



AUGUST 2024

How can religious institutions facilitate reconciliation efforts within Kosovo and normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia?

Author: Fatjona Musliu

Supervisor: Ramadan Ilazi



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This Policy Paper is published as part of the project “Strengthening Youth Civic Participation in Political Processes” implemented by New Social Initiative (NSI) funded by National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

Opinions expressed in this Policy Paper do not necessarily represent those of the New Social Initiative, or the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

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Introduction

Kosovo and Serbia have gone through different periods of conflict that have deeply affected the relations between the two peoples. Reconciliation and normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia continues to remain a complex and multidimensional challenge for many decades, which requires the intervention of various local and international actors. In this context, the role of religious institutions is often neglected, even though they can provide an important contribution to reconciliation processes and help in building bridges that lead to peace and normalization of relations. In a region such as the Balkans, where ethnic tensions and divisions still exist, religious institutions can play a key role in easing tensions and promoting dialogue, cooperation and mutual understanding between different groups. The research question addressed by this political document is: How can religious institutions facilitate reconciliation efforts within Kosovo and the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia?

This policy document deals with the role of religious institutions for reconciliation within Kosovo and the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia. Religious institutions in Kosovo and Serbia are deeply involved in the daily life and cultural identity of the two respective communities. As such, they have the opportunity, and, in some cases, the moral obligation to contribute to efforts to help repair deteriorating relationships. This role can be manifested in various ways such as providing spaces for interfaith dialogue, promoting messages of peace and tolerance, and engaging communities in activities that help build trust and cooperation.

Therefore, this policy document aims to provide you with a deeper understanding of the ways in which religious institutions can contribute to assisting important reconciliation processes and helping to normalize relations between Kosovo and Serbia, and to provide policy recommendations and practical steps that can increase the effectiveness of this potential contributor to peacebuilding.

The main method of data collection has been the review of existing literature, reports and documents.

Background

Kosovo is one of the most complex societies in the Balkans, due to its ethnic and religious diversity and mainly due to the historical and political events that have occurred in recent decades, since the breakup of Yugoslavia. Before the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans, the entire area including Kosovo was predominantly Christian.

From 1389 to 1912 Kosovo was officially governed by the Muslim Ottoman Empire and, as such, a high level of Islamization occurred. In 1912, Kosovo was occupied by the Kingdom of Serbia. After the Second World War, Kosovo was part of Yugoslavia and therefore is governed as a secular socialist country. Before the 1998-99 conflict, approximately 90% of the population of Kosovo were Muslim Albanians, the remaining 10% of the population were Orthodox Serbs, Roman Catholic Albanians, Roma and Turks.

The last conflict was not based on religious hatred, although such feelings also play a role in these battles. It was rather a conflict instigated to a large extent by Serbian politicians in Kosovo, but the Serbian Orthodox Church also has deep historical ties with Kosovo and with the Milosevic regime, where it also approved the policy of the same regime.

The Serbian and Albanian religious communities have been more willing to talk to each other than other sectors of Kosovar society. As early as March 1999, before the NATO bombings, representatives of the three religious communities in Kosovo (Muslims, Orthodox and Catholics) had a joint meeting in Pristina that was organized by the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) to facilitate dialogue. The representatives expressed opposition to the misuse of religion for political reasons by all sides and called on all parties not to use religious symbols to incite violence and intolerance. Kosovo Albanians never before and even now have not defined their national identity through religion but through language and have had a very relaxed approach to any form of religion. Three religions, Islam, Orthodoxy and Catholicism, have coexisted for a long time in Kosovo.

Islam is the most widespread religion in Kosovo and was introduced in the Middle Ages by the Ottomans, where a large majority of Kosovo Albanians consider themselves, at least nominally, as Muslims. Today, Kosovo has the second highest number of Muslims as a percentage of its population in

Europe after Turkey. The majority of the Muslim population of Kosovo are Albanians, Turks, Gorans and Bosniaks.

A minority, about 60,000, are Catholic. Most Kosovo Serbs, even those who are not active religious believers, consider Orthodoxy to be an important component of their national identity. However, despite this substantial division of religious activities along ethnic lines, it cannot be said that religion itself was a significant contributing factor in the conflict between Serbs and Albanians.

In the 2011 census, 95.6% of Kosovo's population was counted as Muslim and 3.7% as Christian, including 2.2% as Roman Catholic and 1.5% as Eastern Orthodox. The remaining 0.3% of the population reported no religion, or another religion, or did not give an adequate answer. Protestants, although recognized as a religious group in Kosovo by the government, were not represented in the census. The census was largely boycotted by Kosovo Serbs, who mostly identify as Serbian Orthodox Christians, especially in northern Kosovo, leaving the Serb population underrepresented. Followers of the Roman Catholic Church are mostly Albanians, while ethnic Serbs follow the Eastern Orthodox Church. Relations between the Muslim Albanian and Catholic communities in Kosovo are good, however, both communities have little or no relations with the Serbian Orthodox community. In general, Albanians define their ethnicity by language and not by religion, while religion reflects a distinctive feature of identity among other ethnic groups in Kosovo and elsewhere.

What are the main cultural heritage issues in Kosovo?

In terms of secularity, Kosovar society is ranked first in Southern Europe and ninth in the world as free and equal for tolerance of religion and atheism. Kosovo is a secular state where the freedom of belief, conscience and religion is expressly guaranteed in the Constitution of Kosovo, more precisely in its article 8, while in its article 9 it is determined that the state of Kosovo ensures the preservation and protection of its cultural heritage and religious as a necessary pillar for sustainable development. As such, the freedom to exercise and practice religion in principle belongs to everyone, but it can also be limited for reasons established by law that are necessary in a democratic society, including: the interest of public safety, the

protection of public order, health and morality and the protection of the freedoms and rights of others.

In its efforts to protect and promote its rich and diverse cultural heritage, Kosovo has also adopted the Law on Cultural Heritage, according to which cultural heritage includes architectural, archaeological, movable and spiritual heritage.

To summarize it as a whole we can say that it is a group of resources inherited from the past, which people identify, regardless of ownership, as a reflection and expression of values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions in constant evolution. So, cultural heritage embodies in itself a number of different values that are often complemented, therefore their direct impact on the evaluation of cultural landscapes and not only monuments has turned into a global discourse of theoretical and empirical research, which brings to light cultural diversity as added value and as an expression of the wealth and identities of a country. The cultural heritage of a country or people is undoubtedly considered a cultural, political, economic source, a source of wealth in its entirety.

On the doctrinal level, monuments and localities of cultural heritage together with cultural landscapes are evaluated for their historical, architectural, archaeological, artistic, religious, economic value. These values, combined in many ways, constitute the material heritage and the immaterial or spiritual heritage, which is often translated into meanings and feelings or spiritual connections that individuals and communities attribute to certain objects or monuments and localities, among which the most evident are places of worship or customs and traditions.

Heritage values are intrinsically and mutually linked to the past as a starting point. Therefore heritage is synonymous with the past. In other words, any value of any nature is derived from the past for the purposes of the present and stored for a projected future.

This close connection between heritage and the past makes heritage, like history, a powerful tool for shaping and refining a nation's identity.

The multi-ethnic and multi-religious structure of modern Serbia and Kosovo are predetermined by the difficult history of the two countries.

For Albanians over the years important aspects of cultural heritage have

been: forts, towers, museums, mosques, tombs and others. On the other hand, Serbs who often consider Kosovo as the cradle of their civilization, for them monasteries and churches are of special cultural and religious importance.

What was the issue with the Dečani Monastery?

One of the treasures of the Serbs, as they call it, the Monastery of Dečan has been continuously guarded by the NATO-led KFOR peacekeeping troops since June 1999.

The board of Europa Nostra, based on the opinion expressed by the Advisory Panel of the 7 Most Endangered Program, stated: "This is the only monument in Europe under such strong international military protection for a continuous period of 20 years. However, it constitutes a monument of exceptional historical and cultural importance for Europe and the world, as confirmed by its World Heritage status. As part of the EU's enlargement strategy for the Western Balkans, it is urgent and necessary to ensure a comprehensive protection by all stakeholders of this endangered World Heritage site, through full respect for the rule of law and the values of other key European Adequate protection and accurate interpretation, communication and education about Kosovo's multicultural and multi-religious heritage are prerequisites for reconciliation and dialogue leading to sustainable peace and prosperity in the wider region."

A particularly sensitive issue is the dispute between the Monastery of Dečan with the Municipality of Dečan and the Kosovo Privatization Agency due to the land located near the monastery. After many years of dispute, the Constitutional Court of Kosovo confirmed the decision of the Supreme Court that the land belongs to the monastery. However, the municipality refuses to respect the decision of the Constitutional Court and prevents the monastery from using its land, where as a result certain groups threaten to escalate the situation due to their grievances.

The obstacle to the implementation of the court's decision caused the reaction of the EU representatives in Kosovo, who publicly called on the Kosovo authorities to respect the rule of law, stating that "the full implementation of the decision must be carried out without delay. Of particular concern is the plan for an international road connecting the municipalities of Dečani in Kosovo and Plava in Montenegro that would

cross the special protected area and pass by the gates of the monastery. In the summer of 2020, road works have been suspended and an agreement has been reached, under the auspices of the international community, to build a bypass for this road. The overall situation requires close monitoring to ensure full respect for the rule of law and especially the 2008 law on special protected areas, which does not allow such a path. In this context, it is also important that the 2016 decision of the Constitutional Court of Kosovo confirming that the property of 24 hectares of surrounding land belongs to the Monastery of Deçan is properly implemented by the responsible authorities and this without any further delay.

It is important to note here that Deçani Monastery is already a specially demarcated cultural heritage site. It benefits from extensive internationalized protection, including Annex V of the comprehensive Ahtisaari proposal, which was adopted by Kosovo after its declaration of independence and translated into its constitution.

There is another key aspect of the monastery that has not been addressed so far, the monastery is not easily accessible to the Kosovo Albanian community, especially local heritage professionals, historians, archaeologists and other students and academics.

This arrangement is maintained even when the monastery is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, despite the fact that its 2001 Declaration on Cultural Diversity defines the right of access, participation and enjoyment of culture. This includes the right of individuals and communities to recognize, visit, use, maintain, exchange and develop cultural heritage.

Considering what was said above, it is fair to say that the Monastery, the monastic community and its surroundings already benefit from an unprecedented level of local and international protection.

In Kosovo, among other things, heritage has served as an instrument that has guaranteed inter-ethnic dialogue, so we can freely say that the dialogue of normalization between Kosovo and Serbia, among other issues,

has also included issues of cultural heritage.

Has the normalization dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia included cultural heritage issues?

There have been negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina with the mediation of the European Union initiated in 2011 with the aim of normalizing mutual relations. Cultural heritage has been part of these discussions, especially in the context of guaranteeing the protection and preservation of important places. The dialogue process has included agreements on the protection of cultural and religious sites as part of broader political and administrative agreements.

The "First Agreement on the Normalization of Relations" was signed in 2013 between the two prime ministers. The European Union has acted as a mediator in the negotiations following the previous agreement that topics of common importance would be brought to the negotiating table. The aim of the EU was to demonstrate the ability to solve problems in its "back yard", and the aims of Belgrade and Pristina were to accelerate the process of European integration by finding solutions to "concrete problems", despite the fact that in front of the local public, both sides presented each agreement (regional representation, mutual recognition of university degrees, customs stamps, registries, cadastral registers, etc.) as a political triumph over the other side. In no agreement between Belgrade and Pristina has so far been mentioned the status and mechanisms for the protection of cultural heritage. At the beginning of the negotiation process, it did not appear to be a contentious topic for either side. Belgrade was satisfied with the status of Orthodox countries protected by UNESCO, the cultural heritage of Serbia in the province of Kosovo. The political dispute over cultural heritage only arose when Kosovo applied for full membership in UNESCO in 2015.

The Brussels Agreement (2013), which was one of the first major agreements in the dialogue, did not explicitly address cultural heritage, but laid the groundwork for future negotiations. It mainly focused on issues such as normalization of relations, including police and judicial matters.

Subsequent agreements have subsequently addressed the protection of cultural heritage more directly. For example, the agreement on the

protection of the properties of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo has been an important topic. This agreement is intended to ensure that Serbian cultural and religious objects in Kosovo are preserved and protected.

Despite the agreements, the implementation of protective measures for cultural heritage sites has faced challenges. Issues such as bureaucratic delays, lack of cooperation and ongoing tensions between communities have affected the effectiveness of these agreements.

The dialogue process continues to address cultural heritage issues as part of broader normalization efforts. Both sides have expressed varying levels of commitment to the protection of cultural sites, but practical challenges remain, as cultural heritage issues are highly sensitive and often reflect broader political and ethnic tensions. This is because both communities see their cultural and religious sites as symbols of identity and sovereignty, making negotiations on these issues particularly challenging.

Then with the end of the 1999 Kosovo war as the last in the wave of disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, the involvement of the international community and the focus on reconstruction and ethnic reconciliation has created a new context in which cultural heritage has moved from the field of aggressive nationalism in the domain of tolerance and regional cooperation. The lack of inter-ethnic trust and examples of endangerment of cultural heritage made representatives of international organizations an indispensable factor in this field. The UNMIK and EULEX international missions, together with various international organizations, have contributed significantly to the construction of a post-conflict, where a path of dependence was created in which both the Albanian and Serbian sides, with the help of international representatives, reinforced their walls of disbelief.

How has UNESCO been involved in Kosovo's cultural heritage matters?

Since the beginning of 2000, UNESCO has been actively involved in the protection of cultural heritage and diversity in Kosovo, as an important testimony of the centuries-old dialogue and coexistence of different cultures and communities in the region, acting within the framework of the Council Resolution of United Nations Security.

UNESCO has led the physical reconstruction and restoration of cultural heritage monuments, in particular, in the world heritage property "Medieval Monuments in Kosovo", the Monastery of Deçan, the Patriarchate of Peja, the Monastery of Graçanica and the Bogorodica Ljeviska Church of Prizren.

During the last decade, UNESCO, together with UNMIK, have jointly undertaken dozens of missions in Kosovo, to monitor the implementation of these activities and to monitor the state of World Heritage properties in Kosovo in terms of conservation and security.

Unfortunately, what created this dependence on the international community had to do with the lack of desire to communicate directly and find a compromise, as international representatives were always there to mediate and often initiate talks.

Although the international presence has a limited scope, it is necessary until the issue of cultural heritage emerges from the political framework of inter-ethnic misunderstanding.

During the monitoring process, the OSCE Mission highlighted several challenges for the preservation of cultural heritage, mainly reflected in the legal framework which had not made a clear division of responsibilities between different institutions whose task was the protection of cultural monuments.

A visit by senior Kosovo officials to Serbian cultural monuments during Orthodox holidays sent a message of reconciliation and the possibility of cooperation between different communities. A positive step forward is the creation of a special police unit trained to provide security for the most vulnerable cultural heritage sites.

However, Kosovo's application for membership in UNESCO was not welcomed by Serbia, this caused fear in them that the monasteries of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the general cultural heritage that constitutes a part of Serbia and the ethnic and religious identity will be appropriated by the Albanians of Kosovo and it will be portrayed as the cultural heritage of the "Illyrian tradition", that is, of the "Albanian" Kosovo, and not as that which belongs to Serbia and Kosovo as a holy Serbian land.

Institutes from Belgrade in charge of issues of culture, heritage and

maintenance of cultural monuments have until now had the right to consult and give consent to the Serbian Orthodox Church for restoration or other changes to churches and monasteries in Kosovo. With the membership in UNESCO, the institutions of Kosovo would receive the full guarantee that they would take care of the protection and restoration of the cultural heritage. Kosovo is still on the UNESCO List of World Heritage in Danger.

A year after a UNESCO mission visited Kosovo in March 2003, a decision was made to declare the Monastery of Deçan as a world heritage site. As early as 2006, the list included the Patriarchate of the Monastery of Peja, the Monastery of Graçanica and the Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljevis as a group of historical buildings called "Medieval Monuments in Kosovo". All four monasteries are on the UNESCO List of World Heritage in Danger, due to the difficulties in their management and conservation stemming from the political instability of the region from 2006 to the present.

On the other hand, there is still a big discrepancy between the legal, institutional framework for cultural heritage and what is implemented, which is why Orthodox monasteries still remain on the list of endangered UNESCO sites. Moreover, if Serbia's position is ignored, Kosovo should not compensate for its lack of international legitimacy by increasing mistrust in the Serbian community in Kosovo and in representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The status of Orthodox countries is directly related to the issue of identity, a unilateral decision can result in a society divided forever.

Just as the issue of cultural heritage is an issue of identity for Serbs, Albanians also have a strong basis of identity when it comes to the process of state building and sovereignty throughout the territory of Kosovo.

There are also additional international legal standards, such as those emanating from UNESCO, with which Kosovo seeks to comply, especially considering its efforts to join UNESCO and other international organizations. In addition, there are very broad provisions on human rights in Kosovo, including religious freedoms, and more specialized provisions on minority rights, generally greater than those applied in the rest of Europe.

In fact, what is missing is the cooperation of the Serbian Orthodox Church with the Kosovo authorities for the full implementation of these provisions.

What adds to the complexity of this issue is the fact that UNESCO interacts

with Kosovo under UN Resolution 1244. Therefore, UNESCO still refers to Kosovo as part of Serbia-Former Republic of Yugoslavia.

As a member country of UNESCO, Serbia can have diplomatic and political influence in the relevant organizations, but it lacks any effective authority on the territory of Kosovo. Therefore, Serbia is unable to fulfill the state obligations required by UNESCO to guarantee the fulfillment of conservation, protection and access to these cultural heritage sites.

What is currently needed is the engagement of all parties with the Kosovo authorities on these issues to achieve further practical benefits in advancing the preservation and protection of cultural heritage in Kosovo.

Why is the involvement of religious institutions crucial for reconciliation in Kosovo and Serbia?

Religion has never directly promoted the conflict in Kosovo, but neither has it acted as a source of peace. Unfortunately, Serbian and Albanian religious voices promoting peace and reconciliation are rare. Despite these shortcomings, religious institutions can play an important role in promoting ethnic reconciliation between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, a process that would simultaneously complement local and international secular efforts to bring permanent peace between Kosovo and Serbia.

Leaders could bring these values from religion into the social and political arena. A social dialogue based on these values could help modify public opinions and attitudes and eventually contribute to breaking the cycle of ethnic hatred in which Albanian and Serbian societies have been trapped for decades. The approach of leaders may not be to redefine the past or reach common interpretations, but, rather, to understand how to learn to live together with these differences and, ultimately, to move away from blind alleys of ethnic politics, something that secular efforts have failed to achieve.

Of course, the main interest of the international community in the religious life of Kosovo includes the potential for effective work towards the reconciliation of the Albanian and Serbian communities. Efforts in this direction have been made for some time. The bitter division between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs involves political and social aspects, but religion as such is not, as is often thought, a contributing factor. Indeed, in

the postwar era, it may have limited opportunities to bridge that divide. Since the end of 1998, representatives of Kosovo's three main religious communities have shown greater willingness to enter into dialogue than other parts of the divided society. Despite the difficulties and uncertainties they currently face, religious leaders continue to meet occasionally on an informal basis. They believe that they can play a decisive role in the urgent task of reconciliation between Serbs and Albanians. The international community should assist these efforts in any way possible, including regular meetings with all major religious leaders in Kosovo and routinely including Albanian religious leaders, as well as Serbs, in leading consultative meetings. In some cases, legal obstacles have prevented religious communities from making their full contribution to this process. Citizens of the Serbian community in Kosovo, participants in focus groups and also interviewed, are the only ones who are close to this option, although they believe that it is unlikely - "no one from the international community will allow the interference of KOS in the politics of Kosovo, after events in Montenegro".

Just the warning about the possibility of opening the status of the Serbian Orthodox Church in negotiations "would cause a wave of negative reactions, as powerful as the reactions to the Association of Serbian Municipalities. According to interlocutors from the Serbian community in Kosovo, but also experts from Belgrade, Belgrade would not be satisfied with the direct involvement of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the negotiations.

While the support of the church is of key importance to the Serbian government, they "nevertheless would not want someone who thinks for himself and on whom I cannot impose positions" to interfere in the long-term process. "Not even the church would agree to that, because that would mean taking responsibility for the whole deal, including the part that might look like recognition." Although, according to some opinions, this is not realistic, this option would allow the church to appease public opinion in the event of a controversial solution, and only if the church manages to maximize the benefits of the dialogue in its favor.

What lessons can be learned from the role of religious institutions in reconciliation in other EU contexts, like Ireland?

Examples of countries like Ireland, where inter-religious and inter-community dialogue has played an important role in reconciliation processes, offer valuable lessons for Kosovo and Serbia in particular, but also for other countries that are in the same situation in general. In Ireland, the conflict known as the Troubles (The Troubles) was a long period of violence and tension between the Catholic community, the majority in Northern Ireland, and the Protestant community, the majority in the northern part of Northern Ireland. This conflict had deep roots in religious and political differences.

Until 1998, a peace agreement known as the Dayton Agreement (Good Friday Agreement) was reached. This process involved significant involvement of religious leaders from both communities. The Catholic and Protestant churches, through various organizations and forums, played an important role in creating a more favorable climate for negotiations and reconciliation. So, the involvement of the Catholic Church and the Protestant Church in the peace dialogue helped reduce tensions and helped create a more peaceful and integrated environment. The participation of religious institutions in dialogue and reconciliation processes can provide a model for Kosovo and Serbia in how they can contribute to helping build better relations.

The Rev. Dr. Gary Mason is a Methodist minister who founded and directs the Belfast-based conflict transformation nonprofit Rethinking Conflict. He is the person who had the most important role in the reconciliation process in Ireland. He mentioned the lessons that other countries can learn from the conflict in Ireland.

Political leadership is essential to achieving peace. Leaders on all sides of the conflict must sincerely believe that change is preferable to the status quo and then be willing to take the risks to achieve peace.

A desire to break the cycle of violence, to save future generations from the horrors of conflict, is essential. This desire is what encourages leaders, as

in Northern Ireland, to take the risks, and face down accusations of betrayal from within their own communities, to achieve peace.

A lack of trust between opposing sides is an inevitable feature of building peace and cannot be used as a justification for not beginning the process. Trust does not come at the start of any process, and it most certainly was not there at the beginning of ours.

Attempts to resolve the conflict through military force are ultimately futile. In Northern Ireland they did not result in sustainable security for either community. Security was achieved only when dialogue was prioritized and the root causes of the conflict were addressed.

Civil society has a particularly important role in helping the overall society find a way past historic animosities to build a more positive, shared future. Religious actors are very much part of civil society and they have a key role.

“Actually, Northern Ireland’s struggle to implement peace these 25 years provides a dramatic illustration of civil society’s power - and the roles of faith-based people and organizations within civil society, as the social glue that has held our peace process together even when its formal workings have faltered. The Good Friday Agreement established a legislature, the New Northern Ireland Assembly, as the foundation of a new power-sharing government. Yet the many extraordinary difficulties of implementing the peace accord have repeatedly led to the assembly being suspended. Indeed during 40 percent of these past 25 years, our assembly has been unable to meet. People often ask, how has Northern Ireland not collapsed back into violence when disagreements have been so grievous as that? My answer is that our peace has been sustained by the strength of its civil society underpinnings. That’s why I believe strongly that in any peace process, more work and energy needs to be given to civil society’s role, and particularly that of the religious.”

In general, we see that religious institutions have a strong influence on the formation of the mindset and behavior of individuals. In this way, they can help reduce tensions and promote a better coexistence environment. Their participation in reconciliation efforts can contribute to building a common base of values that help overcome past divisions. Encouraging the organization of joint activities such as festivals, joint services and

interfaith symposia can help build stronger ties and create opportunities for communication and exchange of ideas. Religious institutions can help create platforms and forums where different members of communities can discuss sensitive issues and help solve problems in an atmosphere of respect and understanding.

Conclusion

From all that was discussed above, we can conclude that the role of religious institutions in the process of reconciliation and normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia is essential and multidimensional. The analysis of the topic shows that religious institutions have the potential to contribute to helping build trust and ease the tensions that exist between different communities in Kosovo. This process requires a coordinated and powerful commitment that goes beyond political and economic aspects, including elements of cultural and religious heritage.

Cultural heritage is a key component in this process, as it is closely related to the identity and feelings of both parties. Heritage issues, such as Deçan Monastery, represent a source of tension and conflict, and helping religious institutions manage these issues can help build better mutual understanding. UNESCO's involvement in these issues shows the importance of international protection, but it is clear that lasting solutions must come from local efforts and mutual cooperation.

Religious institutions provide an important platform for dialogue and reconciliation, using shared teachings and practices to help build a culture of reconciliation. International experience, such as that of Ireland, shows that religious leaders and religious communities have played a key role in peace and reconciliation processes. These institutions have the potential to provide safe spaces for dialogue, help share experiences and promote mutual respect.

In Kosovo and Serbia, religious institutions can contribute to helping reconciliation between Albanians and Serbs by organizing intercultural and interreligious activities that encourage dialogue and understanding. These activities can help break down stereotypes and divisions and create opportunities for cooperation and mutual interaction. Moreover, governments and public institutions should support these efforts by providing resources and assistance for organizing activities and projects that promote reconciliation.

The European Union can also provide important support to this process. EU assistance can include financial and political support for reconciliation initiatives, as well as facilitating dialogue between the parties. The role of the EU is important to provide an external perspective and support that

helps maintain a stable situation for the normalization of relations.

In conclusion, efforts for reconciliation in Kosovo and the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia require a multiple and deep commitment, where religious institutions play a key role. These institutions, with support from governments and international organizations, can help build a future of peace and sustainable coexistence for both communities.

Other information is clearly understandable, which was possible to understand after reading the preceding lines.

Recommendations

In accordance with all that was said above, in the following we will give some specific recommendations for religious leaders, the government, the EU and civil society, for the inclusion of cultural and religious heritage in the process of civil reconciliation with what will be able to contribute to the creation of a more sustainable and stable climate for reconciliation and building strong and stable relations in the region.

1 For religious leaders :

To promote interfaith and intercultural dialogue: To organize and support events and discussions involving representatives of different religions and cultures to help build trust and mutual respect. To promote more than currently common values and to promote tolerance and understanding among different believers.

To undertake initiatives for the preservation and promotion of the cultural and religious heritage of both peoples: To carry out projects for the restoration and preservation of important cultural and religious monuments and objects that represent the different identities. Create educational programs to raise awareness of the importance of cultural and religious heritage for reconciliation and harmony.

2 Governments :

Integrate cultural and religious heritage into reconciliation policies and dialogue: Develop strategies and policies that include the preservation and promotion of cultural and religious heritage as part of the reconciliation process. Ensure that development programs are sensitive to cultural and religious heritage and help build relationships between different groups.

Deal with the strengthening of laws and policies for the protection of cultural and religious heritage in a reciprocal manner: Create and implement laws that protect cultural and religious heritage and that help preserve cultural diversity and identity. To encourage cooperation between public institutions and other organizations for the preservation and promotion of heritage.

To support various religious and cultural cooperation projects: To provide funding and support for projects that promote reconciliation and help resolve conflicts through cultural and educational activities.

3 The EU :

Provide support for international reconciliation initiatives:

Undertake more initiatives that help create mechanisms and platforms for international dialogue and cooperation in the field of cultural and religious heritage.

To encourage the integration of heritage in development processes: Provide development projects and policies that include aspects of cultural and religious heritage and help promote a sustainable and respectful climate for cultural diversity.

Enable education and raising awareness regarding cultural and religious heritage: Create educational programs and awareness campaigns to inform public opinion on the importance of cultural and religious heritage in reconciliation processes.

4 Civil Society :

To organize various cultural and religious activities and events: To organize cultural activities and events that help build relationships and promote mutual understanding between different groups. Civil society can organize interreligious events and meetings where different religious representatives can discuss important topics for reconciliation and normalization of relations. These events can include debates, workshops, and conferences that encourage constructive dialogue and help build trust.

Facilitate dialogue and provide assistance in building capacities: Facilitate the flow of international dialogue and help build capacities

to manage and resolve conflicts efficiently. To provide expertise and advice for the resolution of sensitive issues and for the implementation of reforms necessary for the normalization of relations.

To monitor and report on progress: To monitor and report on the progress of efforts to normalize relations and to implement the agreements and policies undertaken. To provide recommendations and suggestions for improving processes and to address challenges and obstacles that may arise during implementation.

To provide support for educational and cultural projects: To develop and support educational projects that focus on cultural and religious heritage and that help build a common sense of identity and respect.

To engage in activities for the protection of the heritage of both countries: To engage in the protection and promotion of cultural and religious heritage through projects and campaigns that raise awareness and support the preservation of important objects and traditions.

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