RESILIO ACCESS
Country Report
Kosovo

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1. Introduction

Kosovo is unique in that its rule-of-law architecture has not been domestically owned for most of its existence. From 1999 to 2008, the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), established under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244, exercised extensive legislative, executive and judicial authority. Post-war institutions were developed under heavy international administration; local institutions were gradually established only within a framework in which international actors retained authority.

The declaration of independence in February 2008 opened a new phase in which international and domestic institutions operated alongside one another. The European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) was deployed that same year as the EU's largest civilian mission. It assumed executive functions alongside its monitoring, mentoring and advising role. This executive mandate was transferred to Kosovo's own judiciary only in 2018.[1]

Even that transfer did not end the internationalisation of Kosovo's most sensitive cases. The Assembly of Kosovo established the Kosovo Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecutor's Office in 2015 to investigate and prosecute alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes committed between 1 January 1998 and 31 December 2000 – this followed the 2011 Council of Europe report and subsequent international investigations. The Chambers were established under Kosovo law but sit in The Hague and are staffed by international judges and prosecutors.[2]

Kosovo did not inherit a domestic rule-of-law system to later reform under the EU integration framework – it began as an almost entirely internationalised system. Kosovo's resilience resources have been substantially shaped by international actors who helped build formal institutions while also entrenching a lasting tension between external support and domestic ownership.

A complex institutional framework mixes local and international actors with overlapping executive and consultative roles, requiring constant coordination to prevent gaps in security and rule-of-law

[1] Council of the European Union, "EULEX: Council Renews the Mandate of the EU Civilian Mission in Kosovo", press release, June 17, 2025. Accessed July 29, 2026, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/06/17/eulex-council-renews-the-mandate-of-the-eu-civilian-mission-in-kosovostar/.

[2] Kosovo Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecutor's Office, accessed July 10, 2026, https://scp-ks.org/en

functions.[3] More than fifteen years later, that assessment remains structurally accurate – particularly in the north. This externalisation has also been repeatedly used by Kosovo's political elite to excuse the lack of political will to strengthen domestic rule of law.

The European Commission's 2025 assessment of preparedness in the judiciary placed Kosovo between an early stage of preparation and some level of preparation, citing institutional weaknesses and delays to justice sector reform. There has also been mixed progress against corruption; more high-level cases have ended in conviction, but investigations and convictions in non-high-level cases remain low and Kosovo still lacks a strategic anti-corruption framework.[4]

Since the government of Albin Kurti came to power in 2021, judicial vetting has become one of the most contentious elements of Kosovo's justice reform agenda. The government presented comprehensive vetting as a response to longstanding concerns about judicial integrity, but its proposals generated scepticism among the EU and the Venice Commission over the risk of politicisation and risks to institutional independence and due process. The Venice Commission affirmed these concerns in its 2022 opinion, and the EU has continued to press Kosovo on whether its recommendations have been incorporated.[5]

Before this reform agenda could take off, the country entered a political crisis that placed all processes on hold. Following the February 2025 elections, the Assembly failed to constitute itself for months. Kosovo was governed by a caretaker administration and suspended its EU integration reforms. Two further snap elections followed in December 2025 and June 2026, and the crisis is expected to continue throughout 2026.[6]

[3] Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly, *The Situation in Kosovo and the Role of the Council of Europe*, Doc. 12544, January 7, 2011, accessed July 29, 2026, https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17872&lang=en .

[4] European Commission, Kosovo Report 2025, SWD(2025) 752 final, November 4, 2025, accessed September 5, 2026, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/kosovo-report-2025_en.

[5] Venice Commission, Opinion on the Concept Paper on the Vetting of Judges and Prosecutors and Draft Amendments to the Constitution, CDL-AD(2022)011, adopted at the 131st Plenary Session, June 17–18, 2022, accessed July 13, 2026, https://www.coe.int/en/web/venice-commission/-/opinion-1064; European Commission, Kosovo Country Report 2022, October 12, 2022, accessed July 13, 2026, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/Kosovo%20Report%202022.pdf.

[6] Emini, D., Parliamentary Elections in Kosovo 2025–2026: Back to Square One after Three Rounds of Voting, Southeast Europe in Focus 5/2026 (Munich: Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft, 2026), accessed July 30, 2026, https://sogde.org/en/publications/southeast-europe-in-focus/.

2. Analysis of the country case along the RESILIO-ACCESS model

2.1. The most important primary resilience resource: Order and security

According to the RESILIO-ACCESS data, order and security is Kosovo's strongest primary resilience resource. Its trajectory differs sharply from most regional countries. Kosovo did not inherit a functioning security sector; its rule-of-law and security architecture was established through an extensive international presence – first under UNMIK and the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) in 1999 and later in 2008 paired with EULEX.

Rule-of-law and security institutions were built gradually under international supervision, with the international presence initially providing much of the capacity necessary to maintain public order and security. In 1999, Kosovo's domestic courts were rebuilt from scratch under UNMIK administration. International judges sat alongside local judges in a hybrid arrangement formalised in 2000 – domestic judges alone were not considered capable of ensuring fair trials in serious cases.[7]

The establishment of the Kosovo Police Service in 1999 marked an important step towards local ownership of the rule-of-law architecture. With substantial international assistance and training, the OSCE established the Kosovo Police Service School in Vushtrri in September 1999, creating a modern, community-based police force. Responsibility for everyday policing was increasingly transferred to domestic institutions, especially after 2008, making the Kosovo Police one of the earliest examples of Kosovo's transition from international to domestic administration.[8]

The post-independence period marked another stage in this transition, though international actors remained deeply involved; KFOR continued providing security, while EULEX retained justice-sector functions until June 2018.

Kosovo's domestic security institutions have become increasingly capable of managing public order, and the Kosovo Police have gradually assumed responsibility for policing throughout most of the territory. The response to the September 2023 attack in Banjska[9] demonstrated the

[7] Qehaja, F. and I. Prezelj. "Issues of Local Ownership in Kosovo's Security Sector", Southeast European and Black Sea Studies 17, no. 3 (2017): 403–419.

[8] OSCE Mission in Kosovo, "Kosovo Police Service School", accessed July 30, 2026, https://omik.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/8/d/37595.pdf; Kosovo Police, "History", accessed July 30, 2026, https://www.kosovopolice.com/en/about-us/history/.

[9] Lukiv, J. "Kosovo and Serbia row over monastery gun battle", BBC News, accessed August 26, 2026, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-66908955.

operational capacity of Kosovo's security institutions to respond to a serious armed incident, but it also illustrated the limits of the country's security consolidation. KFOR remains particularly important in northern Kosovo, where the authority of Kosovo's institutions has remained contested and tensions with Serb communities have repeatedly escalated.[10] It operates under its mandate to maintain a safe and secure environment alongside the Kosovo Police and EULEX.[11]

Kosovo's relatively strong performance on order and security is paradoxical. The country has developed institutions capable of maintaining public order and preventing localised crises from becoming wider instability (though the capacity to implement deeper rule-of-law reforms remains considerably more fragile). But much of this resilience continues to rest on an international security architecture that remains in place more than two decades after the war. The security of the country is still based on a combination of domestic capacity and international guarantees. The repeated presence of international actors during periods of heightened tension has helped prevent disputes with Serbia from developing into broader instability – and the international presence has itself become part of Kosovo's resilience. But its continued necessity demonstrates that the consolidation of domestic authority remains incomplete.

Kosovo's other primary resilience resources reveal a similarly uneven picture. Equality before the law is also comparatively strong, while Fundamental Rights, Civil Liberties and Regime Legitimation occupy a stronger position than several other areas of the rule of law. These elements are supported by the constitutional framework established after independence, which provides important protections for individual rights and creates institutional safeguards against the concentration of political power.

The Constitution is one of the more important achievements of Kosovo's state-building process. Developed within the framework of the Ahtisaari settlement and adopted following independence, it established a separation of powers and institutional checks designed to prevent the domination of the state by a single political force.[12] The distribution of authority between the Assembly, the government and the president, together with constitutional safeguards surrounding the

[10] International Crisis Group, Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties, Europe Report no. 269 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, April 2, 2024), accessed August 1, 2026, https://www.crisisgroup.org/rpt/europe-central-asia/balkans/kosovo/269-northern-kosovo-asserting-sovereignty-amid-divided-loyalties.

[11] NATO, "KFOR: Keeping the Peace", accessed July 30, 2026, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_48818.htm.

[12] United Nations Security Council, Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement, S/2007/168/Add.1, March 26, 2007, Annex I.

appointment of judges and other senior officials, created a system in which political power is deliberately dispersed. The constitutional arrangements also provide important guarantees for Kosovo's multi-ethnic character and require political compromise in areas of particular importance to the functioning of the state.[5]

The Constitutional Court has become particularly important in the implementation of these arrangements. It has repeatedly intervened in disputes involving the exercise of political power, such as over electoral processes, the formation of governments and the constitutionality of legislation. Its decisions have constrained governments and presidents, demonstrating that constitutional review can function as a genuine check on political authority – even in a young and politically polarised state.[13] In March 2026, it ruled against President Osmani's own decree dissolving the Assembly.[14] The Court's role is particularly significant because Kosovo's broader institutional environment has often been characterised by political deadlock and weak accountability. The constitutional framework and the Court have provided an important layer of stability, ensuring that the political arena remains subject to rules that cannot be changed simply by those temporarily in power.

Kosovo's experience shows how resilience can emerge in a state with young institutions whose sovereignty has been shared with international actors. The security architecture created after 1999 provided stability for state-building and the post-independence constitutional framework safeguarded against excessive concentration of power. But neither is without weaknesses; security remains partly dependent on international guarantees and constitutional institutions still operate within a polarised, deadlock-prone environment.

2.2 The most important subsidiary resilience resources: Civil society and elections

Civil society constitutes one of the most important subsidiary resilience resources in Kosovo. It has consistently compensated for institutional weaknesses, while strengthening democratic participation, accountability and the rule of law. Kosovo's civil society did not emerge after the consolidation of the state – it developed alongside (and in many respects before) the institutions of the state itself. Throughout Kosovo's modern history, organised civic action has repeatedly filled institutional gaps; first by providing services when state institutions were absent, later by supporting post-war reconstruction and democratisation and today by monitoring public

[13] See for instance Constitutional Court of Kosovo, Cases KO219/19, KO43/19, KO48/20.

[14] Constitutional Court of Kosovo, Cases KO72/26 and KO74/26, Judgment, March 25, 2026.

institutions, safeguarding electoral integrity and promoting EU integration. The development of Kosovo's civil society therefore closely mirrors the country's broader state-building trajectory.[15]

Today's civil society can be traced back to the 1990s, when Kosovo Albanians were progressively excluded from public institutions. Citizens established parallel systems of education, healthcare and social welfare, relying on volunteerism and civic mobilisation rather than state institutions. Although these structures differed from today's professional civil-society organisations, they created traditions of civic engagement that continued to shape Kosovo's democratic development after the war.[16]

Following the war, civil society became one of the principal drivers of reconstruction and democratic transition. Extensive international assistance enabled a rapid expansion of CSOs working on human rights, democratisation, reconciliation and social service delivery. As Kosovo constructed new state institutions, civil society evolved together with the political system – rather than simply acting as an external watchdog. It was not created to oversee an already functioning democratic state; instead it was one of the actors contributing to the establishment of democratic institutions themselves.[17]

The sector has undergone a gradual transformation since 2008, as domestic institutions have assumed greater responsibility for governance and civil society has shifted from humanitarian assistance towards public accountability, policy advocacy and institutional oversight. Think tanks, watchdog groups and grassroots initiatives have become important contributors to legislative reforms, judicial independence and anti-corruption policy, increasingly participating in public consultations and producing independent policy analysis on the rule of law and European integration.[18]

This evolution has been particularly important given political polarisation, frequent elections and prolonged institutional deadlock in Kosovo. CSOs have monitored public procurement,

[15] Kosovar Civil Society Foundation, Mapping and Analysis of Kosovo Civil Society (Prishtina: KCSF, September 2005), accessed September 5, 2026, https://kcsf.rrota.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Mapping-and-analysis-of-Kosovo-civil-society.pdf.

[16] Hoxha, T., CIVICUS Civil Society Index Analytical Country Report for Kosovo: Better Governance for a Greater Impact (Prishtina: Kosovar Civil Society Foundation, March 2011), accessed September 5, 2026, https://civicus.org/downloads/CSI/Kosovo.pdf.

[17] Curri, F., B. Milutinović, B. Nesović, and N. Osmani, "Kosovo", in *Civil Society in the EU Integration of the Western Balkans*, ed. T. Żornaczuk (Warsaw: Polish Institute of International Affairs, 2014), 60–81, accessed July 30, 2026, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/184325/Civil%20Society%20in%20the%20EU%20Integration%20of%20the%20Western%20Balkans.pdf.

[18] Puka, D., N. Orana, and M. Ademi, Kosovar Civil Society Index 2018 (Prishtina: Kosovar Civil Society Foundation, 2018), accessed July 30, 2026, https://kcsfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Kosovar-Civil-Society-Index-2018.pdf.

documented corruption, advocated for judicial independence and challenged legislation affecting fundamental rights. They have also given citizens meaningful ways to participate in public life through advocacy, policy dialogue and community mobilisation, helping preserve democratic accountability when institutional checks have proved insufficient.[19]

Civil society's contribution to rule-of-law resilience extends to safeguarding the legality and procedural integrity of political contestation. Whether a government successfully forms is a matter of democratic resilience, but whether the vote is conducted lawfully and transparently is a question of rule of law. Kosovo's elections have generally remained competitive, professionally administered and broadly trusted, despite repeated political crises and delays in government formation. Civil society organisations – most notably Democracy in Action (DnA) – have strengthened public trust through systematic election observation, parallel vote tabulation, campaign finance monitoring and reporting of irregularities, complementing the Central Election Commission through diagonal accountability mechanisms.[20]

This distinction is important to Kosovo's democratic resilience; the European Commission has repeatedly found elections peaceful, competitive and well-administered, while also expressing concern over the institutional crises that have followed several electoral cycles, most recently after the February 2025 elections. Kosovo's democratic difficulties have stemmed from the inability of political actors to translate outcomes into stable governance – a gap civil society has helped bridge by preserving confidence in democratic procedures.

Civil society has also become an increasingly important partner in Kosovo's European integration process. The 2015 Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) created a more structured framework for civil society participation in monitoring reforms and assessing progress towards European standards. Organisations working on governance, rule of law and human rights have become key interlocutors between domestic institutions and international partners.

Despite these achievements, important structural vulnerabilities remain. Kosovo has almost 14,000 registered CSOs, reflecting the significant institutional growth of the sector over the past twenty-five years. However, only a relatively small proportion of these organisations remain consistently

[19] Kosovar Civil Society Foundation, Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development: Kosovo Country Report 2024 (Balkan Civil Society Development Network, 2025), accessed July 30, 2026, https://monitoringmatrix.net/kosovo-report-2024/; CiviKos Platform, Mapping of Civil Society Organisations in Kosovo (2023), accessed July 30, 2026, https://civikos.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Mapping_publication_alb.pdf.

[20] Lührmann, A., K. L. Marquardt, and V. Mechkova, "Constraining Governments: New Indices of Vertical, Horizontal, and Diagonal Accountability", American Political Science Review 114, no. 3 (2020): 811–20.

active, highlighting the distinction between formal registration and sustainable civic engagement. The legal and institutional framework governing civil society has improved considerably, with clearer rules on public financing and stronger consultation mechanisms. But implementation remains uneven and cooperation with public institutions often depends on political will rather than established practice.[21] The sector also remains heavily dependent on international donor support, as domestic philanthropy and public funding remain underdeveloped. As in other countries in the Western Balkans, the suspension of major USAID-funded programmes in 2025 reinforced longstanding concerns about the sector's sustainability.

Nevertheless, the sector has repeatedly adapted to changing political, institutional and financial environments while continuing to provide services, mobilise citizens and hold public institutions accountable. Its resilience lies in its enduring capacity to connect citizens with institutions and sustain reform efforts through periods of political uncertainty. In this respect, civil society has been one the principal architects of Kosovo's democratic development.

2.3. The most important stressor factor: Institutional fragility and incomplete institutional consolidation

Organised crime is the most prominent stressor affecting Kosovo's rule-of-law resilience. Its significance lies not only in the presence of criminal networks and the number of cases investigated by the police and the prosecution, but also the environment that enables it.

The prolonged dependence on international actors and the contested authority of relatively young state institutions have left the status of the domestic security architecture unresolved across the country, especially in the north. This has created the conditions in which criminal networks, corruption and political connections can intersect with limited accountability. Formal institutions are challenged in their ability to operate independently and consistently when confronting powerful interests.

The historical trajectory of Kosovo's rule-of-law institutions is central to understanding this vulnerability. The post-war framework under UNMIK and subsequently EULEX assumed that domestic institutions lacked the capacity to handle high-level corruption and organised crime implicating the political elite. The domestic accountability that Kosovo's institutions would

[21] Kosovar Civil Society Foundation, Monitoring Matrix Brief 2025: Key Developments in Kosovo's Civil Society during 2024 (Prishtina: KCSF, 2025), accessed July 30, 2026, https://kcsfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/kcsf_monitoringmatrix_eng_v8.pdf.

eventually need was deferred rather than built. EULEX's performance in high-profile corruption cases illustrates the problem. Several of its prominent cases, including the Pronto case[22] involving senior political figures, failed to produce the expected accountability. This led civil society assessments to question whether highly-visible investigations had translated into effective, final justice.[23]

Investigating organised crime requires cooperation between police, prosecutors and courts and must survive changes in personnel, political pressure and lengthy judicial proceedings. The Pronto case demonstrated that the presence of an international mission could strengthen individual stages of this process, but could not by itself guarantee that the entire institutional chain would function effectively. Kosovo's experience suggests that international intervention can compensate for institutional weakness in the short term but cannot substitute for the long-term consolidation of domestic institutions.

The same vulnerability is visible in Kosovo's security environment, particularly in the north. A Kosovo Police officer was killed in the September 2023 Banjska attack, the most serious security escalation in Kosovo in years. The incident demonstrated that organised armed networks could exploit unresolved political and territorial tensions and that the distinction between organised crime, political mobilisation and security threats could become blurred.

This helps explain the apparent tension in the RESILIO-ACCESS data. Order and security scores comparatively strongly for Kosovo, while organised crime emerges as its most prominent stressor. These findings are not necessarily contradictory. Kosovo has developed considerably greater policing and security capacity than it possessed in the immediate post-war period, and its institutions have demonstrated an ability to respond to serious security incidents. Yet security capacity does not automatically translate into the ability to dismantle criminal networks, investigate politically-connected individuals or ensure that complex cases result in convictions.

Corruption and clientelism reinforce these vulnerabilities in ways specific to Kosovo's institutional context. Civil service recruitment in Kosovo remains insufficiently merit-based, with clientelist influence continuing to shape appointments across the public administration, including within

[22] Kosovo Law Institute, Pronto: Where Are You? (Pristina: Kosovo Law Institute, November 2017), accessed July 30, 2026, https://kli-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/2.-Pronto-where-are-you.pdf.

[23] Kalaja, B., "The War against Corruption through Media Spectacles", *Çohu*, October 4, 2012, accessed July 30, 2026, https://www.cohu.org/en/blog/lufta-kunder-korrupsionit-me-televizor.

institutions responsible for rule-of-law oversight.[24] The Kosovo Judicial Council and Kosovo Prosecutorial Council have both struggled with incomplete membership and rushed reform processes that the European Commission found did not ensure meaningful review. The Venice Commission's recommendations on reducing the risks of political influence over appointments have been only partially reflected in legislation. Organised crime does not need to formally capture public institutions to benefit from these conditions; weak accountability and politically-connected appointments can reduce the capacity of the very institutions responsible for investigating and prosecuting criminal activity. This creates a mutually reinforcing dynamic in which institutional fragility enables criminal networks while their persistence further erodes public confidence in the impartial application of the law.

Political instability can intensify these problems. Kosovo's repeated electoral cycles and prolonged institutional deadlock have periodically interrupted the functioning of public institutions and delayed appointments, reforms and decision-making. Such crises do not necessarily foster organised crime, but they reduce the continuity and institutional attention required to address complex criminal activity. This is particularly important in Kosovo, where the justice system is still consolidating professional norms and institutional memory after decades of international administration and relatively recent domestic ownership of the rule-of-law architecture.

Kosovo has nevertheless developed substantial capacity to confront these pressures. The Kosovo Police, the Special Prosecution Office and other specialised institutions have become increasingly professionalised. International assistance has shifted from direct substitution towards capacity building and institutional support. The challenge is to ensure that these capacities become embedded in domestic institutions rather than depending on exceptional international intervention when institutions come under pressure.

Organised crime should be understood as more than a criminal justice problem. It is a test of the consolidation of Kosovo's state institutions. Kosovo's vulnerability lies in the difficulty of ensuring that relatively young institutions can exercise their authority independently, continuously and across the entire territory. The long-term challenge is to consolidate the capacities developed through international involvement into genuinely domestic institutional resilience.

[24] Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Kosovo Country Report (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2026), accessed August 3, 2026, https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/RKS.

3. The effect of the EU integration process

The EU integration process has shaped Kosovo's rule of law more directly and for longer than any other external framework, but with uneven effects. Kosovo has not yet received candidate status following its membership application in December 2022, with five EU member states not recognising its independence. This structural position has weakened the credibility of the conditionality incentive that has driven reform in other Western Balkan accession contexts, leaving the EU to exercise influence through financial instruments, political dialogue and direct mission presence rather than the prospect of membership. What distinguishes Kosovo from every other country in the region is the depth and duration of direct EU intervention in its rule-of-law institutions.

EULEX has exercised executive powers in policing, justice and customs since 2008, a level of direct EU intervention in a country's domestic rule of law with no parallel elsewhere in the Western Balkans. The institutional link between EULEX and Kosovo's most sensitive ongoing judicial proceedings runs deeper than mission support; the EULEX Head of Mission formally appointed the first President of the Kosovo Specialist Chambers in December 2016, embedding the EU's institutional role at the very foundation of the court established to try the most serious crimes of the Kosovo conflict.[25] The Kosovo Specialist Chambers' guilty verdict against Hashim Thaçi and his co-defendants on September 16, 2026, triggered protests that turned violent at the EU's own EULEX mission in Prishtina.[26] This puts Kosovo–EU relations under fresh strain. Former EULEX personnel have been involved in the proceedings, illustrating how deeply the two institutions' trajectories remain intertwined.[27] The mission's mandate has been renewed repeatedly (most recently to June 2027), and EULEX continues to operate alongside Kosovo's domestic institutions nearly two decades after independence.

[25] EULEX Kosovo, "Head of EULEX Appoints President of the Kosovo Specialist Chambers", December 14, 2016, accessed July 30, 2026, https://www.eulex-kosovo.eu/?page=2,11,550.

[26] Thaçi was sentenced to 25 years, Jakup Krasniqi to 25 years, Kadri Veseli to 18 years and Rexhep Selimi to 13 years, with time in custody counted toward their terms.
Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecutor's Office, "Hashim Thaçi and Co-Defendants Found Guilty of War Crimes," September 16, 2026, accessed September 18, 2026, https://www.scp-ks.org/en/hashim-thaci-and-co-defendants-found-guilty-war-crimes; Aleksandar Brezar, "Anger over Thaçi War Crimes Sentence Spills into Protests at Kosovo EU Mission," Euronews, September 17, 2026, accessed September 18, 2026, https://www.euronews.com/2026/09/17/anger-over-thaci-war-crimes-sentence-spills-into-protests-at-kosovo-eu-mission.

[27] Pineles, D. B., "Court Blunder in Hague War Crimes Trial Could Jeopardise Fairness", *Balkan Insight*, January 14, 2026, accessed August 3, 2026, https://balkaninsight.com/2026/01/14/court-blunder-in-hague-war-crimes-trial-could-jeopardise-fairness/btj/.

That such a substantial mission remains necessary is a measure of how far Kosovo's rule of law still depends on external support. The Pronto case also illustrates how executive capacity exercised by an international mission has not automatically translated into domestic institutions capable of sustaining complex prosecutions once that support is withdrawn. EULEX demonstrates both the ceiling and the floor of what direct EU intervention can achieve.

The visa liberalisation process imposed demands specific to Kosovo's rule-of-law weaknesses. Launched in 2012, the roadmap set out 95 requirements across border management, document security and rule of law. The last and most demanding benchmark required Kosovo to demonstrate a sustained track record of investigations and final court rulings in cases concerning organised crime and corruption.[28] Kosovo struggled for years to meet this requirement. It was only in July 2018 that the Commission confirmed the benchmark had been fulfilled, having monitored the track record benchmark for two years and conducted a technical mission to assess progress.[29] Even then, political resistance among EU member states delayed actual visa-free access until 1 January 2024, six years after technical fulfilment. The episode captures both sides of conditionality's effect; the benchmarking process drove real and measurable improvements in prosecutorial and law enforcement capacity in precisely the area where Kosovo's institutional fragility was most acute, while the political unreliability of the reward undermined the credibility of the process as a future reform incentive. It also illustrates a recurring pattern in Kosovo's EU relationship; technical compliance achieved at significant institutional effort, followed by a political failure to deliver on the EU's side of the bargain.

The EU's Growth Plan for the Western Balkans (which Kosovo shares with other countries in the region) links €882.6 million in grants and loans up to 2027 to 111 reform steps, including rule-of-law measures. Disbursement is conditional and reviewed twice yearly. The political crisis following the February 2025 elections delayed even the unconditional pre-financing tranche, and by early 2026 Kosovo risked forfeiting further tranches as reform steps due in June and December 2025 had not been completed.[30] The Growth Plan demonstrates how a well-designed EU instrument can be

[28] European Commission, Fourth Report on Progress by Kosovo in Fulfilling the Requirements of the Visa Liberalisation Roadmap, COM(2018) 543 final, July 18, 2018.

[29] European External Action Service, "Visa Liberalisation: Commission Confirms Kosovo Fulfils All Required Benchmarks", July 18, 2018, accessed August 1, 2026, https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/kosovo_en/48592/.

[30] European External Action Service, "EU Starts EUR 61.8 Million Pre-Financing for Kosovo under the Growth Plan", April 16, 2026, accessed July 30, 2026, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/kosovo/eu-starts-eur-618-million-pre-financing-kosovo-under-growth-plan_en.

rendered ineffective by domestic institutional dysfunction. Unlike EULEX and visa liberalisation, it has not yet produced a clear rule-of-law outcome in Kosovo, and its fate will depend on whether the political crisis that has paralysed the country since February 2025 is resolved in time to resume the reform efforts Kosovo had been making before the electoral cycle intervened.

These three instruments reflect the central tension in Kosovo's EU integration experience. EULEX substituted for domestic capacity for more than a decade, while also limiting the incentive to build it independently. Visa liberalisation demonstrated that conditionality can drive institutional improvement when benchmarks are precise and monitored consistently, but also that the political credibility of the EU as a partner has limits. The Growth Plan has yet to prove itself. The EU has built much of the formal architecture of Kosovo's rule-of-law resilience, but the deeper consolidation and domestic ownership of that architecture remain unfinished, constrained by the same institutional fragility that the EU's instruments are designed to address.

4. Conclusion

Kosovo's rule-of-law resilience is characterised by a central paradox; the country has developed important resilience resources even though its institutions remain relatively young and incompletely consolidated. Kosovo's strongest primary resilience resource is order and security, built through the interaction of domestic institution building and sustained international guarantees. KFOR, EULEX and the gradual strengthening of Kosovo's own security institutions have prevented instability from becoming systemic and provided the foundation upon which other institutions could develop.

At the societal level, civil society and competitive elections are Kosovo's most important subsidiary resilience resources. Formal institutions have often struggled with political deadlock, weak accountability and limited institutional continuity; civic organisations, independent actors and electoral competition have provided alternative mechanisms of scrutiny and political renewal. They have helped ensure that institutional weaknesses have not translated into democratic collapse.

Kosovo's main vulnerability remains institutional fragility and incomplete consolidation. There is a gap between institutional design and effective implementation. Informal networks, clientelism, corruption and organised crime exploit this gap, weakening the capacity of institutions to act independently and consistently. The EU integration process has significantly contributed to building Kosovo's rule-of-law architecture, but its transformative effect has been limited by Kosovo's incomplete accession perspective and the continuing challenge of domestic ownership.

Kosovo represents a unique case, where resilience has emerged through a combination of international support, constitutional safeguards and societal mobilisation. The long-term consolidation of the rule of law will depend on transforming these externally-supported and partially-embedded resources into fully-domestic institutional capacity capable of resisting informal pressures.

About the author

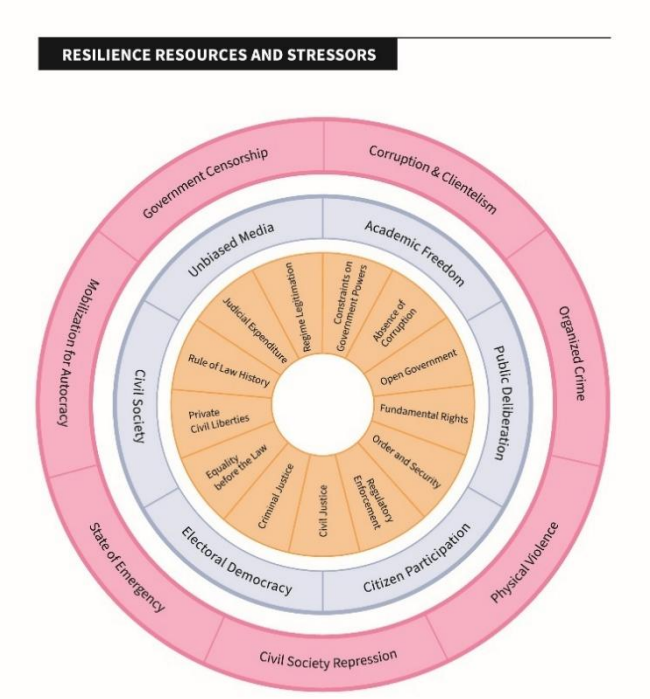
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About the project

RESILIO-ACCESS investigates the resilience of the rule of law in the current (potential) candidate countries for EU accession. The project explores how to measure resilience and how to assess the potential of the EU's enlargement policy toolbox to foster sustainable resilience in the region. Resilience here means the capacity of the rule of law to prevent, cope with, or recover from hazardous events or incremental threats – without losing its core function, structure, and purpose.

About the paper

This paper is part of the **RESILIO-ACCESS Country Reports**, a collection of compact analyses that assess the source of rule of law resilience in EU aspirant countries by using the analytical framework of the RESILIO-ACCESS model.



The RESILIO-ACCESS model is based on *three* dimensions: The system of the rule of law itself provides *primary resilience resources* such as an effective judicial system, the protection of fundamental rights, and democratic elections. These resources are embedded into a social environment with *subsidiary resilience resources* such as civil society, academia, and the media. However, these resources are constantly being challenged by *threats* such as autocracy, corruption, violence, or censorship. The characteristics of each

dimension, their interactions and their conditions of resilience resources determine the overall resilience capacity of the rule of law.

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