

# Dreaming the (im)possible: Western Balkans free from crisis mode and on a path towards collaborative integration



## KOSOVO Peace & Democracy Summit

2nd Edition of the **Kosovo Peace & Democracy Summit (KPDS)**  
**September 20–21, 2023** at Four Points by Sheraton, Prishtina



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**KCSS**  
Kosovar Centre for Security Studies

# **Regional conference: Dreaming the (im)possible: Western Balkans free from crisis mode and on a path towards collaborative integration**

## **Dialogue for a Peaceful and Democratic Western Balkans**

**September 20–21, 2023, Prishtina**

Dear friends and colleagues,

It is our pleasure to welcome you to the second edition of the Kosovo Peace and Democracy Summit (KPDS), an important regional platform for dialogue among civil society representatives, experts, policymakers, and other stakeholders dedicated to examining major challenges for a democratic and peaceful Western Balkans. We appreciate your presence at our conference, which underscores our shared commitment to fostering cooperation and promoting European integration in a difficult and complex context. Our gathering would have been impossible without the generous support from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund (RBF) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), who have consistently supported our efforts at promoting democracy and cooperation in the Western Balkans.

Today, as the Ukrainians are fighting for their freedom, and the liberal-democratic alliance is countering the malign influence of Russia and China in Europe and beyond, populism and ultra-nationalism are rising in the Western Balkans, creating cracks in the internal

and external consensus for a Euro–Atlantic future for our region. Growing authoritarian tendencies coupled with limited progress in resolving long-standing bilateral disputes, is making the Western Balkans region less predictable and more susceptible to instability, weakening the commitment towards the liberal-democratic normative framework.

Our first panel explores the protracted dispute between Kosovo and Serbia, examining the challenges it poses to European integration in the entire Western Balkans. Under the EU's leadership, the ongoing dialogue since 2011 has yet to yield substantial progress towards normalization. This session delves into the role of communities in countering political rhetoric and creating a conducive atmosphere for peaceful relations. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shifted the spotlight on European integration. In this panel, we will discuss the readiness of both the European Union and aspiring member states, to embrace the call from the European Council President Charles Michel for EU enlargement by 2030, which has injected renewed momentum into this process.

Dedicated to promoting regional cooperation and integration in the Western Balkans, the third panel explores the mechanisms that bring the region closer to the EU. We will discuss how greater collaboration can stimulate economic and political progress, particularly through initiatives such as the Common Regional Market (CRM). The rise of authoritarian leaders and the erosion of liberal freedoms in the Western Balkans have profound consequences for the region's future. Additionally, the absence of a clear path to European

Union integration has fueled anti-Western sentiments. Panel four is dedicated to addressing these challenges head-on. Panel five examines malign foreign influence in the Western Balkans, involving various aspects of information, security, diplomacy, and societal resilience.

Throughout KPDS, we encourage robust engagement and dialogue. The collective expertise in this room is invaluable for generating insights and innovative solutions to the complex issues facing Kosovo and the broader Western Balkans. We anticipate your active participation and the opportunity to deepen our understanding of the challenges and prospects in this region.

Thank you for joining us at the Kosovo Peace and Democracy Summit.



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**Jovana Radosavljevic**  
New Social Initiative  
(NSI)



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**Mentor Vrajolli**  
Kosovar Centre for  
Security Studies (KCSS)



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**Bardhi Bakija**  
Sbunker





# Wednesday

## 20.09

**08:30–09:00** Coffee and registration

**09:00–09:15** Welcome remarks by the organizers of the KPDS

**09:15–09:25** **Opening remarks by H.E. Jeffrey M. Hovenier**, US Ambassador to Kosovo

**09:30–11:30** **Panel I – Aiming for Accord: Perspectives on Achieving Comprehensive Normalization of Relations between Kosovo and Serbia**

**11:40–12:30** Conversation with **Cynthia Cook**, Deputy Political-Economic Chief, US Embassy in Kosovo and **Christian Ramet**, Representative of the EU Special Representative on Belgrade–Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues moderated by **Ramadan Ilazi**, KCSS

**12:30–13:30** Lunch break and Networking

**13:30–15:00** **Panel II – The Ukraine War and EU Enlargement: A Panel Discussion on Shaping the Future with Opening remarks by Damon Wilson**, President & CEO of NED

**15:00–15:30** Side event – “Speed-dating” discussions on dialogue-related topics with young researchers, supported by NED

**15:30–17:00** **Panel III – Collaborative Horizons: A Dialogue on the Western Balkans’ Regional Cooperation with Opening remarks by Stephen Heintz**, President & CEO of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund

**20:00–21:30** Night owl session on scenarios for Kosovo-Serbia relations 2027 (Chatham House)

# Thursday 21.09

**09:30–10:00** Coffee and registration

**10:00–11:30** *Panel IV – Safeguarding Democracy: Addressing Backsliding and Illiberal Practices in the Western Balkans with Opening remarks by* Deputy Head of Mission, German Embassy to Kosovo H.E. **Matthias Conrad**

**11:30–11:40** Brief break

**11:40–13:10** **Panel V – Truth vs. Disinformation: Combating Malign Foreign Influence in the Western Balkans**

**13:15–13:30** Concluding remarks

**13:30** Lunch

**Please connect with us at: @KPDSummit & please use #KPDS23 if you post in X (tweet)**

## Detailed Agenda

**Wednesday, September 20**

**08:30–09:00** Coffee and registration

**09:00–09:15** Welcome remarks by organizers of KPDS **Jovana Radosavljević**, Executive Director, New Social Initiative, **Mentor Vrajolli**, Executive Director, Kosovar Centre for Security Studies, **Bardhi Bakija**, Executive Director, Sbunker

**09:15–09:25** Opening remarks by **H.E. Jeffrey M. Hovenier**, United States Ambassador to Kosovo

### **09:30–11:30 Panel I – Aiming for Accord: Perspectives on Achieving Comprehensive Normalization of Relations between Kosovo and Serbia**

The unresolved bilateral dispute between Kosovo and Serbia poses a significant challenge to the European integration process in the entire Western Balkans. Despite over a decade of dialogue aimed at normalizing relations since its inception in 2011, neither party appears to be any closer to normalization than when the process began. The normalization process is still owned by Brussels and Washington and not by Belgrade and Pristina and certainly not by the populations. The failure to achieve normalization has been evident in heightened ethnic tensions, including recent instances of violence, and has contributed to the ethno-political radicalization of communities within the country. Recognizing the limitations of political approaches to achieving normalization, this panel is dedicated to exploring the potential of populations to counter the inflammatory rhetoric and actions of political leaders and create an enabling environment for peaceful relations and normalization. In essence, the panel will investigate

what can be done to help Serbs and Albanians counter nationalism while fostering support for reconciliation and cooperation. Additionally, the panel will examine how civil society can contribute to reconciliation efforts and address the impact of political discourse within communities.

### **Some of the questions that the panel will examine include:**

1. What are the key elements of political discourse that impact people, and how can these be addressed to create a more conducive environment for normalization?
2. How can communities play a more active role in countering inflammatory rhetoric and promoting peaceful relations between Kosovo and Serbia?
3. What strategies can be implemented to prevent radicalization within communities while simultaneously fostering support for reconciliation and cooperation?
4. How to help regular people see the other side as neighbors rather than foes?
5. In what ways can civil society organizations contribute to reconciliation efforts between Kosovo and Serbia, and how can they engage with regular people but also with politicians more effectively?
6. At the ballot box, politicians often benefit from radical rhetoric and nationalism. Is there a way to make conciliatory politics more profitable than nationalistic ones?

## Members of the Panel:

- **Dragiša Mijačić**, Executive Director, Institute for Territorial Economic Development
- **Engjellushe Morina**, Senior Policy Fellow, European Council on Foreign Relations
- **Ian Bancroft**, Project Manager and Author, Peaceful Change Initiative
- **Laura Kryeziu**, Executive Director, Leadership and Growth Council
- **Maja Piščević**, Nonresident Senior Fellow, Atlantic Council's Europe Center
- **Marta Onorato**, Resident Program Director – Kosovo, International Republican Institute
- Moderator: **Alex Roinishvili Grigorev**, President, Council for Inclusive Governance

**11:30 – 11:40** Brief break

**11:40–12:30** Conversation with **Cynthia Cook**, Deputy Political-Economic Chief, US Embassy in Kosovo, and **Christian Ramet**, Representative of the EU Special Representative on Belgrade–Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues moderated by **Ramadan Ilazi**, Head of Research, Kosovar Centre for Security Studies

**12:30–13:30** Lunch break and networking

**13:30–15:00 Panel II – The Ukraine War and EU Enlargement: A Panel Discussion on Shaping the Future with Opening remarks** via video by **Damon Wilson**, President & CEO of the National Endowment for Democracy

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has garnered renewed attention and support for the European integration process. Just four days after the invasion, Ukraine formally applied for membership in February 2022, followed by Moldova and Georgia in March. Kosovo submitted its application for EU membership in December 2022. At the Bled Strategic Forum last month (August 2023), European Council President Charles Michel expressed his desire for Europe to be prepared for enlargement by 2030, stating that "Enlargement is no longer a dream." President Michel, however, acknowledged that "there is still a lot of work to do. It will be difficult." In essence, EU membership will ultimately hinge on the progress made by the candidate countries in implementing necessary reforms.

Nevertheless, President Michel's statement has bolstered confidence and injected much-needed political momentum into the accession process. This panel aims to examine the readiness of the EU and its Member States, as well as the Western Balkans and Ukraine, to achieve membership in the Union. The discussion will examine the primary challenges facing the region, issues such as the rule of law, freedom of the media, economic competitiveness, and regional cooperation.

### **Some of the questions that the panel will seek to answer are:**

1. Considering President Charles Michel's statement that "Enlargement is no longer a dream," what concrete steps can the EU take to expedite the accession process for candidate countries? What are the potential benefits and risks associated with such a timeline?

2. President Michel acknowledged that there is still a lot of work to be done. What are the major obstacles and challenges that need to be overcome by both the candidate countries and the EU itself to ensure a smooth and successful enlargement process?

3. What role can civil society organizations play in advocating for and facilitating the accession process in the candidate countries? How can they help address some of the challenges, particularly in areas like the rule of law, media freedom, and regional cooperation?

4. How has Russia's invasion of Ukraine impacted the dynamics of EU enlargement?

## Members of the Panel:

- Ambassador **Tomáš Szunyog**, Head of Delegation, EU Office in Kosovo and EU Special Representative
- **Agon Maliqi**, Independent Policy and Research Consultant
- **Daria Meshcheriakova**, Journalist from Ukraine (Online)
- **Sonja Stojanović Gajić**, Policy Consultant and Researcher
- Moderator: **Ramadan Ilazi**, Head of Research, Kosovar Centre for Security Studies

**15:00–15:30** Side event – Coffee break and “Speed-dating” discussions on dialogue-related topics with young researchers supported by National Endowment for Democracy featuring: **Aleksandar Šljuka, Donjeta Rexhbogaj, Nikolina Klajić**, and **Mila Mihajlović**

**15:30–17:00 Panel III – Collaborative Horizons: A Dialogue on the Western Balkans’ Regional Cooperation** with Opening remarks via video link by **Stephen Heintz**, President & CEO of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund (Online)



This panel is dedicated to promoting regional cooperation and integration in the Western Balkans, as a means of bringing the region closer to the EU while addressing pressing challenges like organized corruption, illiberal practices, and weak rule of law. The panel will examine how greater cooperation can boost economic and political progress, including the implementation of the Common Regional Market (CRM), unanimously agreed upon by all six Western Balkan governments in 2020, promising substantial economic growth. By facilitating the movement of people and capital, regional integration enhances trade and cultural ties among Western Balkan societies. Moreover, it serves as a crucial catalyst for resolving longstanding bilateral disputes and advancing reconciliation in the region – an objective of utmost importance for the region. The panel will also examine the implications of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and how the Western Balkans can contribute to security and democratic resilience of the EU at large.

### **Some of the questions that the panel will examine include:**

1. How important is regional cooperation and integration for Western Balkans' EU accession process?
2. Considering the transnational nature of the emerging threats that the region faces, such as corrosive capital, malign foreign influence, cyberattacks, etc., why does regional cooperation remain a challenge?
3. What more can or should be done by civil society in enhancing regional cooperation?
4. How can regional cooperation effectively play a role in resolving historical bilateral disputes and fostering

reconciliation in the region?

5. What are the lessons learned for the Western Balkans following the brutal Russian invasion of Ukraine?

## Members of the Panel:

- **Adnan Ćerimagić**, Senior Analyst, European Stability Initiative
- **Andi Dobrush**, Director for Western Balkans, Open Society Foundations
- **Marigona Shabiu**, Executive Director, Youth Initiative for Human Rights – Kosovo
- **Sofija Todorović**, Program Director, Youth Initiative for Human Rights – Serbia
- **Stefan Ristovski**, Researcher, European Policy Institute
- Moderator: **Adelina Hasani**, Researcher, Kosovar Centre for Security Studies

## 20:00–21:30 Night owl session on scenarios for Kosovo–Serbia relations 2027 (Chatham House)\*

- **Agon Maliqi**, Co-founder of Sbunker and Policy and Research Consultant
- **Jovana Radosavljević**, Executive Director, New Social Initiative
- **Ramadan Ilazi**, Head of Research, Kosovar Centre for Security Studies
- **Sofija Todorović**, Program Director, Youth Initiative for Human Rights – Serbia
- Moderator: **Milica Andrić Rakić**, Project Manager, New Social Initiative

***\*Dinner included***

**Thursday, September 21**

**09:30–10:00** Coffee and registration

**10:00–11:30 Panel IV – Safeguarding Democracy: Addressing Backsliding and Illiberal Practices in the Western Balkans** With Opening remarks by Deputy Head of Mission, German Embassy to Kosovo **H.E. Matthias Conrad**

The rise of authoritarian leaders and the significant erosion of liberal freedoms and rights have produced detrimental consequences for the Western Balkan countries. Furthermore, the absence of a clear path toward European Union integration has fueled anti-Western sentiments among the region's citizens, further entrenching authoritarian governance. This poses a serious threat to the political and socio-economic progress achieved thus far. The Western Balkans remain a fragile region heavily reliant on Western support and democratic institutions. In this context, the preservation of democracy is of paramount importance. Considering these challenges, this panel discussion aims to delineate the most pressing issues regarding the state of democracy in the region and explore potential solutions to combat democratic backsliding and authoritarianism.

**Some of the questions that this panel will examine, include:**

1. What factors have contributed to the rise of authoritarian leaders and the erosion of liberal freedoms in the Western Balkans, and how have these developments impacted the region, including the European integration process?
2. How can the European Union and other international actors effectively engage with Western Balkan countries to

support their democratic development and integration into European institutions?

3. In what ways can local civil society organizations, grassroots movements, and citizens themselves contribute to safeguarding and strengthening democracy in the

Western Balkans?

## Members of the panel:

- **Eraldin Fazliu**, Journalist, Interaktiv at KTV
- **Miloš Pavković**, Researcher, European Policy Centre
- **Misha Popovikj**, Program Coordinator, Center of Good Governance at the Institute for Democracy 'Societas Civilis' Skopje
- **Nermina Kuloglija-Zolj**, Journalist, Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (Online)
- Moderator: **Visar Xhambazi**, Project Manager, Sbunker

## 11:40–13:10 Panel V – Truth vs. Disinformation: Combating Malign Foreign Influence in the Western Balkans

Combating malign foreign influence in the Western Balkans is a multifaceted challenge that involves various aspects of information, security, diplomacy, and societal resilience. Due to its geopolitical significance and historical complexities, the Balkan region has been a target for various forms of external interference, including disinformation campaigns, political manipulation, and efforts to undermine stability and democratic processes. The issues we will focus on during this discussion include key indicators of foreign malign influence in the Western Balkans; the role that fact-checking organizations and media literacy programs play in countering disinformation and propaganda campaigns originating from foreign

actors; and cybersecurity measures and strategies that the region should adopt to protect critical infrastructure and systems from foreign interference, including cyberattacks.

## **Some of the questions that this panel will examine include:**

1. How is foreign malign influence in the Western Balkans manifested in practice, and how we can effectively identify such practices?
2. How can fact-checking organizations and media education contribute to countering disinformation and propaganda campaigns?
3. With respect to cybersecurity, what specific measures should the Western Balkan governments prioritize to protect critical infrastructure and systems from foreign interference, including cyberattacks?
4. What cooperation initiatives can be or should be pursued to address and deter malign foreign influence in the Western Balkans, especially in relation to the EU?

## **Members of the panel:**

- **Ana Marija Ivković**, Editor-in-Chief, Alternativna
- **Bardhyl Jashari**, Executive Director, Metamorphosis Foundation
- **Darko Brkan**, President, Zašto Ne (Online)
- **Jeton Mehmeti**, Chairperson, Independent Media Commission
- Moderator: **Fitim Gashi**, Project Manager, Sbunker

**13:15–13:30** Concluding remarks

**Bardhi Bakija**, Executive Director, Sbunker

**Mentor Vrajolli**, Executive Director, Kosovar Centre for Security Studies

**Jovana Radosavljević**, Executive Director, New Social Initiative

This event is hosted by **Milica Andrić Rakić**, Project Manager at New Social Initiative.

**13:30** Lunch





# **MEET OUR SPEAKERS**







**Adnan Ćerimagić**  
European Stability  
Initiative (ESI)



**Agon Maliqi**  
Independent Policy  
and Research  
Consultant



**Andi Dobrush**  
Open Society  
Foundations (OSF)



**Dr. Adelina Hasani**  
Kosovar Centre for  
Security Studies  
(KCSS)



**Alex Roinishvili  
Grigorev**  
Council for Inclusive  
Governance (CIG)



**Ana Marija Ivković**  
Alternativa



**Bardhi Bakija**  
Sbunker



**Bardhyl Jashari**  
Metamorphosis  
Foundation



**Cynthia Cook**  
Deputy political chief  
at the Embassy of  
the United States of  
America to Kosovo



**Christian Ramet**  
Representative of the EU  
Special Representative on  
Belgrade–Pristina Dialogue  
and other Western Balkan  
regional issues



**Daria  
Meshcheriakova**  
Journalist from  
Ukraine



**Dragiša Mijačić**  
Institute for Territorial  
Economic Development  
(inTER)



**Darko Brkan**  
Zasto Ne?



**Damon Wilson**  
The National  
Endowment for  
Democracy (NED)



**Eraldin Fazliu**  
Interaktiv, KTV



**Engjellushe Morina**  
European Council on  
Foreign Relations



**Fitim Gashi**  
Sbunker



**Ian Bancroft**  
Peaceful Change  
Initiative



**Jeton Mehmeti**  
Independent Media  
Comission (IMC)



**H.E. Jeffrey M. Hovenier**  
United States  
Ambassador in Kosovo



**Jovana Radosavljević,**  
New Social Initiative  
(NSI)



**Laura Kryeziu,**  
Leadership and  
Growth Council (LGC)



**Marigona Shabiu**  
Youth Initiative for  
Human Rights, Kosovo  
(YIHR)



**Mentor Vrajolli**  
The Kosovar Centre for  
Security Studies (KCSS)





**Misha Popovik**  
Institute for Democracy  
Societas Civilis Skopje  
(IDSCS)



**Milica Andrić Rakić**  
New Social Initiative  
(NSI)



**Miloš Pavković**  
European Policy  
Centre (CEP)



**Marta Onotaro**  
International  
Republican Institute  
(IRI)



**H.E Matthias Conrad**  
Deputy Head of Mission  
German Embassy to  
Kosovo



**Nermina Kuloglija-Zolj**  
Balkan Investigative  
Reporting Network  
(BIRN)



**Ramadan Ilazi**  
Kosovar Centre for  
Security Studies  
(KCSS)



**Stefan Ristovski**  
European Policy  
Institute  
(EPI)



**Sonja Stojanović Gajić**  
Policy Consultant and  
Researcher



**Sofija Todorović**  
Youth Initiative for  
Human Rights, Serbia  
(YIHR)



**Stephen Heintz**  
The Rockefeller Brothers  
Fund (RBF)



**Ambassador Tomáš  
Szunyog**  
Head of EU Office in Kosovo  
and Special Representative



**Visar Xhambazi**  
Sbunker







# **ABOUT THE ORGANIZERS**

## About the organizers

**Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS)** is an independent policy research center founded in April 2008 and based in Pristina – Kosovo. KCSS is dedicated to security sector development and reform in Kosovo and Western Balkans. It proactively promotes principles of good governance, integrity, and resilience. KCSS's focus is democratization and performance of the security sector in Kosovo and Western Balkans based on good governance. In almost a decade, KCSS has been building and offering alternative expertise in security studies, by filling a void in a limited academic contribution in the field in Kosovo. The KCSS aims to enhance its effectiveness by supporting the SSR programs through its research, events, training, advocacy, and direct policy advice. Advancing new ideas and social science methods are also core values of the center. Each year, KCSS publishes numerous reports, policy analyses, and policy briefs. It also, runs more than 200 public events including conferences, roundtables, and debates, lectures – in Kosovo, also in collaboration with regional and international partners. A wide range of activities includes research, capacity-building, awareness, and advocacy.

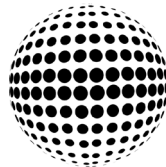
**New Social Initiative – NSI** is a civil society organization working in Kosovo, but also cooperating with the key stakeholders in the Western Balkan region, to ultimately impact inclusiveness, trust-building, democratization processes, and good governance in Kosovo. While doing so, NSI follows its vision of an inclusive society built on trust and appreciation among its communities, in which citizens from all ethnic groups actively participate in the society and its governance. NSI strives to create an impact and bring change by empowering our constituency, a non-majority community based throughout Kosovo, to participation in Kosovo's social and institutional life and by increasing

trust among communities. NSI believes that the change in the Kosovo Serb community's position and relation to the majority community is one of the key contributors to the inclusiveness and democratization of Kosovo society.

**Sbunker is a non-governmental** media organization based in Kosovo, dedicated to strengthening and promoting liberal democratic values in Kosovo and the Western Balkans. Sbunker's dedication is rooted in the creation of new media content and critical thinking initiatives targeting youth. Sbunker is committed to actively participating in the public discourse within Kosovo and the wider Western Balkan region, offering a critical perspective on significant political and socio-economic matters. Sbunker's primary media offerings include op-eds, thematic blogs, in-depth analyses, thought-provoking critiques, engaging podcasts, and informative videocasts.



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