inherently needed for there to be one? What affects a state’s stance on recognition?) and then what “engagement without recognition” means, as it is the thesis’ conceptual backbone (Ker-Lindsay, 2015; Berg & Pegg, 2018; Berg, 2023). The literature will be an overview of the existing knowledge about the non-recognisers of the RKS with a specific focus on the previously mentioned EU states. It will also be displaying cases of engagement without recognition documented in academic literature, such as Wikileaks’ Cablegate (such as Pegg & Berg, 2016; Berg & Pegg, 2018). The second chapter addressing research design will present our research questions and research expectations as well as presenting and justifying our method of analysis, being Qualitative

Content Analysis. The choice of our selected timeframe (2008-2024) will also hereby be justified, our data sources presented, and a reliability assessment of said sources conducted. We shall also operationalise our two research questions there, which will be followed by our reasoning behind case selection (important as we chose not to keep two of the possible five case studies) and the presentation of our three case studies divided between hard and soft non-recognisers. Our analytical chapter will be divided in two parts, both going over one of our two research questions; the first subchapter will access our case studies' non-recognition of Kosovo, and the second will access the existence and the level of bilateral contact between our non-recognisers and the newborn state. Our conclusion will summarise our analytical findings, whilst displaying both the thesis' limitations and the possibilities for further research.

Theoretical framework – De facto statehood, recognition, and engagement with unrecognised states in the modern international system.

In this first chapter covering our thesis' theoretical background, will be focused on defining our two core concepts: starting with the politics of recognition first, then followed by what is engagement without recognition and how it is possible. These definitions will also serve as a blended literature review, allowing us to go delve into the known knowns and known unknowns of our topic. In order to be able to conceptualise what are the politics of recognition, and to set a solid theoretical foundation for this thesis, we will put aside a large section of this chapter for defining terms upon which shoulders' our two concepts stand on (recognition, statehood, de facto statehood) with the help of prior academic literature.

1. The politics of recognition: recognition, (de facto) statehood, and the driving forces behind (non-)recognition.

Before we start defining what are politics of recognition, we first need to brush off on the second half of that very concept: *recognition*. Whilst doing this will also be defined both statehood and de facto statehood: these concepts require to start being addressed in light of their importance in defining the politics of recognition, as it tackles questions such as *when is there a state* as well as the aforementioned issue of recognition.

- i. Recognition and (de facto) statehood

State recognition is a fundamental building block in the international system and the basis of international bilateral relations, it has thus been extensively covered by both experts of international law and international relations. The work of scholars such as Eva Erman, Mikulas Fabry, and Scott Pegg's definition of what is a de-facto state (from his 1998 book *De Facto State and the International Society*, regarded as first comprehensive effort on the study of unrecognised states), is what we primarily shall use as a base to conceptualise the term. Fabry's book *Recognizing States* (2010) is notable for serving as a valuable resource to try and make sense of a complex practice, as central to international relations as it is difficult to address, thanks to its historical overview of both recognition and their politics. There is, as a matter of fact, no broad consensus in the world of academia as to how to define the topic, despite its current relevance due to the non-negligible number and importance of de facto states since the second half of the twentieth century (Fabry, 2013). Whilst primarily researched by experts in international law as highlighted by Erman (2013) and Fabry (2013), more traditional international relations theory scholars have produced literature regarding the topic, with very little being broadly agreed upon besides perhaps that the most effective way to study state recognition is through the analysis of its practice (Erman, 2013).

Recognition as defined in a dictionary is, simply, the “act of accepting that something exists, is true or is official” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, 2024). In our case, the act is carried out by state X to another state-like entity, granting it statehood in state X’s eyes: something that the constitutive theory of statehood considers as integral to its obtention. Followers of the constitutive theory will argue a state’s existence is tied to other states offering it recognition, without which it is impossible for it to obtain sovereignty under international law (Fabry, 2010). This stands in opposition to the declarative theory of statehood, which broadly entails that if a state declares itself to be independent and fits the criteria of the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States of 1933, it should suffice to consider the entity a state. The convention, whilst only being signed and ratified by members of the Organization of American States, is widely cited in international law as defining the criterion for statehood and referred to as the most agreed upon legal definition of the term statehood (Coppieters, 2018). The required criteria for statehood are as following: a “defined territory” with a “permanent population”, a “government”, and “the capacity to engage with other states” (Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, article 1, signed December 26th 1933). Both theories, constitutive and declarative, complete each other to an extent: they however coexist “inharmoniously” as states and individuals choose that which “better addresses the given situation” they find themselves in (Worster, 2009, 124).

De facto statehood, the form of statehood which takes central stage in our research, is thus experienced by entities that “enjoy many of the attributes of statehood, but they are not members of the exclusive club of (externally) sovereign states” (Caspersen, 2017, 11). Pegg’s 1998 working definition is broadly referenced throughout academia, stating the following: “de facto state exists where there is an organized political leadership which has risen to power through some degree of indigenous capability; receives popular support; and has achieved sufficient capacity to provide governmental services to a given population in a specific territorial area, over which effective control is maintained for a significant period of time” (Pegg, 1998, 26). Additionally, the state seeks “constitutional independence” and for its sovereignty to be internationally recognised yet finds itself unable to and is considered illegitimate (ibid).

Recognition thus acts as a declaration from a foreign actor that the state exists, but not as a precondition for its existence (Erman, 2013), but as the constitutive theory of statehood prevails as per the nature of the international system and international law, de facto states exist when they unilaterally secede. The practice of recognition is tied to the liberal idea of self-determination of peoples that emerged at the end of the eighteenth century and is based on the idea that peoples have a right to establish their own governments (Fabry, 2010, 9). It is important to note that once recognised, both states can entertain bilateral relations as they see fit, but membership of international organisations is decisive to engage effectively with foreign governments. Upon joining the UN, one’s statehood becomes undeniable in practice, even if said state’s existence is subject to contestation such as Israel (Ker-Lindsay, 2012, chapter 6). Must be noted that the practice of state recognition has changed as world did. Before the

nineteenth century, there was a consensus that the only feasible way for new states to form was if they were given expressed consent by the parent state (Fabry, 2010, 23), without which their sovereignty was not understood as legitimate. After World War 2, following the start of decolonisation, the international community outlined specific peoples as being entitled to self-determination: the victims of colonisation and peoples of “constituent units of dissolved states” (chapter 5, 147), which upon demand accessed to the possibility of obtaining their own state, self-governance, or deeper integration into their current state. Outside said cases, the only way to secede legally and with no issues regarding the international community was to do so with parent state consent: doing so would be illegitimate unilateral secession and lead to de facto statehood. Statehood now issued from international law, and recognition for the first time was given “the character of a “casual”, “mechanical”, and “wholesale transaction”” (168). This however hurt itself to the principle of self-determination which was presented as a “positive right of all peoples” (ibid), of which the application was completely stumped due to the preconditions for legitimate secession. Such incoherence had consequences following the end of the cold war, as peoples without any allegiance to their parent state (such as Bosnia) were forced to remain as part of it (chapter 6, 194), and recognition was opportunistically and selectively offered by states to de facto states, to secessionist entities (179). It is important to note however that whilst there is no legal basis for self-determination aside from former colonies wishing to access to statehood, unilateral secessions attempts are not illegal as “sub-state entities are not subjects of international law” (Berg, Riegl & Doboš, 2017, 2). This is why Kosovo’s UDI was not deemed illegal by the ICJ, nonetheless without being given its express approval. In the case of Kosovo’s secession under international law, two views exist: that of Kosovo as a *sui generis* case (a unique and specific case which does not have or create precedent) and that of Kosovo as remedial secession² for which Kosovo would remain an outlier as a non-colonial secession very much taking place without the consent of its parent state (Conolly, 2013).

Summed up, recognition both does create a state (by letting it access the international plane) and does not make a state (as examples such as Somaliland’s demonstrate this recognition is but up to the discretion of individual states and not a set of standards being fulfilled) (Worster, 2009). No state is obliged to recognise another no matter how many members of the UN have chosen to do so (Poghosyan & Berg, 2021, 615) (Pakistan for instance is alone in not recognising Armenia) and the act of recognition, whilst up to the states’ discretion, includes in practice a judgement based on “legal, political, moral, economic, security, and other considerations” (Fabry, 2013, 166). In other words, some de facto states can “earn sovereignty” (Berg & Mölder, 2012) in the eyes of the international community for adhering to liberal, democratic standards. Derecognition is also possible and has occurred several times: can be cited as example the 1971 security council seat swap between the ROC/Taiwan and the PRC

² Remedial secession is an option used as a last resort when “a group within the territory of an existing state is denied basic democratic freedoms and is subjected to severe human rights abuses” (Conolly, 2013, 72), consisting of recognising the independence of that group in order to protect it from further parent state abuse. Whilst not enshrined in international law, several examples of such exist (Kosovo, Bangladesh).

following a communist states-led motion aimed at making the UN recognise the latter as the sole China (UN General Assembly Resolution 2758, 1971). The case of Kosovo's derecognitions also ought to be taken note of, however with care as it has been a contentious with Kosovo refuting said withdrawals (Poghosyan & Berg, 2021, 619 n°10). States, in practice and depending on an extensive list of factors at a certain point in time (such as for example their size, diplomatic ties to a parent state, membership of certain international organisations), can decide to see a state where they see fit (ibid). Patterns of recognition exist, but in practice there is no obligation for a state to argue why they chose to do so (ibid, 612). And as there are no consensus on a definition of statehood, there is "no obligation of recognition" and "the political motivations of third countries may appear crucial in deciding what makes a state or which entities deserve inclusion into the most privileged club of sovereign states" (ibid, 608).

ii. Conceptualising the politics of recognition

This long-winded prerequisite now dealt with; we can conceptualise the politics of recognition. Politics of recognition revolve around three core questions being the following: *when is there a state, is recognition required for statehood, and what affects a state's chosen stance* on according or denying recognition. These points of interest harken back to the considerations important to politics of recognition, which are the "legal worth of recognition", its "political stakes" (Almqvist, 2009, 7) and that of the unregulated and arbitrary nature of the process of recognising states, leading to "a diversity of differing and conflicting reactions of third" (7). In short, politics of recognition are erratic, driven by the interest of states, which could be fixed through the implementation of a hypothetical framework, which has no chance to happen thus ensuring that future claims of sovereignty will all but will "face an unpredictable reception driven by everything else other than a strictly codified legal manual for recognition acts" (Poghosyan & Berg, 2021, 618). Whilst it can be argued that states are inspired to recognised purely on moral grounds, this remains in the frame of their own selfish interest as just another foreign policy act.

When is there a state?

Acts of recognition are inherently political as they are "neither formal nor fixed" (Fabry, 2013, 166) discretionary, depending on a state's own "legal, political, moral, economic, security, and other considerations" (166). There is thus an idea of a degree of legitimacy being needed to earn, to deserve sovereignty in the eyes of the international community (Berg & Mölder, 2012). But as seen during our definition of recognition, its loose and arbitrary nature means that there is no universal criterion to seek to fit. The justification of the earning of sovereignty however is mostly tied to the state of the de facto states' regime being in accordance with liberal democratic principles: particularly democracy (Berg & Mölder, 2012). This was explicit during following Pristina's declaration and the first wave of recognition (Poghosyan & Berg,

2021), but reasons were not limited to this and even tended to include even justification of the recognition on moral grounds (613). This props the question: when is there exactly a state to recognise?

First and most important, there must be a state like unit seeking independence and recognition in the first place, fitting the criterion which we presented at length when defining recognition and statehood. This prerequisite aside, as seen during part i. of this chapter, the answer to the question then depends on which theory of statehood one chooses to follow (either constitutive or declarative). It belongs to each state to decide which theory they subscribe to regarding cases of de facto statehood in function of their personal interests in the sovereignty game these confirmed states: this is the reason “when is there a state?” stands out as a question no one really can answer in a satisfying manner, besides all parties tacitly agreeing that membership of the UN makes statehood undeniable -at least in practice. Many Muslim-majority states do not recognise Israel but do interact with it on the international plane, despite not maintaining diplomatic relations (Ker-Lindsay, 2012, chapter 6). The very term of statehood itself is an issue, as to determine what is a state when looking at de facto states is inherently political due to the politicisation of such terminology (Coppieters, 2018; Ferrero-Turrión, 2021). Our previous attempt to conceptualise statehood could lead us however to make the link that, as “earned sovereignty” was the most popular framing for Kosovar recognition with 36 countries (Poghosyan & Berg, 2021, 618), that there is a state when the state has earned legitimacy in the eyes of enough for it to be de facto part of the international system/community of state. Or, less, controversially when it obtains membership in international organisations such as the UN (Ker-Lindsay, 2012, chapter 6). Eritrea’s status upon UN membership, for example, was complete acceptance. Kosovo may not have a seat at the assembly, but its membership (whether full or with observer status) in many others and within specialised UN agencies through UNMIK does lead to a de facto state with a deep level of interaction within the international community (137-139). This is without mentioning its relations with the EU, even if to avoid backlash from non-recognisers in the union, the relations are entertained with Kosovo* (with asterisk) rather than with a more explicitly independent Kosovo. For there to be a state (and to increase chances of recognition), it is important for states to be able to prove that they have established themselves as the rightful authorities over their territory (Berg & Mölder, 2012), usually though the installation of a rule of law-based regime. This however will not necessarily bring upon recognition from states which would not benefit from it, and examples of de facto states such as the short-lived Republic of Crimea could play as a counter example (if one was to consider it as a proper unrecognised state rather than a transitional state of a territory that was destined for Russian annexation following its invasion).

Whilst we previously noted that both theories of statehood complete each other and coexist, the constitutive theory allows its proponents to ignore factual realities like the existence of certain states (Worster, 2009, 120), and thus this theory proves somewhat unattractive. To this can be added the ethical issues presented by making a group of states, with a select group

being granted more power than their peers, the power gatekeep statehood (ibid, 120). The declarative theory allows to remedy this, despite its own issues (state practice not aligning with it, its discretionary application, and declared yet unrecognised states not accessing to the international plane) (ibid, 119). It still remains, as social scientists rather than politicians, a better way to proceed in answering the question “when is there a state?” as the theory is a more dependable, facts-based approach to identifying the presence of statehood -without excluding its possible political instrumentalization. We will address this later in the thesis. A state’s existence can be denied, but if the facts on the grounds are that there is an entity fitting all criterion of statehood, sometimes even adhering to western liberal-democratic standards, it is then up to scholars be realistic about the situation on the ground. This is the case even in the case of a state being created controversially, as “an internationally wrongful act does not prevent the creation of a State which is a question of fact, and a State which exists in fact attains the legal status of a State solely on the basis of its existence, independent of recognition” (Talmon, 2005, 180). Another important aspect to consider when talking about recognition is the following: how necessary, for both the prospectus engager and engage, is recognition?

Is recognition necessary?

Short answer: it is heavily preferable and stands as the end goal of all separatist units, but in practice can be dealt with to an extent. The longer answer is more nuanced.

Recognition is needed to, as previously as stated many times, access the international plane thorough membership of international relations -namely the UN. But, as shown through the example of Kosovo, a lack thereof does not make it fully impossible for an unrecognised state to partake in the concert of nations. Pristina’s legitimacy may be a contentious topic, but through UNMIK and the terms set via UN resolution 1244 (1999), they are able to find solutions allowing them to alleviate the pains of de facto statehood (Ker-Lindsay, 2012, chapter 6). A good example was the obtention of its own postal code from the Universal Postal Union through a UNMIK-UPU agreement (137). But this logic is somewhat erroneous, as the reason Kosovo is able to achieve this is arguably thanks to its already wide recognition base for a de facto state and its broadly positive relations even before its unilateral independence. Other de facto states near invariably have an allied or kin state which can support them to an extent in operational matters: example includes Türkiye and Northern Cyprus, Russia and the separatist states in Georgia and Ukraine, as well Armenia and the late Republic of Artsakh in now recaptured Nagorno-Karabakh. Some are not as lucky such as Somaliland, who is a special case as its own parent state struggles to fit the criterion for statehood. Most of the previously mentioned entities also recognise each other’s sovereignty. But it is exceedingly rare for a de facto state to possess the support of so many members of the UN, which gives Kosovo a great deal more leverage within and without UNMIK.

The ROC/Taiwan’s case could be used as an example of a widely unrecognised state which is also deeply incorporated within the international system, namely through its high-tech

industry. The loss of its UN security council seat and membership has not barred it from achieving major successes as a state and becoming a notably important regional actor with a thriving economy. It is also a member of several international organisations: most notably the World Trade Organization and the Asian Development Bank (Van Fossen, 2007). This success has even allowed it to take part in pay-check diplomacy, highlighting its available funds (Atkins, 2010). But this past power as a UN security council state, a universally recognised states, and its unrivalled economic power when compared to other de facto states, makes it a uniquely specific case: it thus is not fit for comparison with Kosovo. To this can be added that Taiwan's claim is to be the rightful China, and that its parent state is illegitimate in that matter: this is another difference, as Kosovo does not claim to be the legitimate government of all of Serbia but only to be independent from Belgrade.

Furthermore, as will be discussed in part 2) where we will be conceptualising engagement without recognition, it is not necessary to recognise a de facto state to engage with it at certain levels. Greece in particular serves as a notable example, with its deep ties to Pristina in diverse sectors, despite a staunch non recognition policy through UNMIK (Armakolas, 2020). Indirect engagement through the EU (supranational level) is another path allowing for states to entertain a certain level of engagement without the need for any recognition, through a policy of "non-recognition and engagement" (Coppieters, 2018, 343-344). Spain's firm stance did not forbid it from now accepting Kosovo issued passports as valid following an EU-wide decision (Dunai & Jopson, 2024). Recognition is thus not strictly necessary for de facto states to engage with confirmed states and vice versa, but it is preferable for both for a plethora of reasons. But what are the factors pushing a state (not to) over recognition to a de facto state?

What affects a given state's stance on recognition?

This question brings us over to the second core component of the politics of recognition: the *politics*. Politics are near invariably the reasoning behind the choice to recognise or deny an aspiring state's ambitions for legitimacy through the refusal to acknowledge their statehood. This can be through normative reasoning (such as a focus on international law and norms to avoid controversy), due to the nature of the de facto state and how it seceded as well as the internal politics and diplomatic agenda of the recognising state, or even because of more personal incentives to pick a certain stance (such as financial influence from a parent state or a common religion). In the case of the state experiencing the secession of one of its parts, reasons can range from: not being willing to let go of its territory for economic, emotional, and historical/cultural reasons, wanting to prevent an influx of refugees to other parts of the country, or limiting further territorial losses (Ker-Lindsay, 2012, chapter 3). We shall address these reasonings in this final subsection, the complete subpart demonstrating that a policy of recognition entails far more than a simple absence of recognition (Coppieters, 2018, 346).

A popular and tentatively neutral factor affecting stance on recognition for a state could be a focus on international law and norms. Near systematically this will lead to a refusal to

recognise a de facto state if its parent is not willing to grant it independence first, in line with the current international legal stance on secession. This is very much in line with the perceived illiberal nature of de facto states and the presence of illiberal regimes in many of them (Berg & Pegg, 2018)³. In the case of Kosovo, following the ICJ's ruling that Pristina's UDI was not deemed illegal, several states chose to recognise Kosovo citing this ruling as an important part of the reasoning: Kuwait for example waited until the ruling to recognise Kosovo (Poghosyan & Berg, 2021). International law was often used with that decision as a frame to justify. But as said earlier, its intended uncontroversial, neutral, normative aspect is to relativise as it remains inherently political (Poghosyan & Berg, 2021). Decisions such as that of the ICJ remain highly controversial for countries allied to the parent state or countries experiencing secessionism such as Spain, with many deeming the decision "irresponsible" and arguing it creates a legal vacuum (García & Espada, 2010). Remains that international laws and decisions from organisms such as the ICJ can and have affected (at least in large part) the decision on recognition of some countries. This was not the first time Spanish legal experts felt uneasy about international arbitration regarding separatist states. That was the case in the nineties, following the violent breakup of Yugoslavia and the establishment of the Arbitration Commission of the Peace Conference on Yugoslavia, an advisory body set up by the European Economic Community, about which Spanish expert N. Navarro Batista warns of the possibility of potentially dangerous ramifications due to rapid, politically influenced recognition without enough guarantees from the new states on certain issues (Navarro Batista, 1995). Another way to politically use the normative reasoning argument is through the way certain concepts, certain elements of language are presented: the difference between calling the leaders of a de facto states its de facto authority and calling them occupiers will dramatically change a prospective recogniser and third parties can engage with the state (Coppieters, 2018). A hegemonic state's opinion and framing of a de facto state reduces its allies' agency to recognise.

But the political aspect of recognition is more visible when looking at how the nature of the de facto state and how it attempted to secede, and how this influences the decision of foreign governments. This is very visible in the Spanish case study, where Kosovo's non-post-colonial nature and the way it committed secession via a UDI is a major hurdle for the government in Madrid regarding recognition (Sarriá & Demjaha, 2019; Ferrero-Turrión, 2021; Ferrero-Turrión, 2022). Whilst the reasoning for non-recognition Kosovo is presented by Spain as a simple case of opposition based on international law and norms by the state's authorities (Reuters, 2008a; 2008b; MFA of Spain, 2009), it undeniably appears that what has put Spain in a position of extreme hostility regarding Kosovar independence is intrinsically linked to its politics and nature as a multi-ethnic state (Sarriá & Demjaha, 2019; Ferrero-Turrión, 2020; 2021). This is particularly clear when comparing the timeline of the Catalan independence referendum movement with the evolution of the situation pre-2008 in Kosovo, when separatism and the

³ Interesting here to note that de facto states have no single regime type, with some being healthy democracies (Taiwan, Kosovo, Somaliland when comparing to its neighbours) and some illiberal regimes (such as Transnistria or Eritrea).

wish for unilateral independence was growing in both Catalunya and the Balkan de facto state. This position is not a new phenomenon for Spain, who welcomed the ends Czechoslovakia and of Yugoslavia as terrible news, as a fellow multinational state, and engaged with the offspring of the fall of said states following a position of “recognition without engagement” (Ferrero-Turrión, 2020, 217; 2021, 351) in order to keep the EU as cohesive as possible, without necessarily engaging with de facto states. This is something that they did not do with Kosovo, preferring to neither engage nor recognise (352). This policy remains today, as can be seen (along with the other EU non-recognisers’) in how Madrid deals with Kosovo through the EU level without getting in direct contact, even when accepting passports since January 2024 -and most of what was said here can be applied to countries such as (among EU states) Cyprus, Slovakia, and to an extent Romania, which suffer from the same separatist anxieties due to Northern Cyprus or the presence of large Hungarian minority groups on their territory under international law.

The diplomatic agenda of governments can also play a role in their recognition politics, whether this is because of their membership of specific international organisations (EU/NATO) (Poghosyan & Berg, 2021) or because of their links to another state such as a kin or client state for example. This can also apply to religion as, whilst not a unified approach to recognition, Muslim-majority Kosovo found several mentions of cultural ties religious brotherhood in statements of recognitions from other Islam-practicing states (ibid, 617). Greece’s stance on Kosovo, as well as that of Balkan nations such as Bosnia & Herzegovina, is mainly due to its diplomatic ties with Serbia and its kinship with Cyprus (Armakolas, 2020). The same kinship with Moldova also influenced Romania⁴. But other case studies in the Asia-Pacific highlight another form of political influence on recognition, being a patron state’s (often financial) influence: this is especially visible in the competition for recognition between the two Chinas, which purchase recognition and derecognition for large sums of aid directed to Pacific Island nations such as Kiribati and Tuvalu (Van Fossen, 2007; Atkinson, 2007; Sautedé, 2010). Nauru, another Pacific country, was similarly given Russian aid for a recognition of the Georgian de facto states (Wyeth, 2017).

Finally, a state experiencing the secession of one of its regions will have many reasons affecting its own stance on recognising the wannabe state. Whilst seemingly self-explanatory as states just do not want to give up territory for no reason (even if the value of the territory seems dubious at best compared to the difficulties tied to owning it), it is good to quickly summarize why using a list found in Ker-Lindsay 2012, chapter 3. The reasons behind a state’s refusal to give up territory are as follows: a cultural, emotional, historical, or religious attachment to the territory; the issues tied to the return of internally displaced persons; the economic damage it occurs (tied to the previous one); the fear of further territorial loss; a “sense of injustice” (Ker-Lindsay, 2012, 60-69). All these indeed apply to the Kosovo-Serbia case study: Kosovo is seen

⁴ Worth noting that kin states do not necessarily recognise or support in full a de facto state on that basis. Artsakh for example was never formally recognised by the government in Yerevan but did enjoy a large amount of support, in particular from the Armenian public sphere, until its dissolution in 2023.

as Serbia's historical and cultural core, is home to numerous Serb majority areas, possesses mineral deposits, and the loss of control over the province following NATO intervention was lived by Serbian authorities and people as a deep injustice.

The politics of recognition are not, as we saw, limited to following international law and norms -as there is no such thing as a clear agreed upon framework for recognition. Everything in the process can be subject to interpretation and to the influence of politics, down to the very question of *does a state even exist there for us to recognise*. Every state's internal politics and its links to foreign powers and international organisations matters, every cultural and religious tie plays a role in influencing recognition, and this thesis' main focus on Kosovo offers an eloquent example of this.

2. Conceptualising engagement without recognition

Engagement without recognition is one of the two core concepts of this thesis, and a concept worth looking into due to how influential this concept has been in European and international politics over the past two decades, as we have already established over the course of this chapter. In order to define what engagement without recognition is, we will answer three questions: *what* is it, *how* is it operationalised and to *what end* state engage without recognition? Once addressed, this part will offer us a good grace on how states engage with de facto states such as Kosovo, and how a state being treated as de facto by a country does not systematically equates it being treated as null (Coppieters, 2018, 345). We will also present three forms of engagement: political/de facto diplomatic, economic, and through the public sphere (Caspersen, 2018).

i. What is engagement without recognition?

Engagement without recognition, or diplomatic engagement with de facto states (Ker-Lindsay, 2015, 276) is used to describe a state entertaining a certain degree of contact with a state that it officially does not diplomatically engage with, not even recognising it as a state under international law. The legal understanding would be that it is theoretically impossible for a state to engage whatsoever with separatist state: the default level of position has remained non engagement as doing this was deemed unlawful (Caspersen, 2012 *in* Berg, 2023). But in practice, the governments of contested countries such as Kosovo do enjoy a sometimes-surprising amount of contact with officials of non-recognising countries, with Greece as the most notable example due to its numerous cases of officials from both Athens and Pristina meeting unofficially (Ker-Lindsay, 2015; Armakolas, 2020). Sometimes the engagement occurs in differently or in a roundabout way, such as diplomatic cables, as demonstrated by the USA's cable leak of 2010 (Pegg & Berg, 2016; Berg & Pegg, 2018). Engagement towards de facto

states can be null or completely hostile (Spain, Cyprus), broadly cordial (Greece), or more nuanced (USA, depending on the de facto state, but mostly opportunistic). These unrecognised states receive “varying levels of acceptance from international society” (Berg, 2023, 360), meaning that just like recognition, there is no framework as to how to engage with them. A strong definition of the concept is found in Armakolas & Ker-Lindsay’s 2020 book’s first chapter, outlining it as “the extent to which entities, most usually a UN member and a state/entity that is not a UN member, can interact” (Ker-Lindsay & Armakolas, 2020, 11) with a variety of steps to engagement able to be taken “short of steps that formally amount to recognition, such as the establishment of an embassy” (11). This is completed by Ker-Lindsay and Berg’s focus on *why* they engage, painting de facto state engagement as “a mechanism that provides for varying degrees of interaction with de facto states maintaining the position that they are not regarded as independent sovereign actors in the international system” (Ker-Lindsay & Berg, 2018, 355).

ii. How can states engage without recognising?

Engagement with de facto states without prior establishment of diplomatic relations is, as previously stated, theoretically not a possibility: states and their interactions are only accounted when they are recognised as such entities under international law (as demonstrated UN resolution 1244), and engagement is deemed unlawful (Caspersen, 2012). These lulls in law, their subsequent lack of framework regarding not only recognition but also engagement, as well as the lack of political will (or possibility really) to implement one, leads to there being an array of ways to engage without recognition.

First of which is informal (or de facto) diplomacy, being interaction between officials, diplomats, and such figures from a recognised and an unrecognised state. Such a prospect hardly seems plausible, but these meetings do occur -usually in an unofficial fashion. This can be through direct meetings when off-duty, for example between Greek and Kosovar ministers (Armakolas, 2020), or through direct communication in secretive diplomatic cables (Pegg & Berg, 2016; Berg & Pegg, 2018). In this case can be cited the USA’s direct engagement with Somaliland and the TRNC (Pegg & Berg, 2016, 277). In most circumstances, when meeting or addressing a representative from a de facto state, diplomats and dignitaries will refrain from using the official title of their contested interlocutors or to address their country by their chosen independent name (Ker-Lindsay, 2015). However, this involvement can sometimes be more direct and explicit depend on the case and on the intent behind the interaction, as seen with the TRNC (ibid, 2015; Pegg & Berg; 2016); we will talk about this in more detail when diving into the intent behind de facto engagement. This is a form of “hard engagement” as opposed to “soft engagement”, being the creation of “links that build state capacity (Caspersen, 2018, 377). De facto engagement can also occur through the establishment of offices both by the de facto states themselves (TRNC offices in diverse capitals, with very limited power and no official diplomatic status unless issued the status of a Turkish diplomat) (Ker-Lindsay, 2015) or

by non-recognisers (Armakolas, 2020). The liaison office of Greece in Pristina is especially interesting: whilst supposed to be Greece's representation to UNMIK, it is headed by a diplomat with an ambassador status and is independent to the Greek embassy in Belgrade - even directly reporting to the Balkan division of MFA in Athens (2020, 140). The EU has also kept a similar presence in Taipei with its European Economic and Trade office and acted in a very ambivalent way regarding the Cypriot separatist state (Berg, 2023), and de facto states like Taiwan also enjoy extensive representation abroad⁵. Engagement through supranational organisations from non-recognisers is a bit complex to tackle by design. One could argue that countries such as Spain and Cyprus, which have entertained as close to null relations as possible with Pristina, are engaging with Kosovo via their membership of the EU, with whom it is engaged diplomatically: this would not be quite right, as previously mentioned, due to the use of the specially designated name Kosovo*. These two non-recognisers may now accept RKS-issued documents as legal, but it does not equate recognition.

Another way of engaging with recognising is through economic incentives, which is something Greece has used by easing investment into Kosovo (Armakolas, 2020). But this is mostly relevant in the cases of Taiwan and Somaliland: Taipei's economic ties to the world due to their high-tech industries are by now well known, the rest of the world only starting to catch up to their microchip industry very recently, and Somaliland's deepening ties with Ethiopia over economic opportunities (sea access against Ethiopian Airlines shares and possible recognition) made for a pretty clear cut case of economic engagement (Bakonyi, 2024; Nogueira Pinto, 2024). Relations between Taiwan and South Africa, a country with extensive trade with Beijing, are another great example of such mutually beneficial engagement without recognition in the pursuit of common economic interest (Grimm, Kim & Anthony, 2014). Another example of this is the EU's extension of the DCFTA with Moldova, with a participation of Transnistria. This type of engagement with de facto states is linked to a state engaging with specific intents in mind but remains worthy of note.

States and institutions can engage with de facto states is through soft forms of engagement, through entering contact with civil society, people, institutions... rather than with the de facto authorities (Caspersen, 2018). Such links do not directly build capacity but have as a goal to engage with the those living in these contested statehood areas in areas such as education, socio-economic assistance to local communities, healthcare, and more (Kolarz, 2020). This is happening in Georgia, but is particularly the case in Moldova, a de facto with whom engagement has been enabled by a cooperative parent state up to certain red lines not to be crossed -namely to not work against the prospect of reunification (Berg & Pegg, 2018; Caspersen, 2018). EU diplomacy acts with de facto states under the idea that unrecognised

⁵ Taiwan and Kosovo, whilst comparable as two de facto states with substantial amounts of engagement both existing as "quasi-recognised" for different reasons (Berg, 2023, 360), have been respectively losing and gaining recognisers.

states are not necessarily mere puppets, and that they in fact have possible (very variable) levels of agency (Berg & Vits, 2020).

Finally, we must note that engagement is a “western intellectual product” (Berg, 2023, 367), thus rooted in western-centric expectations and values whilst attempting to engage with decidedly non-western-aligned breakaways, often depending on their parent (often the Russian Federation) for physical and economic survival. This is relevant to keep in mind, especially when asking ourselves to what end do states engage with certain entities and in what measures; it also brings forth more questions such as why does the West and the USA, at least officially (as seen through confidential diplomatic cables), not engage in a more comprehensive manner with breakaways such as Somaliland which attempts to function in a way that fits the criterion for earning sovereignty in the eyes of western states (more than its parent state, Somalia proper, on certain points).

iii. To what end do states engage without recognition with de facto states?

As seen up to this point, engagement without recognition is contentious, controversial abroad and at home, and difficult to not make impede on a state’s foreign policy: the ends of such contact, therefore, must be of value/interest for engaging governments. So, what can motivate them? To what end do they engage with de facto states?

First of which, and most logical by a realist point of view, is to increase their political leverage within a de facto state in line with diplomatic strategy (Pegg & Berg, 2016; Bakonyi, 2024). A state can use their position of power as a recognised member of the international community (among other characteristics) to engage with de facto state and obtain something of interest: this can range from a port for shipping (Ethiopia/Somaliland) to trying to foster political progress leading to reconciliation down the line (the EU with Moldova/Transnistria) (Berg & Pegg, 2018, 362). Russia has also done this by engaging with de facto states at their borders, in Georgia and Ukraine, and further in its “near abroad” (Toal, 2017) in Moldova. As we speak, all de facto states at on Russia’s western borders have obtained diplomatic acceptance from Moscow and are either considered as a foreign state (Abkhazia, South Ossetia – Alania) or have been annexed (Republic of Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics). Transnistria is the last one they engage with without recognition, in the same way they conducted relations with the separatists (besides Crimea, who’s de facto status lasted all but a day) before establishing diplomatic relations. By providing support (material, economic, political...) to Tiraspol (Kosienkowski, 2019), Russia can influence Moldova and thus the EU, as Chisinau seeks membership. This influence is one of the ends of engagement without recognition.

A reason often tied to the previous, but not necessarily so, is economic gain. We already mentioned Taiwan, with its large economic presence and many countries entertaining unspoken yet very explicitly real relations with the island, but it is not the sole example. Again, the engagement of Ethiopia with Somaliland authorities is mostly driven by an economic,

strategic end: that end being cheaper and more reliable sea access. This is similar to the Greece/Kosovo situation: Greece being one of the largest economies of the region in spite of its issues has made it engaged with its neighbours (Armakolas, 2020). This engagement leads to trade, in the objective of conserving its economic weight in the area. Economic engagement may not be the main reasons most countries will engage with de facto states, but it certainly can play a role, especially outside of the European theatre.

The last thing we want to mention here is to what end a state would not engage with a de facto state, even if it recognises it diplomatically. The reasoning behind such actions is a state's diplomatic incentives to do so: governments will abstain to engage with de facto states not simply by not engaging with them, but by sometimes recognising their statehood but refraining from engagement to a large degree in order to support an allied diplomatic agenda such as that of the EU's and its main partners. This is given that it does not hinder their own on any core level (as was the case for Spain with Catalunya in particular). The Polish and Czech recognitions of Pristina's authority exhibit this first type of case-study: their engagement (*with* recognition) was begrudging, and to this day they entertain very little contact with their authorities and possess very little diplomatic representation there (Dopita, 2020; Wisniewski, 2020). Opposite this, one the principal driving forces behind Athens, Bratislava, and Bucharest's non-recognition of Pristina were the same links to an allied or kin state (Armakolas, 2020; Ivan, 2020; Nič, 2020).

3. Gaps in current literature

As seen in this chapter, serving as both theoretical background and a literature review, scholars have extensively covered the issue of Kosovo and its relations: whether it is with the EU and its members, with Serbia, or with some of its non-recognisers. However, we believe that a gap in this research exists. Ker-Lindsay and Armakolas' 2020 book *The Politics of Recognition and Engagement: EU Member State Relations with Kosovo* covers the relationship between Kosovo and some of its EU recognisers and its five EU non-recognisers, presenting the latter's (de facto) engagement with Pristina, we have yet to see research which compares and contrasts non-recognising EU members' engagement over the course of an extended period of time. In this thesis, this is precisely what we will do, all the while assessing if the non-recognition from hard non-recognisers is as hard as staunch as we would expect it to be based on literature and political statements made by the governments of Cyprus, Greece, and Spain.

Research design – Understanding, comparing, and contrasting non-recognisers.

This thesis' second chapter addresses research design. Over the following pages, we will begin by outlining our two research questions as well as their associated research expectations. In the data and method subpart, we will present and justify application of the comparative study. Then we will set a time frame of the study, present our primary data sources, assess their reliability, and outline how we will operationalise our two research questions. Finally, we will present our case studies, divided between soft and hard non-recognisers.

1. Research questions and research expectations.

This thesis will attempt to answer the following two questions. First, *why* have non-recognising EU member states not recognised Kosovo? Second, *how* (to what extent) have EU non-recognisers engaged with Kosovo in spite of their non-recognition of the country's independence?

For our first research question, our expectations will depend on each specific case, but it is that each country has abstained from entering diplomatic relations with Kosovo due primarily to internal politics: especially in the case what we shall soon introduce as the two “hard non-recognisers” (Armakolas & Ker-Lindsay, 2020) in our study (due to the presence on their territory of communities having or wishing to secede unilaterally). We expect Spain in particular to have had zero engagement with Pristina, as Madrid's hostility towards has been no secret since its UDI. This was exemplified among others by its low-tolerance policy regarding mentions of a sovereign Kosovo and its national symbols, such as its flag, in sports competitions, especially when taking place on Spanish soil (Dunbarap, 2019; Sarriá & Demjaha, 2019). In the case of the three “soft non-recognisers” (Armakolas & Ker-Lindsay, 2020), our assumption is that their engagement levels has varied due to reasons such as their diplomatic relations to foreign states (either kin with a de facto state on its territory, or to Serbia), their ties to the EU and NATO, or their personal dealings with communities inside of their territories which could become candidates to secession attempts (such as the Hungarians living outside of Hungary in territories which formerly belonged to Hungary before the Treaty of Trianon).

For our second research question, tackling the patterns of engagement of EU member states that do not recognise Kosovo with the latter, our expectation is that hard non-recognisers will have not engaged with Kosovo in any meaningful way (or never directly, by engaging through means such as unofficial “diplomatic” representation). We expect such states' governments to not have engaged with Pristina, and that this will especially be the case for Spain as it holds very little interest for the Balkans and previously had enforced a policy of avoidance of Kosovar diplomats to its own staff (Valero, 2018; Sánchez-Vallejo, 2018; Ferrero-Turrión, 2020; McAulay, 2022). Soft non-recognisers are expected to have engaged with the de facto authorities in Pristina through informal diplomacy, economic ties, and investment, as well as engaging with Kosovar civil society to a degree. Among other soft non-recognisers, we expect Greece to have

engaged the most without recognition due to its strong ties to Kosovo in spite of its closeness to Serbia (Armakolas, 2020; Nič, 2020). We expect there to be no mentions of Kosovo as a state anywhere on these states' governments websites and speeches, and for Kosovo to systematically be mentioned as Kosovo* or an equivalent of such designation.

2. Data and methods

i. Comparative analysis: compare and contrast.

The method we will use in this thesis is that of comparative analysis, which was found most suitable to address our two research questions as our goal is to first understand similarities and differences why our cases studies have not recognised Kosovo and how they have interacted with it in spite of their diplomatic stance.

Qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) is a method brought forth in the field of social sciences by sociologist and methodologist Charles D. Ragin in 1987, upon the release of his landmark book *The Comparative Method Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*. QCA has, over the last decades, proved popular with political scientists and sociologists looking for a middle way between combining “certain features of the qualitative approach (case orientation, interest in complexity) with those of quantitative research (interest in generalization)” (Sehring, Korhonen-Kuri & Brockhaus, 2013, 1). This is more specifically indicated in its French translation, *analyse quali-quantitative comparée* (AOQC) -translating to quali-quantitative compared analysis (Meur, Rihoux & Varone, 2004). The method is designed for small to intermediate number of cases (Sehring, Korhonen-Kuri & Brockhaus, 2012, 2), hence suitable for our small-N research thesis. Research conducted through QCA's aims to enable systematic cross comparison whilst being a case-sensitive approach (ibid). By balancing complexity of each case study through analysis, QCA allows for “allows modest, medium-range generalization and theorizing” (ibid). Cases in QCA are understood not as such, but as a combination of diverse factors called conditions (which are the variables) (Miri & Dehdashti Shahrokh, 2019) called configurations (Sehring, Korhonen-Kuri & Brockhaus, 2013a, 2; Ragin, 1998), and the diversity of these cases and of said configurations is important for proper application of the method. Four main types of QCA exist: crisp-set, fuzzy set, multi-value and two-step fuzzy set (Sehring, Korhonen-Kuri & Brockhaus, 2013b). Multi-value appears to be the most appropriate type of QCA here, as it allows us to verify for the presence of engagement without recognition through comparison between our cases under the lens of our theoretical framework (how we defined it and its three forms of engagement in the first chapter). Content analysis was considered but ultimately did not function due to how loose our set of primary data is, relying on too many different types of primary sources.

Our research has two parts, the first consisting of us studying official and unofficial explanations made by a country in regard to their choice not to recognise Kosovo's

independence. We will do this through the examining of primary data sources such as press-releases, official statements (from MFAs or to the ICJ, the EU...), and interviews among others. This first part's objective is to display the reasons behind non-recognition for our second research question to be sufficiently contextualised, and functions more as a research/report hybrid as this question having already been covered in the literature (Armakolas & Ker-Lindsay, 2020). Our second question will aim to systematically collect data in our primary sources revealing the existence of engagement without recognition if engagement there is, based on our definition of engagement and the three possible forms we highlighted. We will then contrast and compare our findings in regard to our expectations, how much each country engaged, and if soft and hard recognisers behaved as expected prior conducting research.

ii. Timeframe of the study: February 18th 2008 to February 2024

The period covered in our research will be ranging from February 2008, date at which the de facto authorities in Pristina unilaterally declared independence, all the way to February 2024, fourteen years later. This timeframe is rather long, as it covers approximately sixteen years, leading to a possible overwhelming wealth of documentation and sources to cover in a Masters' thesis. However, due to our topic's very nature -engagement without recognition, this is not the case; by definition, engagement between our three case studies and Kosovo are expected to be quite limited, as well as our number of primary sources indicating (pseudo) diplomatic contacts. Due to this, focusing on a tighter timeline would both lead to sparse sources, but also to missing out on being able to analyse potential changes of heart in foreign policy regarding Kosovo as the de facto state garnered more recognition and remained independent in a Europe shifting between expansion fatigue and enthusiasm. The study's timeframe was initially limited to the September 2023, month in which the Banjska attacks occurred, but early 2024 felt more appropriate as visa liberalisation entering in force on January first marked one of Kosovo's most important foreign policy milestones.

iii. Data sources and reliability assessment

MFAs and governmental sources

MFAs direct expressions of a state's foreign policy regarding confirmed or de facto states. Their value as a source revolves around their official nature. Mentions of links with Kosovo or Kosovar authorities from a non-recogniser makes an argument for degrees of engagement without recognition. The omission of Kosovo, its mention in hostile terms, or as a part of Serbia, makes for valuable data. As they are government-issued, these websites are deemed highly reliable. Research will be conducted on of our three case studies' MFAs as well as Kosovo and Serbia's. The latter provides a very clear presentation and assessment of their foreign relations in different domains such as diplomatic and economic relations, making it valuable to understand the relation between Serbia and our cases. Though these sources, we

access our case studies' official stances regarding Kosovo, their level of engagement with Pristina, the strength and nature our non-recognisers' diplomatic ties with Kosovo's parent state, and their official reasoning behind their non-recognition decision. MFA websites are the main sources in this category, but other ministries or press and information offices (PIO) are also considered if they contain relevant data (example: Cyprus). We will use these websites' internal research tools to check for statements including Kosovo, consult if available info pages regarding Kosovo (as these websites often maintain detailed information pages displaying their diplomatic ties). Theoretically, none of these websites are expected to possess any content hinting at any level of recognition. We will systematically input in these websites internal research tools selected keywords: Pristina, Kosovo, and these two names in the language of the country's MFA if they happen to differ from their official English spellings. It is important to note that we are not merely looking for references and uses of Kosovo or Pristina, but we are using these keywords to find pages that could contain content for us to interpret for data.

Kosovo Central Bank annual reports (2009-2022)

These reports, issued by the Kosovo Central Bank since 2009 and available in English on their official website, are primordial for us to search for economic engagement between Kosovo and our case studies. Independently audited and issued by Pristina's independent central bank, the reports appear to readily available, highly reliable sources. We expected for non-recognisers to have little to no economic contact with Pristina, hard non-recognisers in particular. The over a decades-worth of data offers a clear showcase of the evolution of possible economic engagement without recognition. Other central banks were also consulted, but the lack of such clear figures and the scale constraints of a master thesis made us decide against using them. We will look for mentions of our case studies through our software's research function; if they are present, we will compare and contrast the data between non-recognisers (soft and hard) and countries which we expect to engage economically with Pristina.

EU web portals and institutional sources

Such primary sources will be used on a case-by-case basis when looking for specific legislation, declarations from member states, and when looking to showcase EU decisions or processes including Kosovo which engage Pristina to our cases. As these sources are issued by organisations the EU, the ICJ, or the European University Association (EUA), we consider them highly reliable. Needs to be noted that their treatment less systematic than our previous source categories. For this source category, there is no need for us to use a similar research process to the previous two sources which utilised keywords. Regarding ICJ written statements made by our case studies (Cyprus and Spain), data retrieval is straightforward: we will simply

gather information on the states' stance on Kosovo's UDI through a review of the documents issued to the court.

Press and miscellaneous websites

Engagement between confirmed states and a state they do not recognise, when it occurs, is often conducted indirectly; this can be through the use of international organisations as a 'middleman' (Van Elsuwege, 2017; Ker-Lindsay & Armatolas, 2020), through unofficial meetings, or diplomatic cables (Pegg & Berg, 2016; Berg & Pegg, 2018). Press sources are necessary to find prospective cases of engagement, as states themselves are not theoretically expected to report such instances. Validity and reliability are a concern when using journalistic sources for data; we acknowledge that, and attempt to assess as much as possible the quality and journalistic standards of the cited articles and newspapers. Diverse (miscellaneous) websites also serve as data sources, for the same reasons as press did. Examples include that political parties to see if the leaders have met Kosovar officials or that of insurance companies to attempt finding out if certain countries recognise an insurance purchased in Kosovo. The reliability of such sources should be adequately high, as we consult official party or company websites for specific purposes. Systematic collection of data on social media accounts was also considered as a possible source (were considered the Twitter accounts of officials, MFAs, representatives...), but this was abandoned due to variable levels of reliability and the large scope of such an undertaking. Such sources would also be more suited for discourse analysis, which is not the type of research we are conducting in this thesis. In regard to data collection: press titles will thus be gathered over the course of the research, when looking for example for events spoken of in academic literature or government statements, for context, or as needs arise. This is also valid for websites.

iv. Operationalisation of our research questions

For our first research question, as previously mentioned in the data and methods subpart, operationalisation here is straightforward. We are simply looking for our three case studies' official and unofficial reasons behind their choice not to recognise Kosovo in press, statements, and other types of primary sources. There is no need to measure or assess if they do not recognise Kosovo, as we already know that this is the case: we simply see to explain why through the study of these five states' reasoning and narratives.

In our second's research question's case, what we attempt to measure is how (if, and to what extent) our case studies engage with Pristina without recognising its independence. We will assess the presence of engagement without recognition and its scale based on our three forms, and how "official" is this engagement (acknowledgement of Kosovo national symbols, meetings with officials from confirmed states, investment from confirmed states, recognition of Kosovar documents as valid...). We will consider something engagement from the moment

one of our cases possesses a level of interaction (political, economic, and with the public sphere) with Kosovo, which they theoretically should not possess as they do not consider it a state under international law. Economic engagement is trickier to assess, as people and companies can have contact with Kosovo on their own accord and without government support, but money flowing into Kosovo from Cyprus or Spain will still be assessed as engagement to a certain degree (as, again, it theoretically should be null).

3. Case selection: Cyprus, Greece, and Spain – a small-N research

The selection of our case studies, being Cyprus, Greece, and Spain, is linked to their membership in the EU. Whilst Kosovo's UDI was not unanimously welcomed (even in the west), it was broadly accepted and recognised; most of the first (and most fervent) recognisers being EU member states (Ker-Lindsay & Armatolas, 2020). Pristina authorities' drive to join the union and western institutions makes their relations with members of the union interesting to take a look at: the five EU non-recognisers (Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia, Spain) in the group thus stand out, as the sole theoretically non-engaged EU members with Kosovo. In the context of our thesis, picking cases from this group of five states (whether the full group or only specific cases studies) was the only choice deemed logical.

For this reason, this thesis initially was going to treat all five non-recognisers as case-studies in small-N research. We initially were under the impression that covering Kosovo's de facto relations with only one or two non-recognisers may result into not enough content for us to write an entire masters' thesis on due to the then unclear quantity of exploitable data and primary sources. Furthermore, the whole group of non-recognisers being used as a set of cases allows us to compare and contrast them in how they each interact with Kosovo, and how these interactions may have changed since 2008. Overtime however, the prospect of reducing our case study to two to three cases started to make more sense, and was eventually deemed a better choice for this thesis. Whilst it is hard to argue that more case studies are a bad thing, especially when such a clear pre-established, self-evident group of cases is available, the inclusion of all three soft recognisers eventually appeared redundant. The reasoning behind this is that Greek case study combined the most important aspects of both the Romanian and Slovak cases, being Slovakia's very engaged attitude since recognition and Romania's close ties to Serbia and to a kin state whose foreign policy is profoundly affected by a de facto state (Transnistria).

Slovakia has been a constructive non-recogniser, diplomatically engaged (through bilateral dialogue and their liaison office) with Pristina as an EU and NATO member with an interest in the western Balkans, but still hostile to recognising due to how politicised the Kosovo question has been domestically (Nič, 2020). Romania's position was more cautious, based on international law, its kinship with Moldova (which deals with the presence of a de facto state

on its sovereign territory, just like Greece and Cyprus), and its large Hungarian minority, without however ever refusing to contribute to security missions in Kosovo like Nicosia initially did (Ivan, 2020; Ioannides, 2020). Both of these cases as previously stated are worthy of interest, but in the context of a this thesis, the amount overlap with the Hellenic case did not add enough new value which Greece did not already bring to warrant them being treated.

The separation of these three states into two groups comes from Ker-Lindsay and Armakolas (ibid, 5). On table 1.1 were divided some EU member states based on their stance on Kosovo recognition (yes or no), and their level of engagement (engaged or not engaged). This classification felt a very pertinent grouping of our case studies, as these two groups (soft and hard-non recognisers) both come with a similar set of expectations to apply to our research, helping contextualise when comparing stances and levels of interactions with Pristina. We decided to keep it as a convenient framework for comparison.

i. Hard non-recognisers: Cyprus and Spain as Kosovo's fiercest opponents in the EU.

Cyprus and Spain have been staunchly opposed to Kosovo's independence since the 2008 UDI. Both Madrid and Nicosia have a complex relationship regarding separatism; half of Cyprus' de jure sovereign territory makes up the territory of the de facto TRNC, supported by Türkiye, and Spain has long dealt with a history of sometimes violent independentism with its Basque and Catalan minorities (Ferrero-Turrión, 2020; 2021). The Cypriot and Spanish situation differ: Spanish separatism seems increasingly unlikely to result in secession as recent Catalan attempts have not led anywhere and the Basque Country's has become peaceful with the end of ETA. In the EU and internationally, both states have been firmly opposed to Kosovo's UDI (as we will see in the first part of this thesis with, for example, their statements to the ICJ); a good example of this is the April 16th Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly opinion vote on the "application by Kosovo* for membership", which saw all but one Spanish member vote in favour: the other eight Spaniards and the two Cypriots voting against, when four out of the five Greek deputies and both Romanian representatives were in favour no Slovak voted nor abstained (Parliamentary Assembly of the COE, April 16th 2024). Cyprus was selected as our final case study due its Kosovo policy similarities with Spain and its strong relationship with Greece (Kosovo's softest recogniser). Furthermore, Nicosia's EU membership allows us to talk its and kin Greece's relationship with Kosovo without existing our defined 'EU non-recognisers' set of cases; something Romania's case would have as Moldova is only an EU candidate. Both of these states, by virtue of being EU member and both having had consistently hostile Kosovo foreign policies, are important case studies for us to study.

ii. Greece as a soft non-recogniser: puzzlingly engaged with Kosovo.

⁶ Outside of our time frame by two months, but worth mentioning.

Greece stands out as Kosovo's most engaged non-recogniser in spite of strong relations with both kin state Cyprus and close historical ally Serbia, a consistent reassessment of their adverse position regarding Pristina's UDI, and resentment regarding Albanians. A fitting example of that duality is the aforementioned opinion vote, occurring as a result of a Greek report by MP and former FM Dora Bakoyannis, which claimed "the report will take no stand on statehood", adding "the recognition or non-recognition is and shall remain a prerogative of states." (Parliamentary Assembly of the COE, April 17th 2024). Greece possesses similar characteristics to Spain in several regards (Mediterranean, EU member, high unemployment rate...) whilst sitting on the opposite side of the non-recognisers' spectrum, making it simpler to justify comparison between the two. Greece's cautious, yet sustained approach to engagement makes them perhaps our most interesting case study, as we expect it to be surprisingly engaged with Kosovo. It will be interesting here is to see if, and how their relations evolved since 2008, how exactly their engagement occurs, and which are its driving forces.

Analysis - Politics of recognition and engagement without recognition between Kosovo and EU non-recognisers since 2008.

1. The politics of recognition at work: why non-recognition?
 - i. Hard non-recognisers: international law, principles, and fear of contagion.

Nicosia's stance since 2008 has, for all intents and purposes, not changed in regard to Kosovar recognition. Following Pristina's UDI, the Cypriot government was quick to express "grief" over the declaration (MFA of Cyprus, February 18th 2008). The reasoning behind this was rooted in two elements: its illegality under international law ("this secessionist act falls outside the framework of international legality, and is therefore legally null and void") and the UDI's violation of Serbia's territorial integrity (ibid). This succinct statement issued under twenty-four hours following Pristina's declaration still stands sixteen years down the line as the reasoning behind how politics of recognition are conducted with Kosovo in Nicosia: this can be seen on the Cypriot MFA website, where all seven found mentions of Kosovo either use the denomination Kosovo (with asterisk) (ibid, May 3rd 2021; October 17th 2021), or referring to it as Serbia's province of Kosovo and Metohija. This is the case in the oldest publication still currently up which Kosovo on the website, dated December 2020 (ibid, December 11th 2020), and on all following posts mentioning Kosovo on the MFA. In fact, any mention of Kosovo (unless it is mentioned with asterisk) explicitly states Cyprus' non recognition, particularly as the words Kosovo near exclusively appear in the context of Serbo-Cypriot bilateral relations (ibid, December 11th 2020; December 12th 2020; April 5th 2021; August 1st 2022). Uses of the legally nuanced Kosovo* (two out of seven posts) are the context of EU's and international partnerships such as the Media Freedom Coalition's engagement with Pristina (ibid, May 3rd 2021; October 17th 2021) and are by no means intended by Cyprus to constitute any form of recognition.

This non-recognition was tied to a fervent support for both Serbia's territorial integrity and EU-membership bid, from 2009 to the present (Government of Serbia, 2009: MFA of Cyprus, August 1st 2022) which is also tied to strong bilateral relations the likes of which Greece entertains with Serbia (MFA of Serbia, 2024) due to these shared experiences with secessionism (but not only: importance of orthodoxy, historically strong ties with Yugoslavia, common issues with Türkiye, likening of the breakup of Yugoslavia to their own experiences...) (Kentas, 2011; Ioannides, 2020). A good example of this is the first bilateral visit of Serbia's new foreign affairs minister in 2020 being to Nicosia (PIO of Cyprus, December 11th 2020). Whilst out of our timeline, it is worth noting that in April 2024, following the previously mentioned opinion vote at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe which Cypriot representatives opposed in bloc, Cyprus foreign ministry spokesperson Theodoros Gotsis reasserted his country's consistency on Kosovo non-recognition (Cleaver, 2024). There is so far in line with what was stated in 2009 by then Cypriot president Demetris Christofias that the island nation would remain consistent and will not recognise the unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo, even if all other EU members do so" (Government of Serbia, 2009).

This is further exemplified in the advisory opinion that Cyprus handed as a written statement to the ICJ in 2009 in which it attempts to highlight the illegality and illegitimacy of Pristina's UDI and secession in a comprehensive manner. It does so by going through the recent history of Serbia and the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the missions and developments put in place in Kosovo over the preceding decade (Resolution 1244, UNMIK, KFOR, the provisional institutions of Kosovo) and then by proceeding to a legal analysis (Government of Cyprus, 2009). This legal analysis contains five parts and starts by looking at the general application of international law, then questions of sovereignty and territorial integrity, the impact of UNSC Resolution 1244 on the UDIs legality, the power of the provisional institutions in regard to issuing the declaration of independence, the claims that Serbia has lost its sovereignty over the territory, and finally makes the point that the UDI did not create a state (ibid). This latter part (part F in the text, ibid, 41-49) is most interesting, as it most explicitly displays the reasoning Nicosia uses to justify non-recognition. These are, first and foremost, the illegality under international law of this declaration due to its violation of the principles of sovereignty and the UDI being "beyond the legal competence of the Provincial Institutions" (ibid, 41). Cyprus does not find Kosovo to be fulfilling the basic elements of statehood as per defined by the Montevideo convention (population and territory, effective government, capacity to enter into relations with foreign states), and sees it as entirely dependent on third states and agencies in order to carry out many of the government's duties (ibid, 45). All of this together negates not only the validity of Pristina's UDI to Cyprus as it did not possess the legal competence to perform such an action, but any sense of possible earned sovereignty.

Still, hints behind the driving force for this stance can be found on pages 22-23, where former Cyprus president Christofias is quoted stating "we are by your side not just because we deal with a violation of international law in Cyprus as well as a violation of its territorial integrity and sovereignty, but because your case, just like ours, is a case of principle" (ibid, 23). The violation of international law hereby referenced being the case of the TRNC on a territory over which the de jure government lost control of in 1974, following its UDI solely supported by Türkiye. It, however, is not referenced clearly in any of our governmental primary sources⁷ nor is it cited in the ICJ declaration. The presence of a unilaterally seceded de facto state on its de jure sovereign territory plays a crucial role in shaping Nicosia's politics regarding non-recognition, and this shared experience has led to strong mutual support in diplomatic matters between both Serbia and Cyprus, between whom several summits were held in 2013, 2018, and 2023 (CBN, November 23rd 2023).

Cyprus' stance regarding the illegality of the secession and the UDI did not change upon the ICJ ruling, as its position has remained steadfast up to 2024, with their reasoning behind non-recognition being mainly backed by Nicosia's deeming Kosovo's statehood illegal, and the de facto itself not fulfilling the conditions for statehood found in the Montevideo convention. But,

⁷ Cypriot government websites appear to have many mentions of Kosovo missing, with many only accessible outside of the official websites: older pre-2020 MFA press releases may have referenced the TRNC making this sentence erroneous, but we did not find any proof of this.

perhaps inspired by this common experience with secession, this idea of a moral principle also appears to play a significant role in non-recognition, which makes sense based on importance of the *Cyprus Question* (the de facto division of the island into two states) which plays a pivotal role in shaping Cyprus politics and foreign policy. The presence of a dedicated section of the MFA's website is eloquent of this. Said principled stance and Serbia's mutual support regarding the TRNC issue is near infallibly reiterated upon both states interacting diplomatically (PIO of Cyprus, November 2018; February 2019; February 2020; December 2020; August 2022; November 2023) and makes for the strongest element behind the strong ties of the two countries and Nicosia's reasoning for non-recognition.

Spain's stance on Kosovo since its UDI has, like Cyprus since 2008, has been one of clear rejection. However, unlike Nicosia's MFA, the Spanish government did not issue an official written statement, rather officialising their non-recognition through a declaration to the press by then FM Miguel Angel Moratinos (Reuters, February 18th 2008a; February 18th 2008b). It stated that Madrid will not recognise the parliament's unilateral act as "this does not respect international law", adding that secession required agreements between parties or an UNSC resolution (ibid). This stance was very much in line with how Madrid had reacted to the developments in the Balkans since the initiation of Yugoslavia's breakup, being firmly against the violent dissolution of the Balkan state and standing in opposition to UNSC resolution 1244 in 1999 (Sarriá & Demjaha, 2019; Ferrero-Turrión, 2020). This is similar to Nicosia's reasoning and, as they did, Spain's did not change overtime -becoming more drastic. This is unsurprising, as Madrid's situation at home regarding Basque and Catalan independence justifies "fear of contagion" (ibid, 2020, 216) regarding Kosovo's UDI being met by a large degree of acceptance by the international community -particularly at a time when separatist terrorist group ETA was still active in the region, even if on its way to a final ceasefire two years later in 2010. Even more so as since 2006, Catalonia had been granted increased autonomy following a referendum enabled through a 2005 Statue (Ferrero-Turrión, 2020). The Spanish state has had a track record of only supporting self-determination in the event of both states finding solutions to which they consent: could be seen in bilateral relations with Morocco regarding the Western Sahara (MFA of Spain, 2012) and with their support for a Palestinian state following the UN guidelines for the two-state solution (O'Donoghue, 2023). The parliament even voted a non-binding resolution in favour to recognise it as a sovereign state (DW, 2014), with recent developments since October 7th 2023 pointing at a full recognition before July (Hernández-Morales, 2024).

Not unlike Cyprus, Spain has, over the course of diplomatic meetings with Serbian state officials, mentioned Kosovo and their lack of support for the province's UDI. Numbers wise, most references to Kosovo in the Spanish MFA's press releases are dated 2015-2016, when Spain occupied a seat at the security council and Kosovo/UNMIK found itself on the agenda regularly: twenty times between February 2015 and November 2016 (MFA of Spain, 2024a). This makes for the bulk of the mentions of Kosovo, with no new mention since June 2019 in press releases (regarding the Spanish FM's meeting with NATO's secretary general) and 2018

in press statements (in which Madrid deplored the change of Kosovo's security forces into the Kosovo Armed Forces) (ibid, 2024a; 2024b). Interestingly, Spain appears not to use the Kosovo with asterisk denomination or even its Serbian name when mentioning it, due to its very clear stance on the issue. Going back to the bilateral relations with Serbia: four pages on the MFA mention Kosovo in this context, among which three press releases following bilateral meetings (ibid, January 12th 2011; June 14th 2011; May 13th 2013; October 26th 2018) and one press statement following a 2010 UNGA resolution being adopted by the EU in agreement with Serbia (ibid, September 8th 2010). Three points can be observed in these documents: the good to excellent state of the diplomatic relations, the support for Spanish integration into the EU, and the committed stance to non-recognition until a two-party deal is signed. This is still the case today, as premier Pedro Sanchez re-asserted their position in 2022, stating "we support Serbia in everything to do with Kosovo" (El Nacional, 2022), adding that both states are united by shared convictions regarding their respect for international law. Furthermore, it can be remarked that, as UNMIK is the signatory (rather than the RKS) for most of the multilateral treaties and agreements they sign (Taleski, 2013); even in that context, there is not need for the hard non-recognisers to accept Kosovo's sovereignty to ensure the functioning of the international agreements they are part to.

International law is thus here, just like Nicosia, the reason behind non-recognition, with incentives due to the situation at home which are however never explicitly mentioned in the same manner than the Cyprus issue is within Nicosia-Belgrade exchanges. This focus on international law's most preeminent example is its ICJ advisory opinion, in particular the principle of sovereignty and the inviolability of one state's territorial integrity which said advisory opinion finds no valid reason to be tolerated in the case of Kosovo's UDI (MFA of Spain, April 2009). But, whilst Spain is spoken of in literature as Kosovo's "strongest opponent in Europe" (Ferrero-Turrión, 2020, 215), which is not wrong as Spain is larger player in world affairs than Cyprus, it is interesting to remark that the latter's opposition has been notably more outspoken: Spain has been unyielding, but never stated like Cyprus that they would never recognise Kosovo. This is the main difference between the two: both of these countries' justifications are very similar -if not identical, but Cyprus' similar experience of separatism and its relationship with Serbia led to more commitment in declarations from Nicosia.

ii. Ambivalence, regional influence, and puzzling ties: the Greek case-study.

The Hellenic reaction to Kosovo's UDI in 2008 was more nuanced than that of Spain and Cyprus. It was widely understood before the UDI that Greece would not support Kosovo de facto independence was it to occur, mainly due to the shared trauma of Cyprus' Turkish invasion and the creation of the TRNC as well as strong relations with close ally Serbia (Armakolas, 2020); then FM Bakoyannis' declaration on the 18th of February thus was surprisingly tame in its wording and intentions, particularly when put side to side with that of Cyprus or Spain.

As the aforementioned states immediately made their stance clear and highlighted their long-term moral and legal commitment to their position, Athens' declarations (through the words of Bakoyannis) left an impression of a more accommodative stance through both the notable absence of a strongly worded, explicit refusal to recognise, as well as the affirmation that Greece would play a role in the "indispensable" active EU presence in Kosovo (Athens News Agency, February 18th 2008). Whilst the hard non-recognisers did point out that solely a compromise solution is acceptable -something the Greek FM did as well, the tones are comparatively very different. Nicosia expressed its "grief" (MFA of Cyprus, February 18th 2008) and Madrid refused in a very expeditive manner; Bakoyannis however highlighted the importance of "safeguarding the stability and security of the region" and noted that Pristina's UDI created "a new reality" (Athens News Agency, February 18th 2008). This, coupled with the importance brought upon highlighting Greece's commitment to regional security, cooperation, Greek interests in the Western Balkans (especially visible in the claim that Greece was going to take decisions at a later stage, rather than expediting them), and the lack of mentioning international law as a reason for non-recognition (ibid) showcases the initially very different approach that our soft non-recogniser settled for. Worth noting as well is Bakoyannis highlighting "the particular role that Serbia has for the preservation of regional balance and stability" (ibid) when discussing the topic of cooperation with partners and neighbours: this thought makes a lot of sense, knowing the historically tight knit relationship between the two countries, both important actors in the region. They remain close allies today in spite of Greece's ambivalence during the NATO operations, which was torn between fulfilling its role as a member of the organisation and the near total nationwide opposition to the bombings in Yugoslavia (Armakolas & Karabairis, 2011): Greece's MFA notes that "Bilateral relations are excellent, with frequent exchanges of visits by high-ranking government officials" (MFA of Greece, 2024a). This is backed up by Serbia's MFA's website, which displays their large number of bilateral agreements (fifty) as well as their strong bilateral trade (MFA of Serbia, 2024).

Serbian and Greek officials have met with a measure of regularity over the course of our covered timeline; considering bilateral meetings and not multilateral encounters, representatives from both countries have met fourteen times between September 2011 and December 2022 (MFA of Greece, 2024b) In all of these meetings, the issue of Kosovo was mentioned, and Greece seldom omitted to reassert their position in Serbia's favour until a bilateral deal can be reached, outwardly complimenting Serbia's "constructive attitude" (MFA of Greece, September 7th 2011). Proof of the mutual nature of this relationship is how Serbian FM Jeremic, in the same press conference, called Greek FM Lambrinidis "a very good friend of our country [Serbia]" and said in response to a reporter's question about the minister's visit to Pristina that he could "go to any region of our country, including Kosovo" (ibid). Actions such as a visit from a foreign official to Kosovo, a separatist province of your country, even more so from a close ally, could be assumed to acutely damage relations between two allies; this does not seem to be the case here, as demonstrated such interactions and the uninterrupted close ties before and after Pristina's UDI. There are further examples of such ambivalence. For

example, both state's FMs' (as of April 2018) openly discussing seemingly without issues the establishment of a Kosovar "Commercial Affairs Office in Athens", considered okay as it does not count as diplomatic representation (MFA of Greece, April 11th 2018). Such attitude can be surprising on paper from both a non-recogniser (open to trade but not to engage diplomatically through recognition) and from Serbia (for whom such a move by Athens and Pristina could be expected to be seen as highly problematic from a close ally). Another example can also be, in line with years of supporting consistently at every bilateral meeting the dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade and highlighting the importance of a legally binding solution, Greece playing an active role in mediation by going to both cities in 2022 with the same message being, "*pacta sunt servanda*" -agreements must be respected (MFA of Greece, December 19th 2022). This very much in line with Greek Kosovo and Serbian foreign policy overtime, and as we will see later in the thesis, in line with how Greece has conducted relations with Pristina.

What transpires from this is that Kosovo's position on non-recognition did not in fact come about due to their reading of international law, but due to foreign policy considerations and concerns. Their close historical, political, economic ties with Cyprus and Serbia, both that of the governments and of the countries' peoples, were a barrier to any official recognition (in spite of strong relations with the west and their EU and NATO membership): the politics of recognition as we conceptualised them in our theoretical chapter are visible and very much at play here. Whilst we chose not to use the other two soft-non recognisers as case studies, it remains interesting to highlight that Greece is unique in that their stance is uniquely driven by their country interest and is less of a principled stance (moral, international law, or both): this was the case for every single case study but the Hellenic republic's, with both Slovakia and Romania citing such reasoning⁸ (Nič, 2020; Ivan, 2020).

2. Engagement as a substitute for non-recognition?

i. Political engagement

Political engagement the first form of engagement for us to access as it is the most directly comparable to direct diplomatic engagement with Kosovo (theoretically). In order for us to check for such form of engagement without recognition, we have to seek the existence of meetings between officials (official or not), statements concerning Kosovo statehood from

⁸ Interestingly, Slovakia's reasoning for non-recognition besides international illegality was that such a move would go against the country's own interest (shared with Greece, as well as both state's ensuing substantial engagement), and Romania's was also strongly driven by its kinship to another state. Greece for this reason makes an interesting case as it displays the characteristics of both state's reasoning without their main shared argument (respect for international law and norms).

countries clearly positioned as non-recognisers, or interactions between Kosovo political figures and that of the confirmed states we use as case studies. Our expectations are, in line with our theory, that such meetings should be of extreme rarity or non-existent in line with our cases' stance on non-recognition -with Greece as a possible exception due to its soft attitude on non-recognition in line with their regional foreign policy goals. Spain and Cyprus, but particularly Spain, are expected to have no engagement at all. Cyprus is assumed to be more likely to have accidentally engaged with Kosovo and Kosovar officials due to their regional proximity and kinship with Greece, who's government has been attempting to play a peace-broker role between Belgrade and Pristina. In this subpart, through statements and releases from MFAs, press articles, and websites relating presence of officials from our case studies in situations where interactions with Kosovo officials are likely to have (or have been documented to have) occurred, we shall assess our three case studies' level of de facto political engagement with Pristina and their 'unofficial officials'.

Broken vows of avoidance: cherry-picking or timid steps towards engagement?

Cyprus and Spain, due to their outspoken and repeated position regarding the Kosovar UDI and international law-justified support for Serbian territorial integrity, have held a strict non-engagement policy with Pristina officials (in line with the concept of non-recognition, which should in theory exclude contact between a confirmed and de facto government, as it does not 'exist'). Madrid even explicitly barred its diplomats from any contact with Kosovar officials as it could be likened to engagement. This position has been successfully held for years, Cyprus and Spain officials only engaging with Kosovo officials to any degree at EU levels, where precautions are taken by both the union and the individual non-recognisers (no Kosovo flags, national signs, use of the Kosovo with asterisk denomination in documents) to distance said meetings from counting as engagements between non-recognisers and Pristina. A good example of this is the previously cited meeting of Kosovar FM D. Gërvalla-Shwarz with the EU member states' FMs, including Cyprus' C. Kombos and Greece's G. Gerapetritis, who's presence (captured on camera) was in response to an invitation by J. Borell under the role of High Representative of the EU for Foreign Policy and Security rather than as a Spanish official's (MFA of Kosovo, November 11th 2023). The picture is available as Figure 1. When going through Cypriot and Spanish MFA websites during our first analytical part, we noticed the complete absence of references to Kosovo or Pristina as independent on any degree and the lack of any official note of a visit to the separatist territory: the sole mentions of the term "Kosovo" being in the context of contact with Serbia, and the reassessment of a pro-Belgrade position (latest examples: MFA of Cyprus, August 1st 2022; MFA of Spain, October 26th 2018).

When looking at speeches or interviews, one could choose to see statements from officials (former or acting) that could hint at the support of Kosovar statehood. Spain's Borrell and Greece's Gerapetritis both appear to have used the word "state" or "country" when speaking about Kosovo; the former during a pro-Spanish unity speech ("Catalonia is not a colony, it is

not a State occupied militarily, as Lithuania was, by the Soviet Army. It is not a state like Kosovo, where there was violence and Human Rights were violated”) (El Confidencial, October 9th 2017) and the latter over an interview in the USA for a Greek diaspora radio (“particularly in Kosovo, where we have had major incidents, as well as in other countries such as Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania”) (MFA of Greece, September 25th 2023). Such cases, in our view, are not to be considered as they are one-off, singled-out examples, who’s validity is dubious at best as it is near impossible to prove any actual intent from these figures to liken Kosovo to a state; it is likely that such cases are mere incidents or translation issues. To consider such cases as engagement would be academically dishonest.



Figure 1: EU member states FMs and Kosovar FM D. Gërvalla-Shwarz, Brussels, November 11th 2014⁹

However, there are cases where active members of government from our non-recognisers find each other in events where unofficial engagement is likely, or where someone holding a representative function in a non-recogniser country would be assumed to not accept going due to the presence of a Kosovar official. Over our research, we found two such events, both taking place on non-recognising soil: the 2022 Socialist International in Madrid (an international socialist political meeting), and the 2023 Thessaloniki Conference (a private Balkan-focused business conference held since 2016 with many speakers holding ambassador or ministerial positions). Whilst it is true that the apparent, following our research on MFA documents and press, that there is an apparent absence of any contact or acknowledgement from hard non-recognisers of Kosovo as a whole (besides specific cases such as condemning the death of an

⁹ MFA of Kosovo, November 11th 2023. From left to right: Kosovo FM D. Gërvalla-Shwarz (3rd, front row), Cyprus FM C. Combos (6th, middle row), Greece FM G. Gerapetritis (9th, front row).

EULEX mission member in Kosovo) (MFA of Spain, September 20th 2013), these types of unofficial contacts could be considered as possible form of political engagement.

The twenty sixth Socialist International conference of 2022 took place in Madrid, Spain, and its speakers included then and current Spanish PM Pedro Sanchez and its Kosovar counterpart Albin Kurti (Socialist International, 2022a). The event was hosted by the Spanish Socialist party in power (PSOE) and was attended by many political figures and party heads from all through the world, around revolving around socialist politics (ibid, 2022b). The conference was not an official Spanish-state sponsored event, and thus likening it to direct possible engagement between Madrid and Kosovo would be misleading, but the hosting by party-in-power PSOE and the presence of the Spanish PM both make a strong case for us to consider interactions between officials from our case studies as de facto engagement. According to a press article by Catalan daily paper El Periódico about the unchanging Spanish stance on Kosovo independence despite new recognising its travel documents, both premiers “greeted” each other the event took place (El Periódico, January 7th 2024). The article also referred to a previous trip by A. Kurti to Granada, a city also visited by Kosovar president V. Osmani in 2023 for the Spanish-hosted European Political Community summit (Haas, October 9th 2023). If it is difficult for us to verify if the two government leaders in fact met, the Kosovar premier’s simple presence on Spanish soil at a political convention hosted in Madrid and attended by Spain’s head of government represents a level of de facto political engagement without recognition we are not supposed to expect when taking in account the Madrilene position on Kosovo and their complete lack of bilateral ties.

The fact something similar occurred again in Granada a year later amplifies this point: a hard non-recogniser seeing Kosovo secessionism as possibly setting an existential threat to its territorial integrity is not supposed to be hosting on multiple occasions Kosovo’s most important political figures. Something similar occurred with the 2023 Thessaloniki Summit, attended by deputy FM of Kosovo Liza Gashi (Thessaloniki Summit, 2023a); the event itself was far less political than the Socialist International, as the sponsors and organisers are private companies, and non-governmental entities and groups (ibid, 2023b; 2023c). Nonetheless, following the logic we used when talking about the Socialist International in Madrid, the presence of a Kosovar official on a non-recogniser’s soil (soft or hard) and in presence of non-recognising state officials, is enough to make a case for high likelihood of some level of engagement without recognition. During the summit, ten Greek ministers or deputy ministers were present, including minister of foreign affairs G. Gerapetritis, minister for asylum and migration D. Kairidis, and minister of development K. Skrekas among others (ibid, 2023a). To this can be added G. Alesic, the State Secretary of the Serbian MFA, which shared a panel on the second day with deputy minister Gashi (Thessaloniki Summit, 2023d). On a similar note, both Kurti and Sanchez also were speakers on November 25th 2022 during the Madrid congress (Socialist International, 2022a), but we are not able to state that they spoke in the same room as there was, following our analysis of our primary sources, very little in the way of information as it is often the case for matters of prospective engagement between a non-recogniser and a

de facto state. However, there is high likelihood that Kosovo was a topic during the event, as during of the fourth summit in 2019, alternate Greek minister of foreign affairs M. Varvitsiotis spoke of Kosovo when discussing the European future of western Balkan states (MFA of Greece, November 14th 2019).

It is important to mention the case of visa liberalisation between Kosovo and the EU (Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, 2023), which could have been linked to a step in the direction of Kosovar recognition for non-recognisers since its entry in force on January 1st (ibid, 2024). Again, this would be misleading as -similar to the previously mentioned meeting at EU-level which included the Kosovar FM Gërvalla-Shwarz, measures were taken to distance the member states from the union, and non-recognising states highlighted their unchanging position in spite of this new visa doctrine (El Periódico, January 7th 2024). Whilst neither hard or soft recognisers did change their stances officially, some slow and timid steps do appear to have taken place, but never officially and it is hard to confirm with certainty. The presence of these such as the PM or other ministers of the RKS on non-recognising soil under their official Kosovar titles certainly goes against the supposed non-interaction stance that comes with not recognising Pristina's UDI, and therefore make a tangible argument to the point that a form of political engagement is occurring.

All but recognition: Greek engagement substituting recognition.

When comparing the Hellenic case with our hard non-recognisers, the first thing one notices' is the extent of the Greek engagement with Pristina authorities; a level similar to what would be expected for more 'regular' diplomatic relations between two regional confirmed, mutually recognising states. Entering the keyword "Kosovo" on Athens' MFA research tool leads to 102 results, with the use of the Kosovo with asterisk denomination being a total outlier and only used twice in posts referencing conferences in which Serbia participated in 2020 (MFA of Greece, 2024c). This is a surprising low occurrence as this language trick allows proves useful to engage without recognition. From these 102 entries, we found that twelve official meetings were documented to have taken place between the Greek and Kosovar authorities since 2011 (first mention of Kosovo on the Greek MFA), whether bilaterally or at the UN; with six of these taking place in Prishtina between 2014 and 2022 and one in Athens in 2022 (ibid, January 20th 2022). Neither going to Pristina on a de facto diplomatic visit nor welcoming a diplomat under her official title when your country does not offer recognition to her government is (theoretically) unexpected from a non-recogniser -soft or otherwise.

Greek deputy PM, FM and then president of the Council of the EU E. Venizelos met with Kosovo PM Hashim Thaci (ibid, February 19th 2014). The meeting displayed warm, optimistic relations, referencing the strong economic ties between both states ("The Greek economic and financial presence here in Kosovo is very strong and our political willingness is to endorse Greek companies to participate, always actively, in the economic life of Kosovo") (ibid) and showcased an apparent Greek commitment to a pro-western government in Pristina ("Stay on

the right track, keep on working for your European and Euro Atlantic future, and we [Greece] will stand by your side”) (ibid). These warm relations however did not come with any indications of a change of stance on recognition, Athens’ FM preferring to mainly address their regional commitment and their support for dialogue with Serbia -without however full-on denying recognition anywhere. The latest meeting mentioned on the MFA occurred on April 13th 2022, with visit to Pristina by deputy minister for foreign affairs for economic diplomacy and openness K. Fragogiannis, where he met with Kosovar FM Gërvalla-Shwarz (ibid, April 14th 2022). This statement from the MFA does not come with a press conference transcript as the first 2014 visit did, but the signing of agreements on the organisation of a business forum and the talks of bilateral cooperation of “mutual interest concerning education and culture” as well as the “enhancement of bilateral trade” (ibid) seem to indicate that relations over eight years have remained enthusiastic, which has been backed up back literature and our research. Between these two bilateral meetings, a particular Hellenic visit to Kosovo’s capital stood out as worth mentioning due to the availability of a photograph clearly showing both then Greek foreign minister N. Kotzias and deputy PM H. Thaci both in front of their national flags and other official RKS symbols (coat of arms, government of Kosovo plate: see Figure 2) (ibid, July 14th 2015). Whilst this is in line with the routine use of official Kosovar government titles by the Hellenic foreign ministry, taking part in bilateral discussions *in* Pristina and *in front* of the symbols representing a state of which the country you serve does not recognise the existence of is a noticeable case of diplomatic engagement without recognition on all accounts; such behaviour is thus a surprise, even when expecting some high levels of engagement from Athens in spite of their stance on non-recognition.



Figure 2: Greek FM N. Kotzias and Kosovar PM H. Thaci meeting in Pristina, July 14th 2015¹⁰

¹⁰ MFA of Greece, July 14th 2015

This engagement does not stop at bilateral relations, as Greece has played an active role (in line with their regional policy for the western Balkans) as a mediator in regard to the situation in Kosovo, meeting with its leaders at the UN as previously mentioned (ibid, September 28th 2015; September 19th 2016) and collaborating at EU level in the processes aimed at enabling Pristina's European aims. Whilst Greece does not change in position regarding recognition in spite of now recognising travel documents issued by the Kosovar government, we could not find any proof of hostility regarding this EU level decision.

In short: Athens meets Kosovar diplomats, hosts Kosovar diplomats in official meetings, allows itself to be seen interacting with symbols of Kosovar independence, and hosts them on their territory events such as the Thessaloniki summit (where they are likely to interact with Greek officials). Language found on the Greek MFA regarding their representation in Kosovo such as "Greece is diplomatically represented in Kosovo by the UNMIK-accredited Liaison Office in Pristina" (MFA of Greece, January 23rd 2024) further exemplifies this engagement, diplomatic representation being normally associated to contact confirmed states or supranational organisations. All of this coupled to the friendly interactions between the two states and the now recognition of travel documents (and the presence of trade, which we shall tackle in the part on economic engagement) all points at the Hellenic strategy being one of total acceptance in most matters, with the adage "anything but recognition" (Armakolas, 2020) standing as a fair assessment of Athens' foreign policy. Neither of the two hard non-recognisers would be able to engage to such an extent, with the only thing coming remotely close to this being Spain's Sanchez possibly meeting with Kurti in Spain. This attitude opens up a fair debate as to why not simply recognise Kosovo's independence, but the relationship between Greece and Serbia as well as Greece's position as a regional power is unlikely (if not impossible) to imagine being positively affected by such a decision. The Greek leadership has put a lot of emphasis on their role being centred around the reducing of tensions and the development of the western Balkan, as often pointed out the Greek officials during meetings such as that of N. Kotzias and German FM H. Maas in 2018 (MFA of Greece, September 20th 2018). A possible fall-out with Serbia and other Balkan allies would not align with this, a risk for a country that's doing better but nonetheless recovering from the 2008 crisis.

ii. Economic engagement

Economic engagement is, as we noted whilst conceptualising engagement in our theoretical chapter, a popular form of engagement without recognition by confirmed states, with Taiwan being perhaps the clearest example of countries engaging with a *de facto* state for economic purposes due to its world-leading high-tech industry. Kosovo is no Taiwan: it is a continental, landlocked state, whose population and economy are recovering after decades of conflict following the breakup and subsequent fall of Yugoslavia. It however possesses some mineral deposits in its north, a young and increasingly educated population, support from the west, as well as from its sizeable diaspora in the form of remittances. The latter point is

verifiable in the Central Bank of Kosovo annual reports from the first one available to us for the year 2009 to the latest issued being 2022. Both of which mention remittances, amounting in 2009 to 505,6 million euros (Central Bank of Kosovo, 2010, 151) and in 2022 to 1.2 billion euros (ibid, 2023, 20). Said fourteen reports serve as valuable sources of data for us to measure how economically engaged with the RKS our non-recognisers are, going from the assumption that our hard non-recognisers will not have any or very little economic contact with Pristina, and that our soft non-recognisers may showcase some level of such, but always in a more significant amount than Cyprus or Spain. Despite starting to be issued two years following the independence of Kosovo in 2010 (covering 2009), these reports' formats only became cemented in 2014 with the 2013 report. Some issues during our analysis occurred: the 2010, 2011, and 2012 reports for example offered no data for us to use as it did not mention from with which countries Kosovo was importing and exporting from (ibid, 2011; 2012; 2013). Following the 2013 report, these documents contained as their figures 8.1 and 9.1, always towards the end of the document, relevant date for us: economic interaction between countries and the RKS (incoming and outgoing) as well as assets in Kosovo from foreign countries in the form of portfolio investments.

The use of these trade statistics to quantify engagement without recognition can leave some doubt as to their relevance, as the behaviour of certain businesses and individuals are not necessarily in accordance with a government's foreign policy. However, the presence of large, consistent figures, or the facilitation of trade by a non-recogniser with Kosovo is still deemed a way for us to demonstrate a level of economic engagement without recognition.

The way these tables work (post 2013) is by highlighting a set of countries (separating states in the EU, Europe, and rest of the world) which are understood to be the largest trading partners, and then adding the rest in a catch-all column (other countries) without displaying which states make up that line of data. This set of documents offered interesting and puzzling insights into the economic interactions between Kosovo and its non-recognisers: let's discuss this starting with Spain, followed by Greece and Cyprus -from most in line with expectations to most puzzling. The two Hellenic kin states will be analysed together as their two cases are valuable to put in perspective.

Spain: unsurprisingly economically disengaged.

Again, Spain is a good place to start; being geographically distant, not very export-focused, and very hostile to Kosovar unilateral secession, Madrid was assumed to have very little economic contact with Pristina. And whilst Spain was mentioned every year in the reports as one of the example countries used when looking at the economic performance of EU states (such as GDP growth), it actually had very little data available, showcasing very little to no economic contact with Kosovo. 2009 figures were higher than expected at 11.5 million euros¹¹

¹¹ All figures in millions of euros (M) from this point on.

worth of imports to Kosovo mostly composed of construction materials (ibid, 2010, 153). This figure was quite low but higher or comparable to that of some recognisers such as Sweden (9.2M), Czech Republic (16M), and very strong recogniser the UK (13.9M). Non-EU-members with similar import figures include Montenegro (13M) and Japan (14.7M), distant but heavily exporting economy, and a close ally of Kosovo's most fervent ally the USA (ibid). This was however nowhere near as high as Greece's 78.9M, which put Greece above most of Kosovo's EU and European partners (ibid). There is then no figures for Spain between 2010 and 2013 (ibid, 2011; 2012; 2013; 2014), where they are not explicitly mentioned and understood to thus be a non-partner or with negligible contact. This is also the case from 2015 until 2022, which all went without any explicit references to any Spanish economic engagement (ibid, 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019; 2021; 2022; 2023): 2014 was an outlier as it was mentioned that 0.1M were invested into the RKS from Spain in the form of portfolio investments (ibid, 2015, 140). This number however is negligible, and a clear stand-out, as it only happened once: even more so when compared to the engagement of countries such as Ireland and Luxemburg, two countries with economies depending a lot on venture capital and making up the near totality of assets in portfolio investments in the country (ibid). They remain some of the largest as of the last report accessed for the year 2022, with France and the USA joining that list and Spain still missing (ibid, 2023, 178). Furthermore, no proofs of economic engagement were to be found with Kosovo on other primary sources consulted in the context of our research.

The central bank also does not make note of any remittances from Spain over the course of our sampled timeline, from Spain nor any other non-recogniser in our study¹². Therefore, all seems to indicate that, as expected and in spite of notable trade presence in 2009, Madrid and Pristina did in fact have very little economic engagement with each other -in line with the Spanish government's foreign policy on Kosovo since 2008. Whilst it should, due to the non-recognition, in theory be zero engagement, the extended low to negligible engagement is enough for us to be able conclude so.

Greece and Cyprus: unexpected levels on engagements from the kin states.

The two Hellenic kins Greece and Cyprus are, on paper, supposed to be polar opposites in their Kosovo foreign policy; Greece stands out as Kosovo's most engaged non-recogniser and Cyprus and one of its most consistent opponents. Logically, we expect for this (as it did for Spain) to translate into a high level of economic engagement without recognition for Greece and a complete absence or very low level of this for the latter (similar to Spain). For both countries, initial data is in line with our research assumptions. Greece as previously mentioned starts in as a notable trading partner for Pristina, with imports worth 78.9M in 2009 (ibid, 2010, 153) and 4.7% of all total imports in 2010, equalling 85.786M and making Greece the second

¹² Reasoning for this could be, similarly to the figures analysed, either due to the absence of any contact (unlikely) or to the low amount/insignificant trade or remittances from X country and thus the data not being explicitly highlighted but rather put in a common "other" category.

largest EU trade partner behind Germany (ibid, 2011, 52). There is no data in 2011 and 2012 for Greece, and for Cyprus, there is a complete lack of figures from 2009 to 2012. This and the literature on Cypriot-Kosovar foreign de facto relations highlighting the little to no trade between both states (Kentas, 2011) appears to make sense. In 2013 this however changes drastically, as from this year every year both countries will appear and the most engaged of the two will end up being, against expectations, Nicosia. Comparing the figures, now divided by incoming and outgoing interaction between the RKS and other states, it goes as follows.

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Cyprus:	6.3M	6.7M	6.8M	7.2M	7.9M	9.2M	12.1M	12.9M	13.9M	15.6M
Greece:	9.7M	9.5M	9.3M	9.6M	9.0M	8.1M	7.9M	8.1M	7.9M	6.8M

Figure 3: Incoming trade between Kosovo and Cyprus and Greece (2013-2022)¹³

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Cyprus:	3.9M	3.7M	3.7M	19.6M	19.6M	19.6M	19.7M	19.7M	19.7M	19.7M
Greece:	1.4M	1.9M	2.0M	2.1M	2.1M	2.3M	2.3M	2.3M	2.7M	3.4M

Figure 4: Outgoing trade between Kosovo and Cyprus and Greece (2013-2022)¹⁴

The collected data is immediately surprising. Cyprus, one of Kosovo’s (if not the strongest) opponents in the EU is not only engaged economically with Pristina, but even receives more exports from Kosovo than neighbour and engaged non-recogniser Greece in 2013, growing exponentially to a questionably stable figure of 19.6 to 19.7M a year between 2016 and 2022. This is also paired to fast-growing incoming trade with Nicosia compared to Greek-Kosovar trade figures, which have gone down noticeably, losing nearly a third of their value (from 9.7M in 2013 to 6.8M in 2022). Exports from Kosovo to the Hellenic republic grew but remained humble compared to exports to Nicosia, peaking at 3.4M in 2022 following a 700 thousand euro increase over a year. Whilst these figures make both kin states quite engaged with Kosovo as far as trade between a confirmed state and an unrecognised counterpart go, Cyprus’ trade figures seem surprisingly out of place; especially as between 2009 and 2011, the two states were told to have undergone only extremely limited bilateral trade (Kentas, 2011). Greece has opened its own liaison office in Pristina, its capital city Athens saw the opening of the Office of Interest of Kosovo¹⁵, and the country has showcased a level of engagement with the de facto state’s business sector in the context of regional development, in line with their “anything but recognition” policy (Armakolas, 2020, 124; MFA of Greece, October 17th 2023). Before even this, in 2013, had even happened meetings between the Greek foreign minister (FM) and Kosovo’s premier and its own FM in the frame of “the entry into operations of the Kosovo Trade and Economic Affairs Office” (MFA of Greece, September 23rd 2013). A “forum and

¹³ Central Bank of Kosovo, 2014, 153; 2015, 140; 2016, 160; 2017, 158; 2018, 165; 2019, 161; 2020, 169; 2021, 175; 2022, 172; 2023, 177.

¹⁴ Ibid as figure 3.

¹⁵ Previously referred to as the Commercial Affairs Office in Athens) (MFA of Greece, April 11th 2018).

business mission” organised by Greece and attended by Greek officials also took place in Pristina in 2017, with the goal of fostering deeper business links between the Hellenic republic and Kosovo (MFA of Greece, March 7th 2017). The previously mentioned participation of Kosovar deputy FM Liza Gashi in the business focused Thessaloniki Summit in 2023 is another proof of economic engagement with the country and the region, even if non-state sponsored (Thessaloniki Summit, 2023a).

Taking in account knowledge from anterior literature, which as previously noted pointed the near complete lack of trade between Nicosia and Pristina (Kentas, 2011), such high economic interaction between the two countries (even more so when taking into account Greece’s trade with Kosovo being far lower and on a downward trend) goes completely against our expectations, and demonstrates that not only does Cyprus economically engages with Pristina, but that it has done so to a degree comparable to that of recognisers and our soft non-recogniser Greece. A good example for us to include is 2016, when Cyprus was the second largest outgoing trade destination for Kosovo behind only Germany, a large country with a sizeable diaspora as seen through the presence large remittances (Central Bank of Kosovo, 2017, 164; 165). 2018 is also worth pointing out as it is the year Cyprus overtook Greece as both a large importer and exporter to Kosovo as seen on figure 3 and 4. Nothing we could find, puzzlingly, explains what has led to this increase in economic contact between the two countries, what enabled it, or why export figures from Kosovo to Cyprus have remained so consistent. However, it appears to point at the existence of de facto economic engagement without recognition between not only a soft recogniser more inclined to do so, but between Pristina and a government profoundly averse to its independence since the 2008 UDI like it was the case with Spain.

iii. Engagement with the public sphere

Over the course of our research, engagement with the public sphere has been the most difficult form of engagement without recognition for us to access; this was caused mainly by a lack of clear documentation (in English or otherwise) about most of the information we sought to find. What we are looking for in this final analytical subpart is proof of engagement from non-recognising governments with the civil society of Kosovo, with Kosovar nationals. Following our theoretical framework, our first instinct was to look at how our non-recognisers act towards official documents or identification issued by the Kosovar state such as ID, passports, drivers licenses, vehicle license plates, or university diplomas issued by Kosovar universities. Such a selection seemed pertinent to the thesis as our non-recognisers are expected to have interacted with such documents when interacting with the Kosovar public sphere. We also attempted looking at car insurance, not issued by states but legally required to drive. As a result of our research, we were surprised to find very few certainties and instead being left with ‘educated guesses’ in lieu of proper answers; being able to speak Albanian or interviewing Kosovars about their experiences could have allowed us to have more certainties.

Starting with passports, which we have already previously mentioned. Ever since the visa liberalisation of Kosovo passport holders on January 1st, all EU states accept Pristina issued travel documents as valid: this allows people in possession of a Kosovar passport to stay in the EU for 90 days without needing a visa (Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, 2024). Whilst our three case studies did not change their stance on recognition following this, some have explicated their stance; Greece, in an January 2024 update to their MFA page on Kosovo we noticed between our first October 2023 visit (MFA of Greece, October 17th 2023) and our latest in May 2024, declared itself “a staunch supporter of the visa liberalization for holders of Kosovo passports to enter the Schengen area, which, following the approval of EU member states” (ibid, January 23rd 2024). We were not able to find any hostile statements from Cyprus stating their new EU compliant visa regime with Kosovo did not equate recognition, this can be interpreted as non-engagement though not officially acknowledging the change and quietly complying with it. This is not the case for Spain, which accepted to implement the directive in 2024 whilst noting that Madrid, though FM J.M. Albares, did “not recognise Kosovo, the sovereignty or independence of Kosovo” as they reject secession by UDIs (Dunai & Jopson, January 9th 2024). Their compliance went against a previous statement by the FM which noted that non-recognition of statehood “entails the non-recognition of Kosovo passports” (ibid). Factually, this new recognition of Kosovo passports as valid travel documents throughout the EU, in spite of statements denying likening this to engagement or recognition, is an undeniable form of engagement from our non-recognisers with the Kosovar public. This is especially notable in light of some of these states visa policies regarding Pristina before the liberalisation (for which state-specific information online proved very scarce and often through second-hand sources such as the press). Spain simply refused the entry to Kosovars unless they were able to present another document such as “a residence card or another document in another EU member state” (Brezar, 2022), Greece would accept them as a “subgroup of Serbian passports” given they had a visa (ibid), and Cyprus accepted - surprisingly, given its hard stance- Kosovar passports if they possessed a multi-entry Schengen visa (Fazliu, 2015). It can be argued that this decision being EU level does not entail any direct engagement between our case studies and Kosovo, similar to the instances where FM met in Brussels with Kosovar officials (as seen on Figure 1); this is true in the context of engagement between the governments of the non-recognisers’ and Pristina. But when looking at our three cases’ studies engagement with the Kosovar public, accepting a passport as valid despite not recognising the issuing state is undeniably a form of de facto engagement without recognition.

The recognition of university diplomas is, again, difficult to access. Our analysis only providing as an ‘answer’ a mere logical deduction. In line with the newborn state’s aims of a European future and its eventual bid for EU membership, Kosovar universities have sought membership in the EUA (either as full members or associate members, differentiated by their voting rights in the association) (EUA, 2024). The role of the EUA plays a role in representing the voice of its over 870-member public and private higher education institutions in forty-nine countries at the EU level, whilst also playing a coordination role in the application of the

Bologna Process. Joining the EUA is achieved through an application procedure, and the near totality of its membership hails from confirmed states, including our three case studies, but universities from Kosovo and the TRNC are nonetheless represented and categorised under the label “other” rather than Kosovo or TRNC (ibid). The Bologna Process, launched in 1998, established the framework for a reform of third-degree education for participating countries, with tools such as the three-cycle degree structure and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) (EUA, 2024b). This process was in line with the COE’s Lisbon Recognition convention of 1997 (drafted in co-operation with UNESCO), now ratified by all members of the COE (and eleven non-COE states) besides Greece (Council of Europe, 2024a). Its goal was to “promote fair recognition of academic qualifications” (ibid, 2024b), or simply put to ensure the mutual recognition of academic qualifications between parties of that convention. Efforts in attempting to unify the European education system led to the setting up of the European Education Area (EEA), an idea first endorsed by EU leaders in 2017 of which the first measure packages passed the European Parliament in 2018 (European Commission, 2024), with among its 2025 goals to ensure “automatic recognition of qualifications and study periods abroad” (EUR-Lex, 2020). One of the main initiative within the EEA and the one which the European public is most familiar with is Erasmus+, which predates any EEA scheme however (European Council, 2024). The EEA being an EU initiative means Kosovo is not involved as it is not part of the union; the reasoning behind mentioning this is to display the efforts since the turn of the millennium in regard to cross-border recognition of university degrees and the homogenisation, especially in regard to the ECTS system.

Kosovo, as expected from its universities’ membership of the EUA, has been following (without having been able to join officially) the guidelines of the Bologna reforms since 2001: higher education in the RKS is thus harmonised with the rest of EU institutions (Recognition of Academic Qualifications in the Western Balkans, 2024). This is reflected in the statute of the University of Pristina, the country’s premier public university, which declares that “academic units of the university shall be entitled to establish specific study programs within the Bologna framework” (University of Pristina, 2012, 28). Articles 91 to 93 of the statute clearly outline the use of the unified ECTS system and the division in three levels of higher education (bachelors, masters, and doctorate) (ibid).The application of the Bologna framework without being an official member can recall to Kosovo’s use of the Euro as its official tender in spite of not being officially part of the Eurozone and thus not stamping its own currency: a way for the country to both demonstrate and streamline its will for an european future. This is further demonstrated by the presence of Kosovo as one of the "third countries not associated to the [Erasmus+] Programme” (Erasmus+ Kosovo, 2024), enabling them to participate for specific events under certain conditions (ibid). From this information we understand that, as Kosovo follows the European unified framework and uses the European credit system, confirmed states following the same framework would by definition be able to recognise Kosovar diplomas as valid. Of course, non-recognisers may not accept such diplomas as valid as they are delivered by a university in a country they do not recognise, and mutual non-recognition

of diplomas has been an issues previously between Kosovo and Serbia until a 2015 mutual recognition of diplomas accord was reached (Kosovo PM Office, 2015). Nonetheless, the RKS still possess an online service, NARIC KOSOVA (the National Center for Recognition of Diplomas) used to obtain legal recognition of one's qualifications acquired outside of the country (NARIC KOSOVA, 2024).

We however did not find cases pointing as such rejections through our research. Out of our cases studies, we could expect Greece to have a rationale behind a hypothetical refusal to recognise Kosovar degrees as they did not sign nor ratify the 1997 Lisbon convention, but such prospect seems unlikely due to a reference in literature of groups of Kosovar students studying in Thessaloniki (Armakolas, 2020) and the lack of any official governmental sources from our non-recognisers which explicitly reject the validity of Kosovo degrees. This leads us to the following conclusion, being that looking at what we found Kosovar degrees should in theory be recognised by all states (including our case studies) which take part in the EEA or use the ECTS system, but that we cannot back this up with actual cases due to the lack of resources and documented cases of diploma rejection of which we were aware. Whilst this is scientifically quite weak, this opens the door to further research on if and how do our non-recognisers engage with Kosovar students.

This pattern repeats itself on the topic of car insurance, drivers' licenses, and vehicle identification plates. If there are indeed document proof of issues relating to car plates and identification between Kosovo and its host state Serbia, having even led to violence which calmed down at the start of the year 2024 (Eastern Western Balkans, 2022; Euronews, 2024), our research did not permit us to find enough data allowing us to conclude anything in a scientifically sound manner for relations between Pristina and our three case studies. One of the only sources of appropriate validity found regarding this interaction between EU non-recognisers and Kosovar vehicle ID and insurance were on the website of Slovakia's liaison office in Pristina¹⁶, which notes that in the event of car travel through the Schengen area (since visa liberalisation), the possession of "necessary car documentation (international driving license and green international car insurance card)" is required (Liaison Office of the Slovak Republic in Pristina, 2024). We then attempted to access if car insurance bought in Kosovo would be valid in our three non-recognisers: this, again, this was unsuccessful and led only to mere assumptions with no real scientific value. Vienna insurance group is one of the largest providers in the Balkans, with a branch in Kosovo operating under the name Sigma insurance group (Vienna Insurance Group, 2024). We found that company as the first result on our research engine (Google Chrome in this case) when imputing the words "insurance Kosovo" translated in Albanian. Upon research on the website, we did not manage to find anything referring to the international green card or the validity of the insurance in non-recognising countries; we did however find that since 2013, Sigma insurance group has been using European accident statements (Sigma Vienna Insurance Group, 2024), a de facto standardised

¹⁶ Slovakia, which we excluded as a prospective case study, is not treated here as such: the page is used for its value in regard to our three case studies and their relations with Kosovo.

format for accident reports developed by associations of insurers which is found throughout Europe and the EU (Your Europe, January 2nd 2023) and that now appears widely used and adopted. Similar to the abovementioned situation with university degrees, one could assume that a standardised document being used Europe-wide in Kosovo would lead to EU states and thus non-recognisers accepting the insurance. Even more so if purchased to a company in Kosovo representing the larger Austrian group Vienna Insurance, and as we found nothing from any Cypriot, Greek, or Spanish official sources rejecting the validity of car matriculation, licenses, or car plates from Kosovo. Nonetheless, this being all we found on the matter over the course of our research, no claim is hereby made: this is simply a supposition and further research would be necessary on this regard to conclude anything we would deem scientifically acceptable.

Conclusion – Findings, caveats, and further research

This research's starting point was the puzzling, illogical, yet factual existence of engagement without recognition between a confirmed and a de facto state. Previous scientific literature showed Kosovo, a partially recognised state with EU membership aspirations, as possessing a degree of engagement with EU member states which did not recognise its 2008 UDI: these states were Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain. We selected Cyprus, Greece, and Spain as case studies, which we divided in two groups (soft and hard non-recognisers, in the footsteps of Armakolas and Ker-Lindsay) based on their stance regarding Pristina's UDI. Our reason for not selecting two very usable cases was that Greece by itself allowed us to cover the main points which the Romanian and Slovak cases would demonstrate, whilst also being the most engaged and thus ideal to compare to Spain, Kosovo's main EU adversary). Cyprus remained as it was both similar to Spain regarding their stances on Kosovo, and was Greece's kin state in the same way Romania has Moldova.

Theoretically, engagement without recognition is not 'possible': recognition is a pre-requisite for a state to engage in diplomatic relations, and to engage with a de facto state (understood not to be impossible as they 'do not exist') is also illegal, equating to a foreign sovereign country interfering into a state's domestic. Still, engagement without recognition does exist in different engagement forms: political, economic, and with the public sphere. A large part of the reasoning behind states' decision to recognise others are the politics of recognition, which revolve around three core questions: when is there a state, is recognition required for statehood, and what affects a state's chosen stance on according or denying recognition. If statehood does not necessarily require recognition in order to factually exist on the ground, as is proven by the existence of de facto states such as Kosovo or Somaliland, recognition from confirmed states and membership to the UN acts as a de facto prerequisite for a new state's integration into the international community (allowing said state to enter into contact and join other international organisations). This thesis' theoretical backbone and its main assumption were that states which did not recognise Kosovo's UDI should then not have any type of contact with Pristina: we knew from literature that this was not the case, states choosing or not to recognise a state based solely on what benefits them. This led to this thesis' goal to assess how and to what extent exactly engagement without recognition took place between non-recognising EU member states and Kosovo.

We set to achieve this through the use of comparative analysis, most specifically multi-value QCA, as our small number of complex case studies and the nature of our research benefited from the method enabling case sensitive cross comparison. We set two research questions, of which the first was "why have non-recognising EU member states not recognised Kosovo?". Through official and unofficial statements as well as press, we attempted to document the post-2008 UDI official reasoning of our case studies justifying their stance on non-recognition: we found that our hard non-recognisers' had not changed their stance since 2008, which they had then justified by their respect for international law and their principles

as well as, for Cyprus, their relationship with Serbia. But most importantly for our hard non-recognisers, the underlying reason for their refusal to recognise Pristina's independence is the fear of contagion through precedent setting in regard to the two states' own cases of separatism (attempted or effective, with the Basque and Catalans in Spain and the TRNC in Cyprus). For our soft non-recogniser Greece, perhaps due to the very different domestic situation, the reasoning behind the absence of recognition was primarily due to foreign relations, with Serbia being very close historical allies and the divided Cyprus being the Hellenic state's ethnic kin state, both logically having a very hostile stance regarding Kosovo independence. To this could be added the popular support for Serbia, and the country's hostility towards Albania, Kosovo's own kin, but we do not find it a defining element, however puzzling. The need to keep the region stable, in line with Greek foreign policy objective as a major regional actor, are another reason to avoid recognition, which could impact their relations to other major Balkan players such as Serbia massively.

This first research question, if not bringing forth meaningful new knowledge, was needed in order to apprehend the second, being "how (to what extent) have EU non-recognisers engaged with Kosovo in spite of their non-recognition of the country's independence?". For this, we went back to our conceptualisation of engagement without recognition, and divided our research into three types of engagement: political, economic, and with the public sphere. Political engagement for hard-non recognisers was, unsurprisingly, null to limited; this was not the case with Greece, that had met and engaged bilaterally with Kosovo on multiple occasions, in a similar way to a relation between two confirmed states. It even allowed its officials visiting Pristina to be seen in front of the RKS's symbols (flag, emblem, official titles used by government officials). This is something hard non-recognisers never allowed, Spain even issuing notices to its diplomats to avoid Kosovo's in all contexts. Nonetheless, cracks appear such as visits to Spain by Kosovar leaders for events such as the Socialist International summit in Madrid, attended by PM Pedro Sanchez: it is hard to state however if such events exemplify a softening of Madrid position or are simply isolated cases without much meaning. Economic engagement led to much more puzzling findings, as Cyprus (arguably the most hostile state in the EU regarding Kosovo) was found to be Pristina's most important non-recognising trading partner, over commercially engaged Greece and (unsurprisingly) distant and unengaged Spain. This was especially surprising, as this contradicted literature on the topic: further research on the matter could thus prove valuable, as our findings here were truly puzzling and went against our research assumptions. Engagement with the public sphere was this thesis most inconclusive part, as we failed to demonstrate through research if and how our cases interacted with Kosovar citizens and their official documents (passports, car matriculation, insurance, university diplomas). Whilst we did find content regarding passports being accepted since the entry in force of Schengen visa-liberalisation in January 2024 followed by all our non-recognisers (but explicitly supported by Greece, non-addressed by Cyprus, whilst Spain only mentioned it to highlight that it did not equate to recognition), only assumptions could be made about the validity of university diplomas and of car related documentation. We thus did not

count this as proper scientific findings, and further research, focused on the non-recognisers' interaction with the Kosovar public sphere, would be required; it would however benefit from an ability to speak Albanian for easier access to resources we certainly missed due to this, as well as from conducting interviews with Kosovo citizens having experienced such situations previously.

Overall, the findings do provide answers to our research questions; first, EU non-recognisers do not recognise Kosovo for matters relating to internal politics or their regional foreign policy objectives, with hard recognisers justifying it through means such as international law compliance. Second, EU non-recognisers do engage with Kosovo to varying extent, going from very little with Spain to very much so with Greece. However, contrary to our expectation, engagement is never null as it theoretically should be, and even when it is expected to be high with cases such as Greece, the level of engagement experience is far greater than what could be expected between a confirmed state and a state it does not recognise. As stated above, more research needs to be done and there are flaws in this thesis, notably in the analytical part which could have had treated all available case studies, conducted interviews with Kosovars and attempted to do so with individuals knowledgeable in matters such as Kosovar document recognition in our case studies. We could also have analysed more data such as the entirety of our case studies' web presence with the goal of finding data indicating prospective engagement without recognition with Pristina. However, most of these caveats are related to the scale of our research being limited, due to being a master's thesis and one non-Albanian speaking student's work alone. Our findings nonetheless have implications: where engagement should be null, we find light forms of unofficial engagement such as the presence of Kurti on Spanish soil, in the presence of the Spanish PM, in an event using the former's official title as PM of Kosovo. We find Cyprus, hostile as can be to Kosovo's UDI, to be its most important non-recognising economic partner over Athens' which operates trade bureaux and de facto diplomatic representation in Pristina. And finally, we find Greek officials giving press conferences in the Kosovar capital, surrounded by RKS official symbols, something a non-recogniser should never be expected to do. The situation remains puzzling, engagement without recognition being indeed here used as a substitute for non-recognition. Further research on the topic could focus in other regions of the world such as east Africa with the Somali case study, where the relation between Ethiopia and Somaliland could warrant similar research to be done as the two states' attempts at deals could impact the region's geopolitics.

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