



UNPACKING POLITICAL DYNAMICS IN THE SERBIAN COMMUNITY IN KOSOVO

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This op-ed provides insights into the complex political landscape and challenges faced by the Serbian community in Kosovo, highlighting the issues of political instrumentalization and marginalization of the Serbian community at the hands of political elites in Serbia, organized crime groups backed by political support, facilitation of malign influence, and the political dimension of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC).

The Serbian community in Kosovo is often overlooked in the midst of uncertain political situations. According to the findings of the [FIERC survey](#) conducted by the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies, the Serbian community in Kosovo feel that they are not adequately represented in Kosovo and that the central institutions are falling short in their attempts to promote clear and effective communication between different ethnic groups.

On the other hand, the Serbian community in Kosovo holds a more positive view of how municipalities are handling inter-ethnic relations. The survey data underscore the role of municipalities in promoting direct communication, ensuring adequate representation and accessibility to institutions, thus contributing to community resilience.

However, the instrumentalization of the Serbian community in Kosovo by Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić has weakened the political agency of this community at the local level. The assassination of Kosovo Serb politician Oliver Ivanovic, after a smear campaign [initiated](#) by state-controlled media in Serbia, shows that political pragmatism among the Serbian community in Kosovo faces resistance.

Vučić, and his Serbian Progressive Party, control the Serbian List, the main political representatives of the Serbian community in Kosovo. After the assassination of Ivanovic, this political party essentially became the only political voice for Kosovo Serbs, reducing the political diversity within the community. Vučić leverages this to push his political agenda, thus prioritizing specific interests aligned with his vision and personal political benefits. These interests, like keeping political control over Serbian-led municipalities, weakening Kosovo's institutions, and blocking efforts for a diverse, inclusive society, are getting more problematic in the light of growing tension in Kosovo's northern municipalities.

Such instrumentalization and decline of political pluralism in one hand, and the negative [perceptions](#) of the Serbian community towards Kosovo institutions in the other, contribute to preserving the uncertainties in the position and representation of the Serbian community

in Kosovo. Moreover, efforts to foster closer ties between the Serbian community and the institutions of Kosovo through a local dialogue [have yet to be addressed](#) by the Kosovo government, thus maintaining the existing distance between the institutions and Kosovo Serbs.

Organized crime is another politically-utilized tool that significantly impacts the Serbian community in Kosovo, especially in the Serbian-majority municipalities in the northern part of Kosovo. Milan Radoičić, the deputy president of the Serbian List, is a well-known figure [involved in organized crime](#) in that area. Despite being wanted by the authorities in Kosovo for various crimes, Radoičić maintains a strong [connection](#) with the Serbian president, highlighting his political power.

Organized crime groups, reportedly linked to Serbia's political elites and led by Radoičić and his associates, have played a key role in undermining the integration of the Serbian community into Kosovo's institutions. The [mass resignations](#) of Serbian members from the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) in 2018 after a violent intimidation campaign; the [ties](#) between criminal groups and police in North Mitrovica; calls by [figures like Radoičić](#), for boycotting of local elections in northern municipalities and events like the [burning of cars](#) with Kosovar license plates owned by Serbian citizens are clear examples. They show how crime groups, backed by politics, use their power to keep the Serbian community in Kosovo in its current political and social state.

Serbia's role extends beyond the influence of local political structures in Kosovo, as it also facilitates the presence of malign influence within the Serbian community. During the COVID-19 pandemic, while Kosovo declined Chinese vaccines due to their origin, Serbia provided the [unauthorized distribution](#) of Chinese vaccines to the Kosovo Serbs in northern Kosovo, as China employed "Vaccine Diplomacy" to enhance its regional influence.

Similarly, [Serbia discreetly](#) funded a project to equip Serbian-majority municipalities in northern Kosovo with unregulated Chinese surveillance technology. Additionally, Serbia's positive attitude towards Russia has allowed [Russian influence](#) to seep into the Serbian community in Kosovo, particularly among political leaders and organized crime groups. These groups and political leaders, viewed by Serbia as political tools, align and work together with Russian interests.

As Serbia becomes a pathway for these foreign powers, it stalls Kosovo's democratic progress and its vision to join international organizations. This roadblock to international integration not only hinders the overall progress of Kosovo, but also directly impacts the Serbian community, barring them from the security provisions and potential socio-economic advancements that Kosovo's membership in international organizations could potentially offer.

Moreover, Serbia's influence over the Serbian community in Kosovo is not limited to political actors and facilitation of foreign interference. It also touches on cultural and religious aspects, mainly through the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC). The SOC holds significant cultural and religious importance for the Serbian community in Kosovo, seen as a [vital and trusted](#) organization that can represent the wider community's concerns.

Yet, this influential position is not without its complications. [Connections](#) of the SOC with the Russian Orthodox Church and potential [ties](#) with far-right groups have raised concerns. Moreover, the [failure](#) of Kosovo institutions to implement a ruling by the Constitutional Court of Kosovo regarding land parcels for the Decani Monastery has also added a political dimension to the SOC, further undermining its cultural and religious significance.

Ignoring this ruling doesn't just raise legal concerns. It also adds to the distrust and isolation felt by the Serbian community, as it makes the current situation even more complicated, and overlooks the potential of non-political groups like the SOC to facilitate the continuous integration of Serbian community in Kosovo. In this respect, there is a need to clearly separate the political issues tied to the SOC from the religious and cultural life of Kosovo Serbs. Efforts should be made to effectively communicate the importance of religious and cultural aspects of the Serbian community to the majority population in Kosovo, and establish positive channels of communication between institutions and the SOC.

The challenges faced by the Serbian community in Kosovo, as outlined in this op-ed, need urgent attention to protect their political agency and close the gap with Kosovo's institutions. The instrumentalization of the Serbian community, the influence of organized crime, and the presence of foreign actors hinder the development of a cohesive and inclusive society.

There's a strong need to focus on actions that promote dialogue while protecting the rights and goals of all communities in Kosovo. By encouraging meaningful engagement, improving political representation, and fighting against malign influences, Kosovo can strive to create a fairer environment for all its citizens.

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