



Southeast European Studies

KOSOVO AND ALBANIA

A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP

Edited by
Liridon Lika



“In international representations, the relation between the two Albanian states in the Balkans is often construed as problematic. A new generation of local scholars, who have started to make their inroads in international theoretical and critical approaches, show that the close relations between Kosovo and Albania are both obvious and special. More importantly, they make a good case in International Relations and Southeast European studies, focusing on how both states interact to ensure security, economic development, and integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. They provide original insights, enhancing understanding and enriching academic discourse on these relations between different states within a same nation.”

Albert Doja—*Statutory Professor of Anthropology, University of Lille, France*

“The book *Kosovo and Albania: A Special Relationship*, edited by Liridon Lika, offers an engaging, original, and important contribution to academic literature. In the last two and a half decades, there has been an exponential increase in the number of publications on the Western Balkans, thus mirroring the changing geopolitical scene in this part of the European continent. Out of the two countries examined herein, Kosovo particularly has received considerable attention, mostly because of its unique trajectory from war to peace and then independence. Albania, too, has gone through a remarkable and, at times, painful transition. This book builds on such literature, but also relies on rich and often first-hand empirical data, to offer a multi-disciplinary perspective to examining the bilateral relations of two states that have so much in common. The book therefore presents a welcome novelty for scholarly literature, since this has not been done before in such a systematic, academic, and in-depth manner.”

Armend Bekaj—*Researcher on Peace and Conflict, Uppsala University, Sweden*

“This book is an essential and innovative contribution to the academic study of Kosovo–Albania relations, offering an original, in-depth analysis that fills a significant gap in the existing literature. It provides a comprehensive examination of the unique bond between the two states, exploring their political, social, and historical ties through a multidisciplinary lens that has not been systematically applied before. As one of the first books to analyze Kosovo–Albania relations post-2008, it offers fresh perspectives and valuable insights for scholars, diplomats, students, and policymakers. With its thorough qualitative analysis, the book serves as an indispensable resource and a vital reference for both academic and practical applications.”

Dorina Bërdufi—*Professor of Political Science, Aleksandër Moisiu University of Durrës, Albania*

“Kosovo and Albania: A Special Relationship provides an insightful and original overview of the trajectory and contemporary dynamics of the special relationship between Kosovo and Albania. As such, this edited volume makes an invaluable empirical contribution to an important yet underexplored topic. With its in-depth, interdisciplinary approach, this book is set to become a uniquely helpful resource for students and scholars interested in the comparative politics and international relations of Kosovo and Albania.”

Pëllumb Kelmendi—*Professor of Political Science,
Auburn University, United States of America*

“Liridon Lika’s book offers an insightful and comprehensive analysis of the historical and contemporary dynamics between Kosovo and Albania. This must-read volume is a valuable academic contribution to understanding the relations between these two European states inhabited overwhelmingly by ethnic Albanians. The well-researched and innovative empirical, theoretical, and methodological approaches make the book an important resource for researchers, students, policymakers, and anyone interested in Kosovo and Albania, as well as Southeastern Europe.”

Shkëndije Geci Sherifi—*Ambassador of the Republic
of Kosovo to Sweden*

Kosovo and Albania

This book offers an original analysis of relations between the Republic of Kosovo and the Republic of Albania, with a particular focus on the 2008–2025 period. It provides an inside perspective bringing together scholarly contributions from academics, researchers, and diplomats from both countries. As Kosovo and Albania are inhabited by an overwhelming majority of ethnic Albanians, relations are fraternal, deep, and extensive, with the two states signing numerous agreements and memoranda in the political, economic, educational, cultural and security fields. This special relationship is explored through innovative and multidisciplinary approaches, thus making the study both timely and relevant.

The book will be of key interest to scholars, diplomats, and students focusing on Political Science, International Relations, History, Kosovo's foreign policy, Albania's foreign policy, and Southeast Europe.

Liridon Lika, PhD, is a lecturer and a researcher at the Center for International Relations Studies (CEFIR) in the Department of Political Science at the University of Liège (ULiège) in Belgium.

Southeast European Studies

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The Balkans are a region of Europe widely associated over the past decades with violence and war. Beyond this violence, the region has experienced rapid change in recent times though, including democratization, economic and social transformation. New scholarship is emerging which seeks to move away from the focus on violence alone to an understanding of the region in a broader context drawing on new empirical research.

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Kosovo and Albania

A Special Relationship

Edited by Liridon Lika

First published 2025
by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-041-02494-1 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-041-03859-7 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-62569-8 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003625698

Typeset in Sabon
by SPi Technologies India Pvt Ltd (Straive)

Liridon Lika dedicates this book to his son Lindon Lika



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Foreword

Two States, One Nation. A Foreword to Kosovo–Albania Special Relationship

The book *Kosovo and Albania: A Special Relationship* delves into the intricate and multifaceted ties that connect these two states, exploring their shared heritage, evolving dynamics, and the broader implications for the Southeast Europe region. The border between Albania and Kosovo is often perceived as unnatural. This perception stems from the profound ethnic, cultural, and linguistic commonalities shared by the Albanian populations on both sides of the border. These similarities underscore a deeper sense of unity that transcends the division imposed by a border, highlighting the ways in which political decisions and conflicts can fragment communities with long-standing, intertwined histories.

This shared heritage forms the foundation for widespread calls among Albanians in both Albania and Kosovo for closer ties and deeper integration. These aspirations are rooted not just in historical memory but also in a contemporary vision of solidarity and collective progress. Advocates of greater unification point to the artificiality of the current division, emphasizing the strong bonds of language, tradition, and identity that bind the two states together. Such perspectives challenge the notion of borders as immutable or sacrosanct, instead portraying them as mutable constructs that often fail to reflect the organic connections between communities.

However, the widespread popular sentiment favoring unification stands in stark contrast to the official policies of the Governments of Kosovo and Albania. Despite the deep-rooted calls for integration from their populations, both governments have adopted a strategic approach that emphasizes their independence and sovereignty. This position reflects a pragmatic acknowledgment of the geopolitical realities of the Southeast Europe region, where the international community's endorsement remains crucial to the stability and progress of both states. For now, the prospect of unification is overshadowed by the broader imperative to maintain stability in Southeast Europe, a goal that is intricately tied to the preservation of existing state borders.

The attitude of the international community plays a pivotal role in shaping the policies of Kosovo and Albania. Influential global Western actors, including key states and international organizations, prioritize peace and stability in the Western Balkans. To this end, they strongly support the independence and sovereignty of both Kosovo and Albania, viewing these attributes as cornerstones of regional stability. For these actors, the integration of the two states into European and transatlantic institutions such as the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a strategic priority. These frameworks are seen as essential mechanisms for promoting regional cooperation, economic growth, and security, offering a pathway toward long-term peace and prosperity.

The interplay of these factors – historical legacies, shared identities, popular aspirations, and geopolitical considerations – creates a richly layered context for understanding the relationship between Kosovo and Albania. Their bond, while deeply rooted in a common ethnic and cultural foundation, is also shaped by the broader dynamics of international politics and the evolving landscape of the Western Balkans. Given these dynamics, the Governments of Kosovo and Albania navigate a complex landscape where they must balance the aspirations of their populations with the pragmatic considerations of international diplomacy and regional stability. This approach reflects a strategic decision to align with the broader goals of Euro-Atlantic integration, which are seen as essential for long-term peace and prosperity in the region. However, Kosovo and Albania are more than just strategic partners; they have the potential to jointly foster democratic stability and peace in Southeast Europe. Albania's strong connection to Kosovo is evident, with Kosovo often seen as a historically denied part of Albania.

The book *Kosovo and Albania: A Special Relationship* provides a comprehensive exploration of these themes, offering valuable insights into the ways in which history, identity, and diplomacy intersect to define the special relationship between these two states. It serves as a vital resource for understanding not only the Kosovo–Albania dynamic but also the broader challenges and opportunities facing the Southeast Europe region in its quest for peace, stability, and integration into the global community.

The book delves into the general relations between these two states, providing a foundational understanding of their historical, political, and cultural interconnections. Building on this foundation, the volume then critically examines the ongoing debates on nationalism and unification of Kosovo and Albania, analyzing different viewpoints and the implications of such a union on regional stability and identity. Finally, the book highlights the current priorities and future perspectives of Kosovo–Albania relations, shedding light on key issues, aspirations, and potential pathways for collaboration. This holistic approach aims to offer readers a nuanced understanding of the interplay between these neighboring states as they navigate the complexities of their partnership in a rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape.

In a masterful manner, the book embarks on a journey through the past, present, and future of the special relationship between Kosovo and Albania, highlighting the milestones that have shaped the identities of both states. Throughout the chapters, the multifaceted nature of this relationship unfolds, encompassing political alliances, economic collaborations, cultural interactions, and a shared vision for a prosperous future. From shared traditions and linguistic heritage to their joint struggles for independence and sovereignty, Kosovo and Albania have navigated a path characterized by resilience and solidarity. The reverberations of history resonate throughout the narrative, illustrating their mutual collaborations, particularly in the face of external pressures and challenges that have tested the fabric of their connection over time. Scholars and diplomats from both Kosovo and Albania examine and discuss the complexities of their bilateral relations. This collaborative endeavor aims to deepen the understanding and documentation of the unique and evolving relationship between the two states.

Historically, Albania has played a crucial role in cultivating the national identity and collective memory of Kosovo Albanians. This influence, rooted in their shared ethnic heritage, language, and cultural connections, has been especially pronounced during periods of turmoil. In the late 20th century, Albania provided substantial support to Kosovo Albanians, nurturing a sense of unity and shared purpose. However, with Kosovo's independence in 2008, a significant turning point was reached. While the historical bond remains robust, Kosovo has increasingly forged its own distinct state identity, marking a gradual shift away from Albania's direct influence in shaping Kosovo's identity as it asserts its sovereignty and builds its own state institutions. Kosovo's identity has undergone significant transformation, from a predominantly Albanian resistance identity under Yugoslav repression to a more complex and evolving national identity post-independence. Efforts to develop a unified Kosovar identity face challenges but are crucial for the country's future stability and full international integration. Balancing ethnic diversity, modern aspirations, and cultural heritage will define Kosovo's identity trajectory in the coming years. The evolving relationship between the two countries following Kosovo's independence continues to be a significant force, shaping the political, social, and cultural dynamics of Southeast Europe. As the complex web of interactions defining Kosovo–Albania relations unfold, the book offers a profound understanding of the ongoing impact these relations have on the broader region, enriching the discourse on identity, sovereignty, and the essence of nationhood.

The geopolitical landscape of the Western Balkans is marked by a rich tapestry of historical grievances, ethnic diversity, and evolving national identities, which heavily influence the diplomatic interactions between Kosovo and Albania. In recent years, the geopolitical landscape of Southeast Europe has undergone substantial transformations, revealing new opportunities and complexities for Kosovo and Albania. This book seeks not only to document this evolution but also to analyze the implications of regional and

international policies that influence their relations. As Kosovo continues to solidify its state sovereignty, the support and kinship of Albania play a critical role in shaping its trajectory. Achieving a comprehensive balance is fraught with challenges. On the one hand, the need to appease nationalist sentiments within their populations can sometimes clash with the diplomatic realities that call for compromise and collaboration with neighboring countries. This tension is particularly evident when advances toward EU integration depend on the resolution of outstanding bilateral issues related to territorial integrity, minority rights, and economic cooperation. On the other hand, Albania, as a NATO member and a candidate for EU membership, seeks to bolster its own international standing while maintaining its support for Kosovo. This duality brings about a balancing act: Albania must advocate for Kosovo's interests without jeopardizing its own diplomatic relationships with key players in Southeast Europe and beyond.

The collaborative contributions of nine esteemed scholars and diplomats add immense value to the discourse, offering a diverse range of perspectives and analyses that enrich the study of Kosovo–Albania relations. Each contributor brings unique expertise, allowing the edited book to delve deeply into various aspects of this multifaceted relationship, from historical roots and cultural connections to contemporary political challenges and economic opportunities. By weaving together these diverse viewpoints, the book provides an unparalleled exploration of the complexities underlying this special relationship.

This work not only enhances scholarly understanding of Kosovo and Albania's interactions but also elevates the academic discussion to new heights. Its insights resonate beyond the immediate context, contributing to broader debates about identity, sovereignty, and regional cooperation in a rapidly changing global landscape. For researchers, policymakers, and anyone interested in the dynamics of Southeast Europe, this book stands as an essential resource, shedding light on how two states with a shared heritage navigate the intricate pathways of modern international relations.

Prof. Dr. Enika Abazi¹

Paris, France

9 December 2024

Notes

- 1 **Enika Abazi**, PhD, serves as the Director of the Center for Scientific Research and Project Coordination at the Academy of Sciences of Albania and is an associate professor at the University of Lille in France. Her academic and professional endeavors center on geopolitics, conflict studies, and European integration, employing a multidisciplinary approach that integrates International Relations, Political Science, Religious Studies, History, and Sociology. Professor Abazi has held visiting professorships at prominent institutions, including the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute (COPRI) in Denmark, Sciences Po Rennes in France, the University of Pisa in Italy, and the National University Institute (IUF) in France.

Her distinguished career also includes leadership as the principal investigator for numerous research projects conducted in collaboration with esteemed European institutions, such as CLERCE (France), DCAF (Switzerland), ELIAMEP (Greece), SETA and TASAM (Turkey), and AIIS (Albania). An accomplished scholar, Professor Abazi has shared her research findings at leading international symposia and conferences. She has published extensively in renowned academic outlets, contributing to book chapters and articles in peer-reviewed journals such as the *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, *Third World Quarterly*, *Time and Society*, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, *Middle Eastern Studies*, and *International Critical Thinking*, among others. Her work continues to influence academic and policy discussions on key global and regional issues.

Acknowledgments

The preparation of this book, which analyzes the relations between the Republic of Kosovo and the Republic of Albania, was a special and beautiful feeling. I grew up with a deep love for Albania, just like all the Albanians of Kosovo. This love passed down from generation to generation. I am delighted that this book, which elaborates on such an important and timely topic for Kosovo and Albania, has been published in collaboration with colleagues and specialists from both states. The completion of this edited book is therefore the result of intensive, rigorous and systematic collective work.

I am grateful towards the publishing house “Routledge,” its editor Robert Sorsby, and the editor of the “Southeast European Studies Series,” Florian Bieber, for bringing this edited book to fruition. I am also appreciative of the anonymous reviewers whose insightful comments, observations, and reviews greatly enhanced the quality of this volume. I would also like to thank my friends and colleagues Arben Hajrullahu, Armend Bekaj, Bashkim Iseni, Bekim Baliqi, Enika Abazi, Hysni Syla, Pëllumb Kelmendi, and Sidita Kushi, for their inspired conversations and valuable assistance in commenting on and proofreading several chapters, which significantly improved the quality of the book.

In exploring the special relationship between Kosovo and Albania, the book brings together the contributions of recognized and distinguished academics, scholars, and diplomats. I would like to thank all the authors of the book’s chapters for their cooperation and their precious work: Afrim Krasniqi, Bekim Baliqi, Daut Dauti, Fisnik Rexhepi, Miftar Kryeziu, Ramadan Ilazi, Sidita Kushi, and Sylë Ukshini.

Special gratitude goes to the professor Sebastian Santander, director of the Center for International Relations Studies (CEFIR) of the Department of Political Science at the University of Liège (ULiège) in Belgium for his continuous support. I am also thankful to the CEFIR member Robert Dopchie for his help and time in proofreading various chapters of this book.

Special thanks go to Enika Abazi as well, who wrote the foreword of the book with great passion and professionalism. I am also thankful to the professors Albert Doja, Dorina Bërdufi, and Pëllumb Kelmendi, the researcher

Armend Bekaj, and to the ambassador of the Republic of Kosovo to Sweden Shkëndije Geci Sherifi, for their support and endorsements of this book.

Last but not least, I express my heartfelt gratitude to my family for their encouragement and unwavering support in every aspect throughout the completion of this book.

Liridon Lika

1 Introduction

The Historical and Current Socio-Political Contexts of Kosovo–Albania Relations

Liridon Lika

Introduction

This edited book seeks to analyze overall relations between the Republic of Kosovo and the Republic of Albania, particularly after Kosovo's independence, namely for the period between 2008 and 2025. The book is devoted to Kosovo–Albania relations in the following fields: historical, political, economic, cultural, social and human, and security, including the role of the Albanian diaspora, and ambitions for Euro-Atlantic integration. Each chapter will explore one of these characteristics or include some of them in its examination. It is important to note that this edited book will apply the name Kosovo in its English version, just as the institutions of the Republic of Kosovo and the international community refer to the Kosovar state in their communications in the English language. In other words, while in the Albanian language, the name of the Kosovar state is written as Kosova, this edited book will use the English version, Kosovo.

Kosovo and Albania are inhabited by an overwhelming majority of ethnic Albanians. Albanians from both states share a common language, identity, culture, history, and national consciousness. The ties between Kosovo and Albania are therefore deep and extensive (Lika, 2023, p. 18). Albania is Kosovo's biggest political and strategic ally in the Western Balkans. The Western Balkan concept includes six states: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia (Lika, 2024). In North Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Greece, there is also a significant presence of ethnic Albanians that exercise an influence in Kosovo–Albania relations.

The governments of Kosovo and Albania attach particular importance to the development of special relations between the two states. Since 2008, the two countries have signed numerous agreements and memoranda in the political, economic, educational, cultural, and security fields. Albania immediately recognized Kosovo's independence in 2008 and continues to actively cooperate with Kosovo in numerous areas. Albania has opened its embassy in Prishtina, and Kosovo reciprocated with an embassy in Tirana. Kosovo and Albania have dynamic, fraternal, and mutual relations in all aspects and fields,

2 *Kosovo and Albania*

continuously regenerated through political, diplomatic, and economic cooperation. Their bilateral cooperation is guided by shared national interests in deepening political, diplomatic, economic, social and cultural interaction and the common aim of advancing the process of Euro-Atlantic integration. Albania is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and has obtained the status of a candidate country for the European Union (EU) membership, while Kosovo is in its initial steps to become a member of these two international organizations. The objective of the Republic of Kosovo is to increase the number of official international recognitions, to join the United Nations (UN) and the Council of Europe (CoE), as well as to advance like Albania in the path of Euro-Atlantic integration, namely becoming a member of NATO and the EU. Cooperation in foreign policy is highlighted in the Kosovo–Albania strategic partnership agreement of 2014. In 2019, the two countries also signed an agreement on the joint use of embassies and consular services. On the foreign policy level, Albania’s diplomacy has been active in lobbying for the recognition of Kosovo. Many meetings have been held, and several agreements have been signed between the two states with the aim of unifying positions and coordination in foreign policy and diplomacy, but nevertheless there remain challenges in enforcement and application.

Conceptual Framework of a Special Relationship

In the last decades, there has been an exponential increase in the number of publications on Southeast Europe (or the Balkans) in general, including the two states examined here, Kosovo and Albania. In various academic publications on the countries of Southeast Europe and beyond, many theories and concepts have already been applied, such as nationalism and nationhood (Brubaker, 1996), the national question (Smith, 2002), state-building and nation-building (Krasniqi, 2013), national identity (Krasniqi, 2014), kin-states (Gjevori, 2017), collective memory and identity formation (Baliqi, 2021), regional cooperation (Bechev, 2011), European Union (EU) normative power (Manners, 2002) and its limits (Noutcheva, 2009), the scope and limits of the transformative power of EU enlargement (Elbasani, 2013), EU conditionality (Bieber, 2018), Europeanization and state-building as everyday practices (Musliu, 2021), and foreign policy and bilateral relations (Lika, 2023). History, diplomacy, security, national interests, economy, culture, education, and human capital are among the numerous characteristics that bilateral relations entail (Lika, 2023, p. 277). A bilateral relationship is based on reciprocal recognition and diplomatic missions. However, political parties, businesses, civil society, and geopolitical factors, as well as internal and external dynamics, also play a role in the development of bilateral relations. Certain bilateral relations hold greater significance than others. Albania and Kosovo share similar identities and affinities as well as closely linked strategic interests. Indeed, “Kosovo and Albania are much more than just strategic partners” (Lika, 2023, p. 279). Geographical proximity, human interactions, commercial ties, and Euro-Atlantic integration contribute to fostering the

dynamics of cooperation between Kosovo and Albania. Kosovo in particular has received considerable attention from the scholarly community, mostly because of its unique trajectory from war to peace and then independence. This book is built on this literature while offering a novel approach – that of examining the bilateral relations of two brotherly states across a range of disciplines and fields. This book aims to analyze relations between Kosovo and Albania through the concept of a special relationship.

Some scholars of International Relations (IR) have tried to explain what makes relations between some states special and to formulate definitions of the special relationship concept. Geoff R. Berridge and Alan James (2003, p. 251) provide a general definition of a special relationship as: “[o]ne between two states which is sufficiently intimate to result in each doing more for the other than it would do for a third party.” According to Joseph Chinyong Liow (2005, p. 11) “[t]he concept of ‘special relationships’ describes relations between states whose populations share historical and sentimental bonds, and whose leaders impute meaning into their relations on the back of these bonds. Such relationships warrant an almost immutable belief (on the part of their leaders and populations) that they, at least in theory, are meant to share a relationship driven by more than purely material factors.” Ho Ying Chan (2018, p. 1) for his part proposes the following definition: “[t]he meaning of a special relationship is centred on the term ‘special.’ It usually means a quality that is exceptional in a positive sense. Consequently, a special relationship between two states is generally being understood as a close friendship.” In a special relationship, the sentimental expressions of closeness are evident, strong, and important (Chan, 2018, p. 28). Moreover, Kristin Haugevik (2018) argues that special relationships are social processes constituted and maintained through linguistic representations and bilateral interaction practices. A special relationship between two states is a diplomatic relationship that is particularly significant and solid. Furthermore, a special relationship between two states is shared when two sources of closeness overlap, namely that of the two states’ common identities and common strategic interests (Chan, 2018, p. 5 and p. 11). On the one hand,

[c]ommon identities of two states are derived from their shared culture, common language, historical ties or shared political values and institutions. Common strategic interests of two states, on the other hand, mean the two states rely on each other’s material presence for survival.
(Chan, 2018, p. 24)

As Chan expanded:

[c]ommon identities of two states sharing a special relationship spawn their mutual sentimental expressions of closeness. The sentimental associations, combine with the two states’ mutual sense of closeness engendered by their common strategic interests, result in the two states sharing an understanding that their relationship is *closer* than their

other bilateral ties. The shared understanding, in turn, stirs up the two states' respective *expectation* that their relationship *should be* closer than their bilateral ties with others. Such an expectation leads to a higher intensity of interactions between the two states as compared with that of their other bilateral relations.

(Chan, 2018, pp. 57–58)

The notion of a special relationship is usually used to characterize the specific bilateral ties between some states. For example, this term is used to refer to the relationship between Austria and Germany, Romania and Moldova, the United States and the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada, or the United States and Israel. However, although the concept of a special relationship is commonly used in such cases in international relations, in this book, this notion should be particularly understood in the context of the identities of the Southeast European states, including Kosovo and Albania.

The concept of a special relationship is relevant and insightful to mobilize in the context of two independent states such as Kosovo and Albania that share unique ties through a common ethnicity, history, national consciousness, memory, language, culture, and fraternal relations. Several authors have used the concept of special relationships to describe relations between Kosovo and Albania (Krasniqi, 2023; Lika, 2023, p. 279; Visoka, 2018, p. 211). This notion was notably mobilized by Afrim Krasniqi in a book chapter published in 2023 and titled “Kosovo and Albania, a Special Relationship: Retrospectives and Challenges Toward the Future.” Both states have strong and vibrant relations. As Afrim Krasniqi (2023, p. 55) points out:

[t]he dynamics between Kosovo and Albania hardly fall under the category of international relations; they are intense dealings between two kindred states of the same essence, boiling down to intimate relations marked by important and longstanding differences. This peculiar interaction begs to differ from the relations of any other state with Kosovo.

Kosovo–Albania bilateral relations are a rapport beyond statehood. This relationship is special not only because of the reasons mentioned above but also because of its geopolitical context. Both countries have experienced the threat of expansionism and domination by neighboring countries throughout their history. In this sense,

[b]oth countries consider the verdict of the London Conference (1913) on the creation of what ended up becoming a truncated Albanian state, as a historical injustice, as what was slated to become the current Republic of Albania was bound to leave out the territories of Kosovo and other Albanian-speaking areas accounting for over a half of the Albanian nation, and arguably the most well-to-do and economically active part of it.

(Krasniqi, 2023, p. 55)

Kosovo and Albania are two brother states. Every important event in Kosovo has an impact on Albania and vice versa. “Therefore, the bilateral rapports between the two countries are that of a strategic and special relationship” (Lika, 2023, p. 279). In 2008, during his visit to Albania four months after Kosovo’s independence, the then Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo, Hashim Thaçi, in his speech in the Parliament of Albania, declared,

Kosovo and Albania are two states with independent state identities, but as Albanians we are one nation, we have one language and one culture. Kosovo and Albania, as two independent states, have one goal and one vision: integration into NATO and the European Union.

(Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo, 2008)

Albania considers supporting Kosovo as a national and constitutional responsibility, as well as a political priority, which contributes to increasing the influence of the Albanian factor in Southeast Europe. Kosovo also considers Albania as a natural ally that contributes to promoting its interests. The priority of the foreign policies of the two states is to deepen the relations between them. Kosovo and Albania have adopted their foreign policies in accordance with their strategic interests, centering in particular on NATO and EU membership. Both states’ common vision is Euro-Atlantic integration and common alliances, especially with the United States. Regional cooperation and good neighborly relations are a precondition for states aspiring to become EU members. Therefore, Kosovo and Albania are members of several regional initiatives that seek to promote closer regional cooperation, such as the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP), the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), and the Berlin Process.

The contribution offered by this edited volume falls within the remit of exploring relations between Kosovo and Albania. In that sense, the book presents an innovative approach, as this has not been done before in such a systematic, academic, and in-depth manner. The relations between Kosovo and Albania after 2008 are scantily addressed within the existing academic literature. In both states, there are few academic publications available that specifically cover this topic. Indeed, this is one of the first books to analyze Kosovo–Albania relations since Kosovo’s independence, namely for the period between 2008 and 2025.

Kosovo–Albania Relations in the Historical Context

The Albanians (*Shqiptarët* in Albanian) are an indigenous people of Southeast Europe. They are the direct descendants of the Illyrians (*Ilirët* in Albanian) (Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, Instituti i Historisë, 2002; Stipçeviq, 2002, pp. 70–75; Castellan, 2004, p. 21; Métais, 2006, p. 98), who themselves, according to many researchers, descend from the Pelasgians (*Pellazgët* in Albanian) (Wassa, 1879; Frashëri, 2013, pp. 15–19; Vlora Falaski, 2004;

De Rapper, 2009, p. 119; Aref, 2016). The Illyrians were one of the largest peoples of Southeast Europe who historically inhabited the entire western and central part of the region, a much larger territory than the Albanian-speaking space of today (Wilkes, 1992, pp. 94–10; Stipčević, 2002, pp. 22–36). The presence of Illyrians appears in written works dating from the mid-5th century Before the Common Era (BCE) (Métais, 2006, p. 94). They lived across more than seventy tribes, the most important of which were the Ardians, the Dardanians, the Dalmatians, the Encheleians, the Labeates, the Libournians, the Molossians, and the Taulantians (Métais, 2006, p. 94). The combination of historical sources and the results of archaeology, ethnology, and linguistics has shown that there is a permanent continuity between the Illyrians and the Albanians (Stipčević, 2002, pp. 70–75; Doja, 1999, p. 3). The Dardanians (*Dardanët* in Albanian) were one of the most famous and largest Illyrian tribes (Castellan, 2002, p. 21; Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, Instituti i Historisë, 2002, pp. 143–152). In 2023, at the archaeological site of Ulpiana near Prishtina, during excavations, a team of archaeologists found a monumental inscription of historical importance – dedicated to the Emperor Justinian of Dardanian origin – where the name of Dardania was mentioned (Uka, 2023). Kosovo and its surroundings constitute the historic heart of ancient Dardania (Shukriu, 1996, pp. 15–19). Even today, Albanians prefer to use the old name Dardania instead of Kosovo.

Due to their geostrategic position, the territories of the Illyrian-Albanians have been forcefully coveted by various foreign actors. But despite the Roman occupation, Slavic invasions, and Ottoman occupation and domination, the Illyrian-Albanians preserved their own ethnolinguistic identity and continuously lived in Kosovo and Albania where they fought for national liberation and independence. Like other peoples of Southeast Europe, the Albanians have endured a long period of Ottoman domination lasting more than five centuries. During this period, they made constant efforts to achieve freedom and independence. In the 19th century, Albanian patriots became more organized to create a modern Albanian state in Southeast Europe. From 1878 to 1912, they rose against the Ottoman Empire (Skendi, 1967). Kosovo Albanians played a key role in these uprisings. Kosovo was the center of the Albanian independence movement (Biberaj, 2014, p. 13). On June 10, 1878, the Albanian League of Prizren, which was a political-military national liberation movement, was held in Kosovo. In other words, the Kosovo Albanians were a most determined force within a political and cultural movement that spearheaded the creation of an independent Albanian state (Hoxhaj, 2016, p. 21).

Following several years of efforts and wars against Ottoman domination, on November 28, 1912, the Albanians declared the independence of Albania. The new Albanian state was to incorporate all ethnolinguistic territories inhabited mainly by Albanians and inscribed in geographical as well as historical continuity, namely, the four vilayets (administrative units): Kosovo, Shkodër, Manastir, and Janinë (Qosja, 1995, p. 80; Frashëri, 1997,

pp. 52–53). Nevertheless, it was during this period – while Albanians had already been fighting for years against the Ottoman domination and declared an independent Albanian state in 1912 – that Kosovo was conquered and militarily occupied by Serbia (Malcolm, 2002, pp. 239–263). In this context, the great European powers of the time (Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Italy, Great Britain, and Russia) met at the Conference of Ambassadors in London, which, on July 29, 1913, recognized the Albanian state. But following pressure in particular from Russia and its efforts to increase its influence in Southeast Europe through the territorial expansion of the Slavic and orthodox states, Albanian lands were arbitrarily divided, thus leaving Kosovo under the violent occupation of Serbia and later the former Yugoslavia (Castellan, 2002, pp. 53–56). Thus, even today, there is among the Albanians a feeling of historical injustice, even of national tragedy, because although an Albanian state was born, the great European powers left more than half of the territories populated mainly or exclusively by the Albanians outside Albania (Biberaj, 2018, p. 6; Lika, 2018, pp. 31–32). From then on and throughout the 20th century, the Albanians contested these borders, imposed arbitrarily and outside of historical and factual realities on the ground (Qosja, 1995, pp. 75–107; Iseni, 2008, pp. 294–295). Thus, the question of Kosovo existed as such for almost a century, until its independence on February 17, 2008.

Kosovo–Albania Relations in Kosovo’s Post-Independence Period

The path to Kosovo’s freedom and independence was long and difficult, and several generations of Albanians sacrificed themselves to achieve this ideal. The creation of the Kosovar state went through a long historical process that began several decades prior, namely since the occupation of Kosovo by Serbia in 1912–1913. Indeed, throughout the 20th century, despite the physical borders that separated ethnic Albanians, there were continuous attempts at rapprochement and socio-cultural collaboration between the Albanians of Kosovo and Albania. Kosovo Albanians used peaceful and armed means to free themselves from Serbian/Yugoslav occupation (Malcolm, 2002, p. 348; Krasniqi, 2007, pp. 62–63; Perritt, 2008, p. 32). The state of Kosovo was born in the context of the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

Kosovo’s efforts for independence were achieved with the help of Albania and Western countries, such as the United States, Germany, Austria, Belgium, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom (UK). It was in close coordination with these countries that the Parliament of Kosovo declared independence on February 17, 2008. Arben Hajrullahu (2021, p. 15) underlines that Kosovo’s statehood is based on a civic approach. Article 3, paragraph 1, of the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo (2008) mentions that: “[t]he Republic of Kosovo is a multi-ethnic society consisting of Albanian and other Communities, governed democratically with full respect for the rule of law through its legislative, executive and judicial institutions.” Regardless of the

fact that Article 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo officially defines the country as a multi-ethnic society, Kosovo is very homogeneous, as according to the 2011 census, 93% of the country's total population is Albanian (ASK, 2013, p. 11). After Albania, Kosovo contains the highest number of Albanians in the Western Balkans, followed by North Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro. After the end of the war in Kosovo in 1999, and especially after Kosovo's independence in 2008, a pan-Albanian cultural and economic space has emerged (Pettifer and Vickers, 2007; Judah, 2008, p. 122). Kosovo's independence has created new geopolitical circumstances in the Western Balkans. Kosovo, Albania, and Albanians in general have significantly increased their influence in this part of the European continent.

Since 2008, the Kosovar state has consolidated its internal and external sovereignty, both *de facto* and *de jure* (Lika, 2023; Lika, 2016a, pp. 536–539). Internally, Kosovo has created and consolidated its own state institutions and has gradually extended its sovereignty over its entire territory. As for the external aspect, Kosovo has obtained wide international recognition. To date, the Republic of Kosovo is officially recognized by 119 states, including the most powerful and richest states in the world. In addition, Kosovo has become a full member of many international political, economic, security, cultural, and sports organizations and institutions. Furthermore, the passport of the Republic of Kosovo is recognized by more than 170 countries.

Bilateral relations with the Republic of Albania take an important place in the strategic objectives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora of the Republic of Kosovo. Indeed, Kosovo gives particular importance to its relations with Albania. This observation is also found on the website of the Embassy of the Republic of Kosovo in Albania:

Kosovo and Albania have excellent bilateral relations, having no open-disputable issues. The cooperation between the two countries is considered excellent and fraternal.

Bilateral cooperation is guided by the common interest to deepen the political, economic and cultural interaction and to advance the integration process in the European Union, as a fundamental project in the service of peace, stability and development.

The relations between the two countries, based on their nature, have acquired a new dimension, that of Strategic Partnership, which paves the way for the institutionalization of bilateral relations in every field.

The excellent relations between the Republic of Kosovo and the Republic of Albania, in addition to the principle dimension, are also supported by the numerous concrete cooperation that the two countries have built over the years. In this context, Kosovo and Albania have signed the most bilateral agreements compared to other regional states, with special emphasis on vital segments such as economy, education and culture, and also a series of initiatives are in process which regulate

procedurally, permanent cooperation in important development fields between the two countries.

(Embassy of the Republic of Kosovo in Albania, 2024)

The Republic of Kosovo therefore seeks to strengthen its relations with the Republic of Albania within the framework of Euro-Atlantic integration (EU and NATO) but as two independent states. Relations between Kosovo and Albania are therefore influenced by the framework and context of Euro-Atlantic integration. The shared historical, cultural, and linguistic ties between Kosovo and Albania, as well as their shared values and aspirations for Euro-Atlantic integration, contribute to their close partnership (Lika, 2016b).

The website of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania (2024) describes the general characteristics of relations with the Republic of Kosovo as follows:

[r]elations between Albania and Kosovo are excellent and brotherly. Bilateral cooperation is guided by the national interest to deepen the political, economic, social and cultural intercommunion as well as to boost the integration process towards the European Union, as a fundamental unifying project of the Albanian space in the service of its peace, stability and prosperity.

Albania has constitutional obligations toward Kosovo. The preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Albania (1998) refers to “[...] the centuries-old aspiration of the Albanian people for national identity and unity [...]”, and Article 8, paragraph 1, mentions that “[t]he Republic of Albania protects the national rights of the Albanian people who live outside its borders.” Unlike Albania, Kosovo introduced into Article 1, paragraph 3 of its Constitution the following sentence: “[t]he Republic of Kosovo shall have no territorial claims against, and shall seek no union with, any State or part of any State” (Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, 2008). Officially, the young state therefore has no territorial claims toward its neighboring countries and does not seek to attach itself to another state, but it wishes to continue existing as an independent state. Indeed, unlike the Constitution of the Republic of Albania, which is a genuinely Albanian political result, the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo is a product of international consensus across various third-party actors, Kosovo Albanians, and minorities in Kosovo – a characteristic that describes the differences in the above definitions (Krasniqi, 2023, p. 57).

The idea of unification between Kosovo and Albania is always present in both countries, especially in television debates and among the citizens. In Albania, around two-thirds of respondents supported the idea of unification between Kosovo and Albania into one single state: 68% in 2009 and

63% in 2010 (Gallup Balkan Monitor, 2010, pp. 47–48). Among Kosovo Albanians, there was an increase in support for unification between 2008 and 2010, from 54% in 2008 to 81% in 2010 (Gallup Balkan Monitor, 2010, pp. 47–48). According to a barometer in Euronews Albania published on April 5, 2024, should there be a referendum, the majority of citizens of Kosovo and Albania would vote in favor of national unification. Specifically, 82.9% of respondents in Albania and 70.6% in Kosovo would vote in favor of the unification of both countries (Euronews Albania, 2024). Although a large majority of Albanians in Albania and Kosovo support the unification, the governments of the Republic of Kosovo and the Republic of Albania promote the existence and maintenance of two independent states integrated into Euro-Atlantic structures (Krasniqi, 2023). This is due particularly to the pressure exerted by the international community, which does not currently support unification between Kosovo and Albania (Peci, Demjaha, and Ukshini, 2020). Currently, the priority of Kosovo and Albania is the further consolidation of Kosovo's statehood, the increase in the number of recognitions, and its membership in all international organizations, including the UN.

Albania continues to support Kosovo in all areas. Albania remains Kosovo's traditional and strategic ally on the path to its further international consolidation. Albania's support was and still remains crucial for Kosovo, especially regarding new international recognitions. Albania constitutes the worthiest representative of Kosovo in every forum, institution or international organization, in which the young state is not yet a member:

[t]he participation of Kosovo in regional initiatives and organizations and its aim to increase the number of international recognitions, both in the bilateral and multilateral framework, is an added value to the investment for peace and security in our region and beyond. Albania will continue to support Kosovo in its aspiration. Meanwhile, the progress of our two countries in their path towards European Union integration processes constitutes another area of cooperation and interaction.

(Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania, 2024)

In fact, Albania is the only country in the Western Balkan region with which Kosovo has the most intense relations. These relations come from overall bilateral activity in terms of meetings and visits at the presidential level, prime ministers and foreign ministers, as well as those from economic and commercial activities between the two countries (KIPRED, 2014, pp. 35–36). In other words, as Gëzim Visoka (2018, p. 211) emphasizes: “Kosovo and Albania enjoy a special relationship including free cross-border travelling, extensive trade and cultural exchanges, periodic joint meetings between governments, joint consular services, and close cooperation on foreign, security, and regional affairs.” Starting in 2014, both countries have established a

tradition of annual joint government meetings to boost cooperation in many areas. In January 2014, in the historic city of Prizren (Kosovo), the first joint meeting between the Government of the Republic of Kosovo and the Government of the Republic of Albania was held. This meeting ended with the signing of a Document on Cooperation and Strategic Partnership between the two countries as well as other agreements between the two governments. A year later, in March 2015, with the slogan “One land – One people – One dream,” the second joint meeting between the Governments of the two states took place in Tirana (Prime Minister’s Office of the Republic of Albania, 2015). These regular meetings show that the two countries continue and wish to further strengthen their all-round cooperation. As Afrim Krasniqi (2023, p. 72) mentions,

Albania and Kosovo are two countries with similar identities and affinities and closely related strategic interests. Each country is much more than just a strategic partner to the other. Together Kosovo and Albania have a clear potential to contribute to democratic stability and peace in the Balkans. Albania is closer to Kosovo more than any other neighboring country. Kosovo represent for Albania the denied part of the same nation.

However, Krasniqi (2023, p. 72) also underlines:

[n]onetheless, neither Kosovo nor Albania is currently ready to advance nationalist projects or accept the protectionist behavior of the other. The aspirations of reunification in a single country or a joint national space have been overtaken by the Euro-Atlantic aspirations but are not ruled out that in the future, they may find a way into the programs of the main political parties of either country.

Beyond political and diplomatic collaborations, socio-cultural cooperation between the two countries is also quite robust. In 2012, a common primer for Albanian schoolchildren from Kosovo and Albania was promoted in Prizren on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Albania’s independence. Since 2014, the Governments of the two countries have also decided to establish a common cultural calendar and a platform for the conservation and promotion of Albanian cultural heritage. Furthermore, Kosovo and Albania have developed a solid cooperation pattern in the areas of economy and trade. However, despite a continuous increase in exchanges in the last years, several obstacles to a higher level of economic integration still persist. Technical and non-tariff barriers, the concentration of economic flows in a few products, and weak structural integration of economies are only some of the shortcomings for developing further within this arena. Many agreements have been signed to provide incentives for better economic integration, although data shows that effective implementation is not satisfactory.

In terms of transport infrastructure, the two countries have conducted several symbolic and strategic projects. The first major project carried out between the two states was the construction of a new highway, known as the nation's highway, which connects the respective capitals. Travel time was significantly reduced, and the quality of the highway promoted growth in economic exchange. Another equally important economic project linking Kosovo and Albania was the 2015 inauguration of a 400 KW interconnection line, better known as the energy highway, with a length of 241 kilometers. This line is considered very important for the exchange of electrical energy between the two countries. In the coming months, there are plans to begin the construction of a railway that will connect the two countries. The two states also actively cooperate in the field of tourism. For example, every summer, more than 700,000 Kosovo Albanians spend their vacations on the coasts of Albania. In other words, relations between Kosovo and Albania are fraternal, excellent, and intense (KIPRED, 2014, pp. 23–24). However, the majority of the citizens of the two states say that Kosovo–Albania relations are not sufficiently developed, and there is still a lot of work to be done for further consolidation (Klan Kosova, 2024). In fact, there remains great potential for additional strategic cooperation between the two states. As Afrim Krasniqi (2023, p. 73) emphasizes,

[t]he transition from preferential political relations and personal influences to institutional partnerships will boost the exchanges between Kosovo and Albania and enable for a common trade, cultural, and national space, with essentially the same or similar priorities, pointing at a joint EU integration. In this perspective, the two countries will have a vital need for an active United States and EU presence, to improve the standards of democracy and of the rule of law.

Book's Relevance, Purpose, and Methodology

This edited book has significant relevance. Until now, very few studies have analyzed Kosovo–Albania relations since the independence of Kosovo in 2008. The existing literature on this topic is therefore neither extensive nor up to date (Krasniqi, 2023, p. 56). This edited book, thus, seeks to develop knowledge on this important theme. This book is particularly important because it enables scholars to see how relations between Kosovo and Albania – the citizens of both states that share the same origin and language – have evolved in this new context in the Western Balkans since Kosovo's independence in 2008. Relations between Kosovo and Albania remain an interesting case study within the fields of IR, Southeast European studies, and Albanian studies. In everyday dynamics, Kosovo and Albania interact with the EU, NATO, the United States, and many European countries through their foreign policies and bilateral relations in order to ensure their security, development, and economic prosperity. Kosovo–Albania relations are therefore

directly connected to the structures and processes of Euro-Atlantic integration, which has been defined by both states as the highest foreign policy priority.

This edited book addresses the following core research questions: how do Kosovo–Albania relations function? What are the key defining features of their relations, particularly since Kosovo’s independence in 2008? And what factors have shaped Kosovo–Albania relations? These are important research questions, with relevance for scholarly understanding of relations between Kosovo and Albania. There are also questions that the literature has largely left unaddressed. Therefore, this edited book will contribute added value to the academic literature. Moreover, the goal of this edited book is to bring together scholars and diplomats from Kosovo and Albania to analyze relations between both states. To that purpose, this edited book relies on the collaboration of many professors, researchers, and diplomats within the Albanian global community. The book moves beyond dominant Western and third-party perspectives on Kosovo–Albania relations and instead centers local and indigenous voices on this theme. By providing original and relevant analyses, the authors of the chapters effectively contribute to a better understanding of Kosovo–Albania relations, enriching the existing scientific literature. In other words, this edited book is intended to nourish the scientific literature on this topic. The book provides an up-to-date overview of bilateral relations between Kosovo and Albania. It offers useful insights into the state of affairs and core areas of bilateral cooperation. In this sense, the book provides valuable information for those wanting to understand in much greater detail the core areas in which Kosovo and Albania work together. Each chapter is authored by scholars and diplomats who are well-positioned to narrate specific sectoral politics and relations between the two states, thus offering a new local perspective, which is often overlooked as these discussions are often dominated by external scholars. In sum, the book clearly fills a gap in the literature and provides an in-depth analysis of relations between two Southeast European countries with a unique bond between them. The analysis is multifaceted and approaches the core themes from an eclectic mix of disciplines and fields.

This edited book combines different methodological and disciplinary approaches in order to present a diversity of perspectives, objectives, and trajectories in Kosovo–Albania relations. As for the methodology and data used in the book, each chapter has adopted an autonomous methodological approach. The chapters are based on qualitative and comparative analysis, as well as primary data while being informed by a comprehensive survey of the relevant scientific literature. They are based on various sources, such as books, book chapters, and scientific articles, as well as official documents, declarations, statements, reports, interviews, global and regional databases, and press articles. In other words, the book is based on a qualitative and comparative methodology that combines a historical, contemporary, and analytical understanding of the interactions between Kosovo and Albania.

The book's strength lies in the multidisciplinary approach and the in-depth qualitative analysis between the two countries. The volume, therefore, provides theoretical and empirical material for the broader field of Southeast European studies. While this book does not seek to generate new theories, its main objective is to apply and adapt existing conceptual frameworks to the context of Kosovo and Albania while delivering an original analysis of the states' relations. In this sense, the concept of a special relationship mobilized in this book ties the chapters together, as well as relates them to the existing scholarly debates. The chapters are also all rich in evidence on the subject matter they cover.

To realize this edited book, a call for chapters was launched in April 2023. This call garnered the interest of several authors of the chapters of this book. In parallel, due to their knowledge and competencies in relevant topics, a number of authors were personally invited to join the project. In fact, my goal was to make the book as comprehensive as possible. For practical organizational reasons, and due to limited space, it was not feasible, in a single book, to analyze all aspects of Kosovo–Albania relations. Because of this, I made the choice of selecting some of the most important topics. As the editor of this book, I made the choice to undertake this scientific activity through a process of openness and interdisciplinarity by involving researchers and diplomats specializing in Political Science, IR, European Studies, Security Studies, History, and Anthropology. Each of the chapters featured in this publication addresses specific topics. However, they all have a common object of study, that of Kosovo–Albania relations.

This edited book brings together contributions from young and senior researchers and diplomats, who aim to present original studies on Kosovo–Albania relations. To do so, the authors articulate in their chapters both theoretical and empirical approaches. They thus aim to contribute to the enrichment of academic debates and to the development of knowledge around Kosovo–Albania relations. The specific case studies presented in this book fall within very specific periods and contexts. The contributions of this book show that Kosovo and Albania have made strides in further consolidating their relations in all aspects. This book argues that by interacting actively and developing solid relations, Kosovo and Albania have contributed to the further rapprochement of the Albanians of both countries.

Kosovo–Albania Relations from Different Angles

The objective of this book is to present different angles of analysis of Kosovo–Albania relations. In his chapter, Liridon Lika examines the involvement of the great European powers in Southeast Europe, which arbitrarily delineated the borders of Albania during the Conference of Ambassadors in London (1913) on the basis of the balance of power and the geopolitical game of alliances. A sovereign Albanian state was clearly recognized, but more than half of the Albanian population and their territories were left

outside its borders by the great European powers. Therefore, the Albanians contested the new Southeast European borders. Lika shows that throughout the 20th century, Albanians made continuous efforts for unification between Kosovo and Albania. He also emphasizes that when Kosovo became an independent state in 2008, its borders were established based on the *uti possidetis juris* principle. However, several surveys illustrate that the majority of Albanians in Kosovo and Albania are in favor of unification between the two states. Nevertheless, in the present international geopolitical context and due to international pressure, the unification of Albanians is not currently an official strategic objective for the Governments of Kosovo and Albania. The official intentions of Kosovo and Albania are guided by the ambition to join the EU as soon as possible. However, Lika concludes that the debate on the future relations between Kosovo and Albania continues in both states.

In his chapter, Afrim Krasniqi offers an analysis of the last two decades of Kosovo–Albania relations. Both states exchanged experiences and chose governing systems and electoral systems, and formed political systems with key differences from each other. In his chapter, the author deals with the commonalities and peculiarities in the governing and political systems, the electoral system, and the main constitutional and legal basis. Krasniqi answers the question of whether mutual influences have strategic effects, whether the models followed have yielded the expected results, and whether the Albanian model applied in Kosovo and vice versa could be a more efficient choice. He focuses on several important topics by making comparisons between Kosovo and Albania. Specifically, Krasniqi analyzes the impact of history in shaping the system of governance, the central and distinctive characteristics of the two constitutional models, the models of representative democracy, the democratic progress of the two countries, and the mutual influences and the role of the international factor.

Ramadan Ilazi and Fisnik Rexhepi provide a comprehensive analysis of security cooperation between Kosovo and Albania, tracing its evolution from informal alliances during the Kosovo War in the 1990s to formal agreements during the period of international administration of Kosovo after 1999, and post-Kosovo’s independence in 2008. The authors highlight the deep-rooted ethnic, cultural, and historical ties that form the basis of this relationship, emphasizing the strategic significance of the Kosovo–Albania partnership in ensuring regional stability and advancing European integration aspirations. Despite over 30 agreements aimed at enhancing security cooperation, a gap between formal agreements and operational reality is identified, particularly influenced by political discord between the Prime Ministers of Kosovo and Albania, Albin Kurti and Edi Rama, respectively. This disagreement has notably impacted operational cooperation in the security sector, demonstrating a disconnect between political aspirations and practical implementation. Ilazi and Rexhepi suggest that overcoming these challenges and leveraging opportunities for deeper integration may require adopting a Nordic model of

security cooperation, emphasizing interoperability, and aligning with EU security objectives.

In his chapter, Sylë Ukshini studies the political dynamics between Kosovo and Albania, highlighting their distinctive relationship across bilateral, regional, and European dimensions. Rooted in a shared history, culture, and language, the two states have endeavored to fortify their political, economic, and cultural bonds since Kosovo's independence in 2008. Albania, a traditional supporter of Kosovo's independence, has persistently advocated for Kosovo's global recognition. The author shows that from 2014 onward, Kosovo and Albania have established joint governmental meetings to explore collaboration across diverse realms. Nevertheless, he mentions that economic issues have intermittently strained relations, manifested in trade disputes and discord over dealings with Serbia and regional initiatives like the Open Balkan. Yet Ukshini underlines that despite these challenges, Kosovo and Albania exhibit an increasing commitment to Euro-Atlantic alignment and acknowledge the necessity of addressing common issues within the framework of European integration.

Bekim Baliqi explores the relationship between Kosovo and Albania, examining how historical, political, and cultural factors have shaped these relations. He investigates how these relations have influenced state-building and identity-formation processes in Southeast Europe. The author delves into these aspects by applying Rogers Brubaker's theoretical concept of the "triadic relational nexus" and David Smith's "quadratic nexus" models. Within these frameworks, emphasis is placed on elements such as collective memory, national imagery, and statehood, which will help to understand variations in this relational nexus. By examining Kosovo–Albania relations, Baliqi argues that historically, Albania played a crucial role in the Kosovo Albanians' national identity and historical memory. However, the author mentions that this role has been reduced recently following Kosovo's achievement of its independence in 2008. Drawing parallels with case studies such as Austria–Germany relations, Baliqi aims to uncover the main challenges and dynamics in Kosovo–Albania relations from the perspective of identity (re-)construction. He highlights the importance of historical context, statehood, self-perception, and the role of collective memories in shaping national identity.

In his chapter, Daut Dauti analyzes the meaning and difference between "Ethnic Albania" and "Greater Albania." He explores the birth of Albanian nationalism and its role as an ideology in political matters. The author has employed a historical approach that started in 1878 and continues to this day. He also presents a short history of the appearance of Albanian nationalism in the context of the Congress of Berlin from 1878 to 1912 which marks the year of the Balkan wars and the formation of the Albanian state. Furthermore, Dauti discusses the period 1913–1945 by looking at the ways, capacity, and impact of the development of Albanian nationalism in former Yugoslavia and Albania itself. The period 1945–1990, the era of the

communist systems of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) and the Socialist Republic of Albania, shows why Kosovo has remained a hotbed of Albanian nationalism. The post-communist period highlights the disintegration of SFRY, the war, and the independence of Kosovo. The transformation of Albanian nationalism under these new circumstances takes central stage within Dauti's chapter. The author's discussion is built on questions and answers regarding the role that Albanian nationalism played in relations between Kosovo and Albania.

In her chapter, Sidita Kushi explores gender relations in Kosovo and Albania. Applying a comparative approach and a range of descriptive statistics, she assesses the degree of women's political and economic participation relative to men and delves into the factors that may prompt divergent outcomes across the two countries, which share similarities in ethno-cultural and regional dynamics. Some key factors that the author explores include the historical legacies of communism in Albania, Kosovo's post-independence transition, cultural and religious structures and norms, economic trajectories, and the impact of third-party institutions, such as EU-led gender initiatives. Moreover, the author outlines Kosovo–Albania state and civil society collaborations on gender initiatives. Kushi further introduces broader measures of gender equality and participation for the Western Balkans and Europe at large. She concludes that Albania performs better than the regional and European averages on women's economic empowerment and participation, while Kosovo lags behind in women's labor market participation, business engagement, and property access. Yet Kosovo has made progress on women's political participation. However, Kushi underlines that both Albania and Kosovo measure poorly on women's physical integrity, norms on domestic violence, and private sphere roles, even with strengthened egalitarian laws.

In his chapter, Miftar Kryeziu examines the role of the Albanian diaspora, particularly the communities who live and operate in Western Europe, as impacting Kosovo–Albania relations. Albanian diaspora is a term that includes all Albanians who live and operate outside native Albanian lands, namely Kosovo, Albania, and other Balkan or Southeast European countries. The author studies the organization, functioning, and actions of the diaspora through various associations of the Albanian diaspora in the host countries. These associations aim to protect Albanian cultural and linguistic identity as well as to promote the values of the Albanian-speaking population in the countries of emigration. Their contribution is also visible in Kosovo–Albania relations. Kryeziu shows that even though the Albanian diaspora is diverse, with its own peculiarities and characteristics, as well as resulting from different periods of migration, it tends to act as a single body in matters of development and promotion of Kosovo–Albania relations. The Albanian diaspora has regular communication and cooperation with Kosovo and Albania and is a promoter of deepening the relations between the two states. In other words, in addition to the political, economic, and cultural contribution, the Albanian diaspora is emotionally very connected to the countries of origin.

In the concluding chapter, Liridon Lika presents a synthesis of the different contributions. Thus, the author provides an overall conclusion to the edited book by summarizing the main lessons to be learned from the empirical studies. Lika aims to provide an overview and an outlook of the Kosovo–Albania special relationship and present the results of this research on Kosovo–Albania relations from 2008 to 2025. He emphasizes that Kosovo and Albania have consolidated their close ties. Both states pursue Euro-Atlantic integration and common alliances, namely with the United States, NATO, and the EU.

This edited book constitutes a comprehensive analysis that draws together mainly a group of scholars and diplomats from Kosovo and Albania. The book fills a major research gap by providing a timely, high-quality scholarly account of Kosovo–Albania relations. In sum, this book should be of key interest to a wide-ranging readership comprised of scholars, diplomats, practitioners, and students in the fields of Political Science, IR, History, Southeast European studies, Kosovo and Albania’s foreign policies, and Albanian studies in general.

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