

Kosovo's Sports Diplomacy

ACCESSING THE
INTERNATIONAL,
BUILDING THE
NATIONAL



GEORGE KYRIS
JUAN MANUEL MONTORO

Kosovo's Sports Diplomacy

**ACCESSING THE
INTERNATIONAL,
BUILDING THE
NATIONAL**

**GEORGE KYRIS
JUAN MANUEL MONTORO**

Title:

Kosovo's Sports Diplomacy:

Accessing the international,
building the national

Author:

George Kyris
Juan Manuel Montoro

Published by:

Kosovo Foundation for Open
Society

Prishtina,
November 2022

This publication has been
produced as part of the Kosovo
Research and Analysis Fellowship
(KRAF), an initiative of the Kosovo
Foundation for Open Society
(KFOS).



Kosovo's Sports Diplomacy: Accessing the international, building the national

1

Introduction

p.9

2

Sovereign Statehood

p.11

3

The Relevance of
International Sports

p.15

4

Kosovo's Participation to
International Sports

p.19



Kosovo's National Identity
and International Sports

p.27



Conclusions and
To the Future

p.30



Recommendations

p.31



References

p.33

1 Introduction

Recognition is mostly seen as a legal or political process occurring bilaterally between states. Such legal and political understandings of recognition help us explore the way in which states emerge (or not) as units of the international system. With reference to Kosovo, they help us understand Kosovo's place in the diplomacy of international relations but, equally, they also create two major limitations in our understanding of statehood matters. First, they neglect the significance of Kosovo's quest for international existence outside strictly intergovernmental contexts, such as through cultural or sports links (e.g. FIFA, IOC). Secondly and related, they do not help us understand ways in which Kosovo acts like a state, despite its lack of general recognition.

This is the gap that this report addresses, by zooming on Kosovo's sport policies and participation globally and in relation to recognition. In this context, we explore:

1. How has Kosovo participated in international football and other sport events? What are the opportunities and the challenges related to recognition issues?
2. While taking part in those events, to what extent is Kosovo exercising a specific kind of sovereignty that enables it to act as a state and/ or be considered as such by states or their citizens?
3. How can Kosovo benefit from this in order to improve its external image but also a sense of belonging for its society more internally?

These questions are important for understanding the way in which sports, and consequently other cultural activities, and statehood interplay in Kosovo, which, in turn, allows us a fuller understanding of the complexities of statehood. Not only because Kosovo's effort at taking part in sports and other culture-related activities are quite substantial but also because they have mostly escaped analyses, which tend to concentrate on more high politics themes.

Furthermore, the question of sports also holds the potential for breaking down stereotypes that might exist between Kosovo and others, especially non-recognisers¹.

In answering these questions, we build on existing research on recognition and sports diplomacy² and on insights from more flexible forms of acceptance and assessment of other cases that, like Kosovo, do not enjoy full recognition (e.g. Taiwan, Palestine, New Caledonia, Scotland, Hong Kong)³. Our historical analysis draws on data collected via a combination of desk research from existing bibliography and open-source data available, documents issued by key stakeholders (e.g. Olympic Study Centre, and Kosovo's sporting federations) and interviews with eight decision-makers both on the side of Kosovo's sports and politics and from international sporting governing bodies. Before we present our analysis, the next section offers a preliminary discussion of issues of state recognition, international relations and sports, including with reference to Kosovo. A final section draws on our analysis to offer a set of recommendations for how Kosovo can build on the experience of participating in international sports.

1 Vila Sarriá, P. and Demjaha, A. (2021). "Kosovo and Spain at the EU Level: a Battle of Semantics", Prishtina, Kosovo Foundation for Open Society.

2 E.g. Giulianotti, R. Collison, H. Darnell, S & Howe, D. (2017). "Contested states and the politics of sport: the case of Kosovo – division, development, and recognition", *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* 9(1): 121-136, Black, D. and Peacock, B. (2013). 'Sport and Diplomacy', in Andrew F. Cooper, Jorge Heine, and Ramesh Thakur., (eds), *The Oxford handbook of modern diplomacy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 708-725

3 For a detailed analysis in a comparative basis, see Krasniqi, G. (2018). "Contested territories, liminal polities, performative citizenship: a comparative analysis", *RSC Working Papers*, 13. Available at: <https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/52225>.



Sovereign Statehood

Recognition⁴ is mostly seen as a legal or political process whereby a state recognises a different state through a declaration or through developing diplomatic relations⁵. Such legalistic understandings of recognition are also reflected in the views of policy makers as well as more public accounts. In dealing with Kosovo, for example, the EU has approached recognition as a state competence⁶. Other policy documents emphasise more the importance of international organisations for recognition. For example, according to the Arbitration Commission of the Conference on Yugoslavia (also known as Badinter Arbitration Committee) 'membership of international organisations, bears witness to these states' conviction that the political entity so recognised is a reality'⁷. Similarly, most media accounts of the young-

er state in the world talk of South Sudan, the last member to join the UN. In any case, state recognition is a question of high, inter-governmental politics⁸.

Recognition has also been seen as enabling participation in international relations, whereby the state remains the main actor. It is in this vein that recognition and the ability to develop external diplomatic, economic and other linkages have been seen as different but inter-related dimensions of sovereignty⁹. In simple words, the ability to rule a state over a territory and a population has been seen as related to internal sovereignty, while the recognition of this rule as an external dimension of sovereignty. In this regard, external sovereignty is seen as exogenous but still closely connected to internal sovereignty.

4 Recognition is hereby used as referring to state recognition, in the way in which it has been understood in political science and international relations terms. For a collection of works on the topic see Visoka, G., Newman, E., & Doyle, J., eds. (2019). *Routledge Handbook of State Recognition*, Routledge, Abingdon.

5 Grant, T.D. (2009). "Admission to the United Nations: Charter Article 4 and the Rise of Universal Organization", Brill, p. XX

6 Council of the EU (2008). "General Affairs and External Relations", Brussels, 18 February 2008

7 Ramcharan, B.G., ed. (1997). *The International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia Official Papers*, Volume 2 Hague: Kluwer Law International, p. 1285

8 See also Kyris, G. (2022). 'State recognition and dynamic sovereignty', *European Journal of International Relations* 28 (2): 287-311

9 See for example Thompson, J. E. (1995). "State Sovereignty in International Relations: Bridging the Gap between Theory and Empirical Research", *International Studies Quarterly* 39(2): 213-233; Jackson, R. (2011). *Sovereignty*. Cambridge: Polity

What is more, recognition is important for international relations because it impacts our understanding of which political organisations come to be considered a state and, therefore, who is a member of the international society and who is not. In this sense, recognition has a constitutive function for statehood, since it has been regarded as a prerequisite of state- becoming¹⁰ and the mutual recognition of sovereigns has been seen as the very foundation of a society of states¹¹. Important for our discussion is also that internal sovereignty can be seen as involving an array of capabilities exercised at the international rather than national level, such as the ability to conduct foreign policy¹² and to participate in international fora in the face of increasing globalisation¹³.

But although there is recent evidence that increase in bilateral links could be a preamble of recognition¹⁴, the two, as expressions of external and internal sovereignty respectively, do not always go hand in hand. There are recognised states that remain quite isolated, such as North Korea. Equally, there are others who suffer a severe lack of recognition but which they have managed to partake extensively in international relations, certainly more than one would expect by looking at their recognition. For example, Taiwan is only recognised by a few states, but it has managed to have access to many

international fora and has strong trade and other links with the rest of the world. Here, however, it is important to highlight that, usually, Taiwan is member to these processes not under its preferred constitutional name ('Republic of China', which is disputed by China) but other designations that are acceptable to China, most notably 'Chinese Taipei'. Such a diplomatic flexibility¹⁵ has led to a 'normalisation'¹⁶ of Taiwan and has been assessed by Taiwanese leadership as beneficial for accessing international relations¹⁷ but it is not recognition. In fact, listing Taiwan as Chinese Taipei is an at least implicit non-recognition of statehood claims and, oppositely, a recognition of China's sovereignty over the island. As a result, here, we witness the rather oxymoron scenario whereby a voluntary abandonment of (external) sovereignty as recognition, via accepting non-recognition and the designation 'Chinese Taipei', leads to an increase in (internal) sovereignty, understood as the ability to take part in international relations. There are other similar examples: the confidence building measures supported by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) that allow cars from Transnistria to travel throughout Moldova with neutral plates have been seen as having the potential of strengthening Transnistria's internal sovereignty in practice¹⁸.

10 Giddens, A. (1984). *The Constitution of Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

11 Reus-Smit, C (1997). "The Constitutional Structure of International Society and the Nature of Fundamental Institutions." *International Organization*, 51:4, 555-89

12 Chayes, A. and Handles Chayes, A. (1995) *The New Sovereignty: Compliance with International Regulatory Agreements*. Cambridge MA, London: Harvard University Press

13 Fowler, M. S. and Bunc, J. M. (1996) What constitutes the sovereign state? *Review of International Studies* 22(4): 381-404

14 Huddleston R. J. (2020) "Continuous recognition: A latent variable approach to measuring international sovereignty of self-determination movements", *Journal of Peace Research* 57(6): 789-800

15 Li, C. P. (2015) "New Leaders with Old Lenses? China's Conflict Frames Toward Taiwan", *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 20: 67-85

16 Berg, E. and Toomla, R. (2009) "Forms of normalisation in the quest for de facto statehood", *The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs* 44(4): 27-45

17 Allen, S. (2019) "Statehood, Self-Determination and the 'Taiwan Question'", *Asian Yearbook of International Law* 9: 191-219

18 Anonymous interview, 2020.

Kosovo's recognition and participation in international relations is far less black and white. Kosovo is recognised by around half of UN members, including three out of five permanent members of the UN Security Council, and, therefore, it does not sit comfortably at either of the two categories of recognised or heavily unrecognised states that have attracted most of the literature's attention¹⁹. In more qualitative terms, even some who do not recognise Kosovo, like the EU collectively, they stand neutral towards its statehood status, rather than condemning it like in other cases like Abkhazia or South Ossetia²⁰. Others with similarly substantial but still far from universal or general recognition include Palestine, which is recognised by the majority of UN members but is not a full member to the UN, although it is an observer member state and member to other international organisations like the Arab League, or even the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, which is recognised by a small minority of UN members but is welcomed in the African Union.

In terms of access to international relations and on top of the bilateral links with states, Kosovo has mostly followed a strategy of applying to collective bodies where the rules of admission are favourable to an application. For example, Kosovo's strategy to not apply for UN membership yet but to do so for the IMF, the World Bank and, more recently, the Council of Europe was primarily influenced by the voting system, whereby the voting powers of Kosovo's

international partners in those two bodies were much higher than those of its opponents²¹. In this regard, this distinction between recognition and participation, as linked to external and internal sovereignty respectively, seems especially important for understanding Kosovo, because of its complex profile in terms of recognition but also because of its rather fervent effort to access international relations at the same time. This distinction, as well as relationship, between state recognition and access to international relations is reflected a lot on the area of international sports and relates to Kosovo's fervent efforts to develop its international profile, despite its lack of diplomatic recognition.

19 E.g. Pegg, S. (1998). *De Facto States in the International System*. Farnham: Ashgate; Caspersen, N. (2012). *Unrecognized States*. Cambridge: Polity.

20 For more see Coppeters, B. (2018). "Statehood", 'de facto Authorities' and 'Occupation': Contested Concepts and the EU's Engagement in its European Neighbourhood", *Ethnopolitics*, DOI: 10.1080/17449057.2018.1495361

21 Visoka, G. (2018). *Acting Like a State: Kosovo and the Everyday Making of Statehood*. London: Palgrave.



In terms of access to international relations and on top of the bilateral links with states, Kosovo has mostly followed a strategy of applying to collective bodies where the rules of admission are favourable to an application.



The Relevance of International Sports

Although somewhat distinct, participation to international sports and wide acceptance as a state relate to each other²², and this is why international sports are another way through which many assess whether a given entity should be considered a state or not, as well as a key device of everyday nationalism²³. For example, the enlargement policies of FIFA and the IOC have been successful in allowing representation from almost all states and this process accelerated in the last fifty years, as it is illustrated in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2. As of today, the only recognised state that does not feature the Olympic family is the Vatican City, while in FIFA only eight sovereign nations remain out of its structures and competitions²⁴, mostly from Oceania. Indeed, IOC rules stipulate that the NOC candidate needs to a) present previous affiliation to at least five international

sporting governing bodies and, b) be an independent state recognised by the international community. This is something that heavily unrecognised entities like Abkhazia or Northern Cyprus, and even non-sovereign dependencies or overseas territory like Curaçao, Greenland or New Caledonia, cannot do. But, as we will see later, the provision was creatively interpreted and allowed Kosovo's membership, despite their lack of UN membership and general international recognition²⁵.

Such decisions to accept or not a new member are often impacted by existing membership of the international body. Even though international sports governing bodies (ISBGs) see interferences from public institutions to their affiliated national federations as detrimental to their autonomy²⁶,

22 There are, however, some exemptions. For example, Great Britain competes in the Olympics but many sports, like football, see the membership and competition of its constituent nations, that is England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In rugby, a unified Irish team assembles both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, while in cricket several English-speaking sovereign states and British Overseas Territories in the Caribbean all compete together as West Indies.

23 Fox, J. and Miller-Idris, C. (2008) "Everyday nationhood", *Ethnicities* 8(4): 536-563. DOI: 10.1177/1468796808088925.

24 These are the Vatican City, Monaco, Marshall Islands, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Palau, and Nauru. United Kingdom does not participate as such, but delegates its representation in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, as indicated above.

25 Apart from Kosovo, polities like American Samoa, Cook Islands, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, Guam, US Virgin Islands, British Virgin Islands, Curaçao, Aruba, Bermuda, Cayman Islands and Puerto Rico competes both at FIFA and IOC levels, while other polities like Gibraltar, Faroe Islands, Tahiti, New Caledonia, Montserrat, Anguilla and Turks and Caicos Islands are members of FIFA, but not of the IOC.

26 Geeraert, A., Mrkonjic, M. and Chappelet, J. L. (2014) "A rationalist perspective of the autonomy of international sport governing bodies: towards a pragmatic autonomy in the steers of sports", *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, DOI: [10.1080/19406940.2014.925953](https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2014.925953)

sport governance is increasingly moving towards multi-stakeholder, networked decision-making. In such decision making, governments affect corporate decisions depending on the influence they have in each sporting federation. For example, according to a source related to sports management in Kosovo, "there are federations in which Russia is powerful and then, admission came only after admission to the IOC, but there were other sports in which Kosovo's allies like the US or Turkey were quite influential to get our membership accepted". Membership to international sports bodies are extra important for its snowballing effects: for example, once an entity achieves affiliation into the IOC it is hard for its opponents to stop its membership into the

rest of sporting associations. Similarly, the decision to admit Kosovo into UEFA made note of the fact Kosovar sporting federations had been recognised by other international sporting organisations²⁷. Finally, ISGBs only sanction or ban members if they attack principles of fair play (cases of institutionally promoted drug abuse, match fixing, government interference, etc.) or if their states engage in international conflicts with overt responsibility (Yugoslavia in 1990s during the Yugoslav wars, Russia in 2022 after the invasion of Ukraine, etc.). But this is markedly different to the withdrawal of state recognition for a range of reasons (for example, some states have withdrawn their recognition of Kosovo due to pressure from Serbia²⁸),

27 Gauthier, R. (2018). 'Constructing Statehood Through Sport: Football, Kosovo, and the Court of Arbitration for Sport', *The Canadian Yearbook of International Law*, 56, DOI:10.1017/cyl.2019.4
 28 see also Visoka G (2019) *The Derecognition of States*. In: Visoka G, Doyle J and Newman E (eds) *Routledge Handbook of State Recognition*. London: Routledge

FIGURE 1 FIFA members compared to nation states that were/are members of the League of Nations (1920 - 1945) and the United Nations (1945 - today).

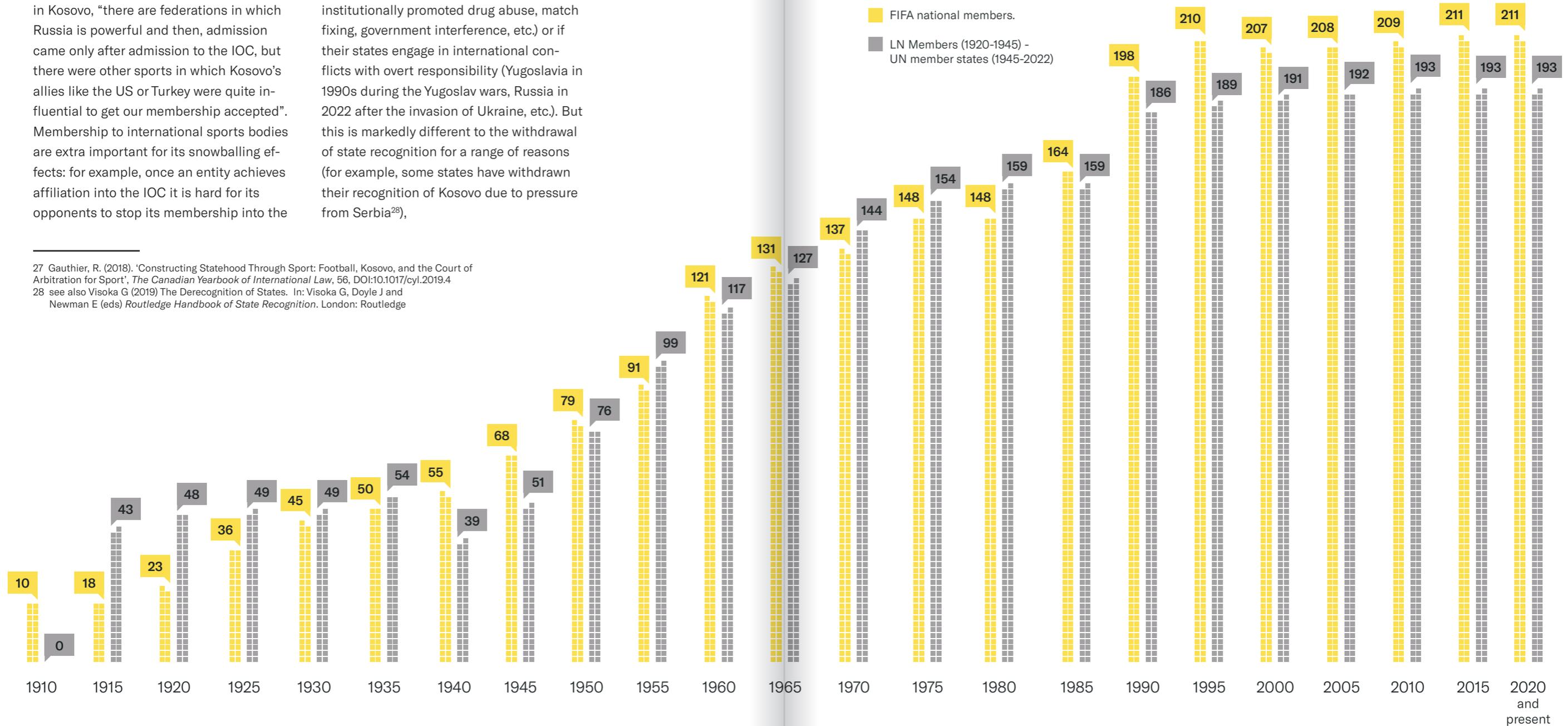


FIGURE 2

National Olympic Committees (NOCs) that took part in each Summer Olympic Games.

Athens 1896	14
Paris 1900	26
St Louis 1904	12
London 1908	22
Stockholm 1912	28
Antwerp 1920	29
Paris 1924	44
Amsterdam 1928	46
Los Angeles 1932	37
Berlin 1936	49
London 1948	59
Helsinki 1952	69
Melbourne 1956	72
Rome 1960	83
Tokyo 1964	93
Mexico City 1968	112
Munich 1972	121
Montreal 1976	92
Moscow 1980	80
Los Angeles 1984	140
Seoul 1988	159
Barcelona 1992	169
Atlanta 1996	197
Sydney 2000	199
Athens 2004	201
Beijing 2008	204
London 2012	204
Rio 2016	207
Tokyo 2020	206

There is already some preliminary evidence that suggests Kosovo has managed to participate in international sports despite its lack of general recognition²⁹, i.e. increase its internal sovereignty in spite of compromised external sovereignty. This is similar to a somewhat different but useful distinction that Duerkop and Ganohariti make between sports sovereignty and political sovereignty, with Kosovo scoring high in the first but lower in the second³⁰. If this is seen in combination with the reflections on international sports access and conduct above, a series of questions arise, which are important for Kosovo, particularly in terms of the relationship between statehood, recognition and access to international relations. How has Kosovo participated to international sports? Is it easier for Kosovo to participate in international sports rather than high politics diplomacy and gain recognition, and how does that participation look like? Indeed, it is expected that aspiring states will engage with sports taking advantage of their perceived status as 'low politics' towards looking more like a state³¹. What does Kosovo's participation in international sports tell us about, on the one hand its recognition and, on the other hand, its access to international relations? Is participation in international sports a way in which Kosovo manages to act, and even been seen, as a state, despite the quite important lack of recognition, both at the bilateral and collective level? What is the impact, if any, of Kosovo's participation to international sports to more internal matters, like Kosovo's institutions, society and identity?

29 We understand 'general recognition' as evident through UN membership. See also Kurtulus, E.N. (2005). *Sovereignty*. London: Palgrave.

30 Duerkop, S. and Ganohariti, R. (2021) "Sovereignty in sports: non sovereign territories in international football", *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, DOI: 10.1080/19406940.2021.1947347

31 Gauthier, R. (2018). 'Constructing Statehood Through Sport: Football, Kosovo, and the Court of Arbitration for Sport', *The Canadian Yearbook of International Law* 56, doi:10.1017/cyl.2019.4



Kosovo's Participation to International Sports

In this section, we analyse Kosovo's participation to international sports in a somewhat chronological order that also highlights different dimensions of this process. First, we look at how Kosovo sought participation to international sports, highlighting the often exceptional ways in which this was done. Next, we turn our attention to what has happened after Kosovo's greater access to the international sporting world following its admission to most federations and the different challenges that come with that.

Seeking Sport sovereignty

Efforts for an independence representation in sports go long back in history, as do the independence efforts from Kosovo Albanians and their struggle to achieve cultural equality within Yugoslavia. From 1946,

sporting clubs founded by ethnic Albanians in Kosovo were integrated into the Yugoslav league systems and became a symbol of resistance and cultural affirmation³². Between 1945 and 1991, two Kosovo Albanian football teams featured in the Yugoslav First League. These were FK Prishtina (5 seasons in total) and KF Trepça from Mitrovica (1 season and reached the final of the Yugoslav Cup in 1978). Despite the fact the Yugoslav Constitution of 1974 improved the access of ethnic Albanians to civic institutions, it did not trigger a wider participation of Kosovo Albanians into sporting events. As an example, out of hundreds of sportspeople that represented Yugoslavia at Summer and Winter Olympics from 1976 to 1988, we found only one athlete from Kosovo Albanian origins: boxer Aziz Salihu who brought home a bronze medal in Super heavyweight category at Los Angeles 1984³³.

³² Mills, R. (2018). *The Politics of Football in Yugoslavia. Sports, Nationalism and the State*. London: IB Tauris.

³³ We found two other ethnic Albanian athletes but from Macedonia: freestyle wrestlers Shaban Trstena (gold in 1984 Los Angeles and silver in 1988) and Shaban Sejdiu (bronze both in 1980 and 1984). The fact that the few Albanian sportspeople that managed to represent Yugoslavia at the Olympics have won medals may indicate how discrimination toward Albanians worked, especially with the ones that were not so overwhelmingly successful. Apart from these cases, it is worth noticing the case of Fahrudin Jusufi, an ethnic Gorani football player from Kosovo that represented Yugoslavia in the most important international tournaments during the 1960s.

If participation of non-Serb Kosovars was scarce then, the process of recentralisation to Belgrade in the 1980s only increased social discrimination and segregation policies towards ethnic Albanians in sporting activities. A recurrent theme across our interview data is how discriminated Kosovo Albanian footballers were during the times of Socialist Yugoslavia, citing Fadil Vokrri as supposedly a rare example of the only ethnic Albanian footballer who represented Yugoslavia internationally at a senior level³⁴ and whose extraordinary talent surpassed ethnic prejudices. According to a former footballer³⁵, the first attempt of Kosovo Albanians to split up with the Yugoslav football system was in 1989 when FK Pristina refused to come out to play for the second half in a match in Belgrade because of riots and mistreatments from local fans and authorities. Shortly after, Kosovo Albanian teams began to boycott Yugoslav sporting institutions and develop their own in parallel during the 1990s in a precarious and hostile environment³⁶.

Sportspeople in Kosovo interviewed for this paper remember this period as one in which practising sports was, in a way, an escape from everyday hardships but, at the same time, a relatively dangerous activity that could be interpreted as subversive by Yugoslav authorities. As an example, the letter addressing the Annual General Meeting of the International Table Tennis federation in 2003 opened with stressing that, not always easy, history:



'In Kosovo, Table Tennis has been played in organised way since 1953. Table Tennis federation of Kosovo as an independent federation exists since 1991. For 12 years now the sport enthusiasts have worked in developing the table tennis in very hard conditions.'

Except for the rare case of table tennis (see below), it was not until the 2008 declaration of independence in which Kosovar sporting federations were able to start breaking isolation and seeking their place in the sporting world. During the 1990s and the period of UNMIK administration, Kosovo's institutions did manage to develop some initiatives of sport diplomacy. The Olympic Committee of Kosovo was founded in 1992 and, as documented through their correspondence with the International Olympic Committee³⁷, their attempts to achieve international presence goes back as far as 1995. After the Kosovo war in 1999, Kosovo's National Olympic Committee (NOC) tried unsuccessfully to send athletes to the 2000 Summer Olympics at Sydney as part of the Independent Olympic delegation. In 2003, Kosovo's succeeded in gaining membership to a governing body, the International Fed-

34 There were other ethnic Albanian footballers but mostly at youth teams, like the case of Xhevat Prekazi.

35 Interview with former footballer, Prishtina, March 2022.

36 This resembles wider process of the development of separate and parallel state institutions developed during the nineties. For more, see Pula, B. (2004): "The emergence of the Kosovo "parallel state," 1988-1992", *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, 32:4, 797-826

37 Olympic Studies Centre. Archive. Correspondence with the Olympic Committee of Kosovo, 1992-1999. Lausanne, Switzerland.

eration of Table Tennis (ITTF), perhaps rather surprisingly because it pre-dates independence. But what is especially interesting here, is how Kosovars instrumentalised UN's activities post-1999 towards furthering their participation in international sports. In 1999 and on the basis of Resolution 1244, UNMIK took over the effective administration of Kosovo and the task to build institutions for Kosovo's autonomy. In practice, UNMIK ended up building the institutions that were eventually declared institutions of Kosovo as declared in 2008. In the same way in which Kosovars showed important political agency in embracing those institutions for building an independent state, they also drew on UNMIK's authority over the area for furthering their sport aspirations. The text of the application to join the International Table Tennis Federation in 2003 is illuminative here:



Following the 2008 declaration of independence and because Kosovo attained wide- spread but not general recognition, better integration in sports or cultural matters dominated foreign policy as winning smaller 'recognition contests'

The federation also submitted to the international federation a letter from UNMIK that confirmed this.

In the end, Kosovo was successful in joining the federation. Crucial for this success is the fact the International Table Tennis Federation is among the most flexible sporting governing bodies when coming to accept polities whose sovereignty is not black or white. As of today, the Federation counts with 227 national members, which makes it the widest sporting governing body in the world. However, it still prevents disputed territories, heavily unrecognized states, and secessionist regions from getting membership. Therefore, Kosovo's application benefited by the support of key stakeholders and international allies. Following the 2008 declaration of independence and because Kosovo attained widespread but not general recognition, better integration in sports or cultural matters dominated foreign policy as winning smaller 'recognition contests' rather than concentrating on, for the moment, futile efforts like UN membership³⁸. These efforts have not been easy and there is evidence that the lack of recognition has posed significant challenges to Kosovo's participation to international sports, including in football where the lack of UN membership was initially a barrier to joining sport associations. In addition, the incomplete participation of Kosovo to international relations negatively affected the development of sports in the country, limited resources but also created a feeling of isolation³⁹. And yet, Kosovo has navigated this difficult terrain in different ways and has increased its participation in international sport activities in recent times.

38 Ioniță, C. (2017) "Russia in the Balkans: A View from Kosovo" in: Armakolas, I., Demjaha, A., Elbasani, A., Schwandner-Sievers, S., Skendaj, E. and Tzifakis, N., eds., *State-building in post- independence Kosovo: Policy Challenges and Societal Considerations*, Prishtina: Kosovo Foundation for Open Society.

39 Giulianotti et al., *ibid*.

We saw earlier how different bodies might be characterised by different members exerting more or less influence and this seems to have informed Kosovo's careful calculations behind applications to international bodies where membership suggested a strong possibility of success, like with IMF (see earlier). A same logic seems to have guided the strategy for increasing participation in international sports.

According to a source from the Table Tennis Federation of Kosovo, "Kosovo's allies like the US or Turkey were quite influential to get our membership accepted". The same interviewee stressed the importance of Canadian then-president of the ITTF Adham Sharara in endorsing Kosovo's application back then.

Here, the example of Table Tennis is suggestive of the importance of existing membership of sporting regimes for Kosovo's efforts and success at better international integration: Turkey's important position within the Table Tennis federation seems to have been an important help for Kosovo's participation there, unlike elsewhere where Russia is more powerful.

During this period, Kosovo's sporting decision-makers struggled to legitimize its claim of a place in the sporting world. In the case of football, in which the creation of a Kosovo federation dates to 1946, the endurance of passion about the sport in a context of political instability, social segregation and lack of infrastructure and materials in the 1990s is often highlighted by sports stakeholders in Kosovo as a key driver in their strategy to seek admission. Shortly after the independence, the Football

Federation of Kosovo attempted unsuccessfully admission into FIFA. According to one of our interviewees⁴⁰, biggest obstacles did not come from non-recognisers but from historical friendly nations and geopolitical allies, especially Switzerland and Austria. Considering that football's rules are very restrictive about nationality switch, these federations feared that having a Kosovo team competing internationally would mean a massive flux of talented athletes of Kosovo-Albanian family backgrounds from their representatives to the brand-new team, something that ultimately did not happen. The interviewer did not provide evidence of how and to what extent countries like Austria and Switzerland mobilised this fear into concrete actions though it is true that, ultimately, Kosovo's admission into FIFA in 2016 brought an exceptional change in FIFA's statutory regulations to switch national allegiances.

The process of Kosovo's admission into IOC started in 2009 and it was achieved in 2014, also in the context of the optimism for the country and its external relations that the Brussels Agreements brought one year before⁴¹. Kosovo's application faced unprecedented legal constraints and provoked a wide reflection among sports executives and diplomats over the ways through which a given entity can accede to the IOC or not. It also offers us insight for how the issues of recognition and participation interplayed. IOC is not just one sporting governing body among the many, but the umbrella organisation that assembles them all when related to Olympic events. In order to join IOC, applicants need to fulfil two criteria. First, to have its admission recognized beforehand

40 Interview with a former executive from the Football Federation of Kosovo.

41 For more see Beysoylu, C. (2017) "The European Union and Peace Implementation: The case of Brussels Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia" in: Armakolas, I., Demjaha, A., Elbasani, A., Schwandner-Sievers, S., Skendaj, E. and Tzifakis, N., eds., *State-building in post- independence Kosovo: Policy Challenges and Societal Considerations*, Kosovo Foundation for Open Society.

by five different sporting federations affiliated to the Olympic family. This was the case with Kosovo, which in the years before the application had managed to join various federations⁴². The second criterion was recognition as an independent state by the international community. Here, it is interesting to see how widespread recognition of Kosovo, even if not general, played a positive role. According to one of our interviewees, the IOC assessed that Kosovo fulfilled this condition by de-coupling UN membership and recognition and arguing that Kosovo at that time was bilaterally recognised by most UN members (108) as evidence that the requirement was met.

The minutes of the 127th IOC Session in which Kosovo was finally admitted, say:



The country had some 1,200 sports clubs and 34 national federations, eight of which were fully recognised by IFs of Olympic sports, with another five being provisionally recognised. Many other IFs would grant recognition to the respective NFs if the IOC granted recognition to the NOC.



On a political level, 108 UN member states now recognised Kosovo as an independent state. This, plus the sporting recognition and the desire to protect the right of Kosovo's athletes to compete in international competitions had led to the Executive Board decision to grant provisional recognition to the NOC, and the present proposal that the Session grant full recognition.

The interviewee, who played an active role during this process, emphasises the distinction between sports and political sovereignty we discussed before by explaining that IOC defended Kosovo's membership from a strictly sporting viewpoint and that the organization has never asked anyone to recognise Kosovo as a state in terms of bilateral relations.

According to the minutes of the 127th IOC Session, "there was no votes against, and no abstentions" and speakers stressed that "(d) discussions with Kosovo's neighbouring NOCs had been very courteous and harmonious"⁴³ and thanked "the Serbian NOC and the other parties involved". In consonance with this, a former Kosovar diplomat who followed closely the application mentioned in an interview that the political atmosphere after the signing of

42 Those federations were: Table Tennis (2003), Archery (2011), Judo (2012), Sailing (2012), Curling -Winter Olympics- (2012), Modern Pentathlon (2013) and Boxing (2014).

43 Intervention of Patrick Joseph Hickey, IOC member, during the 127th IOC Session. In "Minutes of 127th Session", Archive of Olympic Study Centre, Lausanne, Switzerland.

the Brussel Agreements helped the application by foreseeing an imminent future of normalised relations with Serbia and remembers that, on that regard, “Serbia did not interfere much in our applications as a kind of gentlemen’s pact”. After its successful accession to the Olympic family, Kosovo managed to accelerate entries to ISGBs between 2014 and 2015. Currently, Kosovo is a full member of 30 worldwide federations and in at least 14 of its European branches⁴⁴. In this way the affiliation of the Olympic Committee of Kosovo to the Association of National Olympic Committees can be seen as a tipping point in Kosovo’s sporting history because of its effect on normalising Kosovo’s international presence across many sports.

Exercising sport sovereignty and dealing with non-recognisers.

If the period between 2008 and 2014-15 comprises the efforts for Kosovo’s greater participation in international sports, the lack of general recognition still poses a series of new challenges when it comes to exercising sport sovereignty. This happens especially when dealing with non-recognisers whose governments could reject treating Kosovo as one country among the many.

In terms of the effect of Kosovo’s greater participation to international sports on its

diplomatic recognition or participation to international relations more generally, we note a greater participation in international relations which, overall, cannot be clearly accounted for a growth in the extend of recognition yet, but there is some evidence that there might be a positive relationship between the two. Membership of sports federations seem to have gone some way to mitigating recognition-related challenges that Kosovo might be facing at the bilateral level, for example when a non-recogniser might try to block Kosovo’s participation⁴⁵ In 2018 for example, Kosovo athletes were allowed to take part in the World Karate Championships hosted by the non-recogniser Spain, but in ways not suggestive of statehood and recognition. Yet, following suggestions by the IOC that they would advise international federations not to hold any international competitions in Spain, the Spanish government reversed its policy and issued visas to sportspeople from Kosovo and allowed the presence of its national symbols whenever they compete in the country⁴⁶. In turn, this encouragement of sports relations at the bilateral level might have a snow-ball effect and lead to better diplomatic relations and even greater recognition. For example, some suggest that Spain saw the 2021 match against Kosovo as a successful test and Spanish authorities were encouraged to slowly increase relations. Indeed, there have been reports that the Spanish government is considering the opening of a commercial or cultural office in the Kosovar capital, without this implying full recognition⁴⁷. A similar ‘liai-

44 It participated in four Olympics (2016 and 2020 Summer Olympics with great success at achieving 3 gold medals in Judo, and in 2018 and 2022 Winter Olympics), and in football it competed in one Euro qualifiers (2020), two World Cup qualifiers (2018 and 2022) and two UEFA nations league (2018-19 and 2020-21).

45 Online interview with an expert on international sport governance.

46 Catalan News (2018). Spain to give Kosovo athletes visas and allow national symbols. Available in: <https://www.catalannews.com/society-science/item/spain-to-give-kosovo-athletes-visas-and-allow-national-symbols>.

47 Rodríguez, A. and Constantini, L. (2021). “El Gobierno ultima un giro histórico en las relaciones de España con Kosovo”. In: *The Objective*, November 20th. 2021. Available at: <https://theobjective.com/espana/2021-11-20/espana-giro-historico-relaciones-kosovo/>.

son office' is operated by the other non-recogniser Greece⁴⁸.

Some evidence suggests that admission into international sports have eased the acceptance of Kosovo's statehood from strong political opponents. A notable example is how Russia switched from the negative of displaying Kosovo's symbols in the 2014 Judo World Championships in Chelyabinsk to fully respecting them in 2016 in the European Championships in Kazan. In the first event, that was held a few months before Kosovo gained membership at IOC, the organising committee forced eventual gold-winner Majlinda Kelmendi to compete under the flag of the International Judo Federation, even though that Federation featured Kosovo as a full member back then. Two years later, when the same athlete won again a gold medal, not only she was able to compete under Kosovo's symbols but also the Russian military orchestra performed Kosovo's anthem and raised its flag at the awarding ceremony.

In addition, Kosovo's greater participation to international sports can be seen as a strengthening of state capacity and performance both internally and externally, despite the lack of universal recognition. Indeed, Kosovo policymakers see the success of the Kosovar female judokas in the Summer Olympics of 2016 and 2021 as key to nation branding. Indeed, membership of sports federations, such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) or UEFA, has been widely

used by Kosovo to promote its image as a state for external audiences. A small but indicative example of the importance of such events is that all have been celebrated with separate special stamp collections. A perhaps even more important example is how the participation to international sports processes was used during the UNESCO application to promote the image of a state who can make the most if this international access: 'the new Balkan state has achieved remarkable results after having been granted full by the IOC'⁴⁹.

For a different interviewee of ours, once the goal of being accepted to international regimes has been achieved, the focus should be on increasing Kosovo's competitiveness and making the most out of its athletes⁵⁰. In this picture, there are also calls for a greater role of sports federations in developing policies⁵¹. This might suggest an environment in which Kosovo moves from the initial phase of government-dominated sport policies for the purposes of state-building, particularly in terms of access to international relations and nation-branding, to a more mature phase, whereby, having secured integration in sports, Kosovo can move from seeking statehood to effectively acting and living as a state, despite the lack of general recognition. Amid celebrations of UEFA and FIFA admissions back in 2016, some opinions insisted on how important was sustaining that achievement with a government-led strategic plan apart from supranational aids and technical assistance⁵².

48 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hellenic Republic. Liaison Office in Pristina. Available at: <https://www.mfa.gr/missionsabroad/en/pristina-en>

49 Kelmendi, F., Selimi, P., Meta, R. (2015). Kosovo in UNESCO – As We Are: Stories old and new of a country thriving, Pristina, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kosovo. Accessible at https://issuu.com/mfakosovo/docs/as_we_are_vo2_s

50 Interview with former executive from FFK.

51 interview with national policy maker, 2022.

52 Krasniqi, G. (2016) "Kosovo's sport fight for international recognition and glory". Prishtina Insight, May 16th, 2016. Available at: <https://prishtinainsight.com/kosovar-sports-fight-international-recognition-glory/>

Amid celebrations of UEFA and FIFA admissions back in 2016, some opinions insisted on how important was sustaining that achievement with a government-led strategic plan apart from supranational aids and technical assistance.



Kosovo's National Identity and International Sports

If, then, greater participation to international relations can be seen as important for building the image and capacity of Kosovo as a state externally, we can also note an effect on Kosovo's state-building and nation-building internally, particularly in terms of arriving at a more common sense of Kosovar identity. In this context, exercising sports sovereignty is also important for the development of a sense of self-identity distant not only to Serbia's statehood, but also to Albania proper. Far from being a solved question to the date, this issue still creates controversies in Kosovo since some supporters believe it would be better to have a single team representing both Kosovo and Albania represented by the Albanian team. Partly because of that, there is a debate among supporters on whether Kosovo's football team should be called a "national team" (*kombëtare* in Albanian) or rather referred

to it as a "representation" (*përfaqësuese* in Albanian) in order to reserve such belonging to only Albania⁵³. On the contrary, others see positively the fact that, through sports, Kosovo gains a cultural agency that is distinct from that of Albania's. The latter does not mean unfriendly relations with Albania, but it does acknowledge that both states become distinct, at least in a subtle, formal level. Relatedly for example, Kosovar football stakeholders⁵⁴ did not feel their cultural identity to be completely represented internationally until their federation was accepted as member of FIFA in 2016, which might be indicating that international sports play an important role in self-constructing a notion of what implies to be Kosovar. Similarly, a former IOC executive highlights that the IOC always prioritised the express will of a distinct National Olympic Committee competing under Kosovo's flag and symbols rather

53 See Salihu, F. (2019) "Blue, Yellow, White – Football, Politics, Identity". *Kosovo 2.0*, February 16th, 2019. Available at: <https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/blue-yellow-white-football-politics-identity/>.

54 Montoro, J. M. (2021). "Imaginaries and Media Consumptions of Otherness in Kosovo: Memories of the Spanish Civil War, Latin American telenovelas, and Spanish football". In I. Armakolas, A. Demjaha, A. Elbasani and S. Schwandner-Sievers, eds. *Local and International Determinants of Kosovo's Statehood – Volume II*. Prishtina: KFOS

than, for example, offering Kosovo Albanian athletes the opportunity to compete internationally via the Albanian delegation instead. Moreover, Kosovo's sports are considered as hugely important for bridging society together and giving inspiring stories to the narrative of a multi-ethnic, new identity⁵⁵.

This leads to our final point, that is how Kosovo's official representation in the sporting world of nations contributes to people making sense of their identity. Kosovo's participation to international sports, including its effect on normalisation even vis-à-vis non-recognisers, brings to the fore the question of what a Kosovo team stands for to domestic audiences in terms of belonging and allegiance. As outsider observers of a fast-emerging trend, the authors of this paper want to be moderate and limit our remarks to a first mapping of the diverse spectrum of attitudes we found across different discourses in a qualitatively oriented corpus. Our hope is that these reflections can further research on the relations between Kosovo's sports and Kosovo's self-image and identity.

Through our research, we identify three major discursive trends. First, Kosovo as a representative of a polycentric (Albanian) nation⁵⁶, especially associated with

those who identify themselves as ethnic Albanians and/or see Kosovarness fundamentally as a variant of an embracing Albanian identity. Fans that subscribe to this trend do not want to renounce to supporting fandom towards the Albanian national team and some of them even relinquish to display a preference to the Kosovar representatives over the Albanian ones. Secondly, others see⁵⁷ Kosovo as a multi-ethnic society, especially in the context of engaging with national minorities. This trend is promoted by those groups who believe that Kosovo's institutions need to be complemented with a Kosovo 'civic' identity⁵⁸ that should take distance from ethnic Albanian affiliations. On this direction, sports could be an effective tool to integrate non-Albanian communities, especially Serbs, into Kosovar civic institutions and promote inter-ethnic relations. Although there have been attempts to include Kosovo Serbs in teams, this has not been easy⁵⁹. With regards to other communities, the existence of non-Albanian Kosovar sportspeople who played in Yugoslav teams, like ethnic Gorani Fahrudin Jusufi, may reinforce the idea of Kosovarness as multi-ethnic, which could encourage non-Albanian communities to engage with affiliated Kosovo's teams. Lastly, Kosovo is seen in the context of a European transnational belonging, focusing on sports-

55 Interview with national policy maker, 2022.

56 For a wider reflection over Albanian polycentric nationalism, see Krasniqi, G. (2019). *Albanian Nationalism(s) and Power Struggles in Kosovo: The Rise of a Polycentric Nation*, London: Palgrave McMillan.

57 Krasniqi, S. and Krasniqi, B. (2019). Sport and peace-building in post-conflict societies: the role of the Open Fun Football Schools in Kosovo. *Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research* 11(3): 145-147. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/JACPR-07-2018-0369>

58 McGuinness, M. (2020) "The Kosovo football team, national symbols and identity. 'A team of eleven named men'". In J. O'Brien, B. Holden, X. Ginesta (eds.), *Sport, Globalisation and Identity: New Perspectives of Regions and Nations* (p. 52-68). London: Routledge.

59 Hell, A. (2020). "Breaking Down Barriers: Being The 'First Serb' On Kosovo National Team Brings Trouble For Teen Soccer Star". Radio Free Europe. February 29th, 2020. Available at: "<https://www.rferl.org/a/first-serb-on-kosovo-national-team-means-trouble-for-teen-soccer-star/30461589.html>



Kosovo's sports are considered as hugely important for bridging society together and giving inspiring stories to the narrative of a multi-ethnic, new identity.

people rather than territorial and historical claims⁶⁰. Interviewees who stressed this angle of 'Kosovarness' highlighted the pride they feel of having such talented athletes and celebrated 'cultural ambassadors' in the global world over whether they formally represent Kosovar delegations or not. Good examples of this trend are Swiss players Granit Xhaka and Xherdan Shaqiri in men's football and Swedish player Kosovare Asllani in women's football. Furthermore, sports can help de-territorialize and de-ethnicise the concept of 'Kosovarness' by also highlighting life stories of (Kosovo) Albanian players from the diaspora, who are eligible to play for Kosovo and whether they opt for Kosovo or not. Additionally, the fact that most of (Kosovo) Albanian diasporas concentrates in European countries make, according to some interviewees, this kind of belonging a truly mode of showing the world how

their cultural identity needs to be framed under the umbrella of European identities too. In any case, it is interesting to observe to what extent international sports participation of Kosovo will affect the debate around cultural identity and, eventually, craft a sense of belonging clearly distinct to other national belongings.

60 Giulianotti, R., H. Collison, S. Darnell, D. Howe (2020) Contested states and the politics of sport: the case of Kosovo – división, development, and recognition. *Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 9:1, 121-136, DOI. 10.1080/19406940.2016.1217251.

Sonntag, A., García, B. (2020). National Teams, Multiple Loyalties. A Discussion of three Football Case Studies. *Papeles del CEIC*, 1, 224. Available at <https://papelesceic.identidadcolectiva.es/2020-1/07-Papeles-CEIC-1-20.html>

Conclusions and To the Future

This paper sought to explore three related yet different issues. Firstly, how Kosovo's path to international sports relate to recognition issues. Secondly, how sports offer Kosovo an opportunity to improve its image and exercise a sovereignty missing in other political settings. Thirdly, how participation in international sports help Kosovo craft a sense of belonging internally. For the first question, we reviewed the challenges that comes when a not generally recognised state aims to take part in the sporting world of nations. Kosovo's participation in international sports has been noteworthy, especially considering the constrains that the lack of general recognition might create. For example, in the case of the IOC we witnessed how UN membership itself is not an indispensable requisite to be considered a successful candidate to join other supranational bodies, although bodies where a majority of members recognise make it easier. This finding could be valuable considering that further de-recognitions from peripheral states could disbalance such majority in the future. For the second question, we presented the evolution of Kosovo's sporting recent history to indicate the path from isolation to medal-winning performances. Over the years, Kosovars have managed to navigate a challenging international arena and to partake, and often excel, at various international sports. Indeed, this has strengthened Kosovo's capacity and performance as a state, both internally and externally, and raises important questions for Kosovo society too,

particularly in terms of its identity, which is our third question. Whilst we do not elaborate on this due to space limitations of this paper, we hope these initial thoughts will encourage more analysis on the range of possibilities with which the Kosovar society is thinking the relation between their sports representation and their cultural identity.

All these issues discussed in this paper offer us ample lessons to be drawn from the things that worked, and those that did not, in Kosovo's attempts at international sports participation towards the development of both sports but also other cultural policies. Whilst this paper has sought to analyse Kosovo's (recent) past towards assessing its efforts at international sport participation, a look at the future raises questions of how new technologies might further shape these policies. The growth of egames, the disruptive nature of metaverses and new channels for streaming and broadcasting content globally might give room for new forms of international participation beyond traditional key players in the sports industry. Such avenues might be especially important for Kosovo, whose people still often face challenges in participating in international processes with a more traditional or physical element (see for example the challenges relating to visa travel we discussed earlier). In this regard, Kosovo's sport's diplomacy and digital diplomacy might be fruitfully married towards furthering, and diversifying, Kosovo's strategies of international participation.

Recommendations

Finally and drawing on our exploration of the ways in which Kosovo has managed to participate in international sports, the recognition-related challenges it faced and the ways in which they were overcome, we propose below a dynamic set of goals that Kosovo could pursue in terms of sports-oriented policy making:

- 1 to replicate successful initiatives in sports policy to other domains of Kosovo's popular culture to normalise Kosovo's statehood in international fora.
- 2 to promote and endure Kosovo's emergence as a benchmark in sports, especially considering its condition as a small and relatively peripheral country in a world of sports usually dominated by superpowers.
- 3 to more clearly link participation in sports to its external nation-branding goals, but also to the consolidation of internal nation-building processes.

Starting with (1), our analysis showed the various ways in which Kosovo managed to increase its participation and acknowledgment in international sports. These findings suggest that there is room for Kosovo's sports policy makers and key people in those processes to transfer their expertise to other cultural institutions via workshops, technical exchanges, and an in-depth comparative review of how different cultural governing bodies work, how Kosovo can most successfully argue its case, and which path should be the best to allow Kosovo's expansion of membership in international fora.

With regards to (2) it might be worth incorporating Kosovo's contemporary success in some sports, such as female Judo as part of a long-term nation-branding strategy that can inform international audiences about the country and change stereotypical images around it. This might necessitate Kosovo openly engaging with past and ongoing constraints, such as disputed sovereignty, travel restrictions, geopolitical peripherality, economic difficulties and socio-demographic limitations, in order to highlight Kosovar sports or other success stories as even more noteworthy. This is similar to how the Table Tennis Federation argued its case for joining the International Tennis Federation. These issues normally fuel derogative perceptions of the country and its society.

Instead, a reframing that highlights Kosovo's success despite those challenges could center self-improvement, teamwork, commitment, sacrifice, a result-oriented mindset, and healthy habits as values that sports tend to vehicle and which Kosovo embraces.

With reference to (3), participation in international sports might be valuable for a narrative about what unites the people of Kosovo which can be potentially more divisive than other hot-markers of nationhood, like language or religion. In the case of Kosovo, this might allow a sense of belonging strong enough to cope with a series of challenges related to its kaleidoscopic and young society. On that regard, our recommendation is that Kosovo's institutions provide different groups of people identifying with different notions of 'Kosovar belonging' as identified with different motives to engage with Kosovo's teams and sports in general. From a perspective of Kosovo as part of a wider polycentric society, Kosovo sporting institutions should invest in relations with their Albanian equivalents (e.g. fostering cooperation through friendly games, joint initiatives, exchanges camps), while preserving sport sovereignty. Secondly, developing policies that would encourage the representation of underrepresented minorities in sports could go a long way in fostering Kosovo as a multi-ethnic society. Finally, from the perspective of Kosovo as a somewhat transnational European space of belonging, Kosovo could invest in using sports to promote the country's 'European-ness' to international audiences.



Finally, from the perspective of Kosovo as a somewhat transnational European space of belonging, Kosovo could invest in using sports to promote the country's 'European-ness' to international audiences.

References

- Allen, S. (2019). "Statehood, Self-Determination and the 'Taiwan Question'", *Asian Yearbook of International Law* 9: 191-219
- Beysoylu, C. (2017) "The European Union and Peace Implementation: The case of Brussels Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia" in: Armakolas, I., Demjaha, A., Elbasani, A., Schwandner-Sievers, S., Skendaj, E. and Tzifakis, N., eds., *State-building in post- independence Kosovo: Policy Challenges and Societal Considerations*. Prishtina: Kosovo Foundation for Open Society.
- Black, D. and Peacock, B. (2013). 'Sport and Diplomacy', in Andrew F. Cooper, Jorge Heine, and Ramesh Thakur., (eds), *The Oxford handbook of modern diplomacy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 708-725
- Catalan News (2018). Spain to give Kosovo athletes visas and allow national symbols. Available at <https://www.catalannews.com/society-science/item/spain-to-give-kosovo-athletes-visas-and-allow-national-symbols>.
- Caspersen, N. (2012). *Unrecognized States*. Cambridge: Polity
- Chayes, A. and Handler Chayes, A. (1995). *The New Sovereignty: Compliance with International Regulatory Agreements*. Cambridge MA, London: Harvard University Press
- Coppieters, B. (2018). "'Statehood', 'de facto Authorities' and 'Occupation': Contested Concepts and the EU's Engagement in its European Neighbourhood", *Ethnopolitics*, DOI: 10.1080/17449057.2018.1495361
- Council of the EU (2008). "General Affairs and External Relations", Brussels, 18 February 2008
- Düerkop, S. and Ganohariti, R. (2021) "Sovereignty in sports: non sovereign territories in international football", *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, DOI: 10.1080/19406940.2021.1947347
- Fowler, M. S. and Bunck, J. M. (1996) What constitutes the sovereign state? *Review of International Studies* 22(4): 381-404
- Fox, J. and Miller-Idris, C. (2008) "Everyday nationhood", *Ethnicities* 8(4): 536-563. DOI: 10.1177/1468796808088925.

Gauthier, R. (2018). 'Constructing Statehood Through Sport: Football, Kosovo, and the Court of Arbitration for Sport', *The Canadian Yearbook of International Law* 56, doi:10.1017/cyl.2019.4

Geeraert, A., Mrkonjic, M. and Chappelet, J. L. (2014) "A rationalist perspective of the autonomy of international sport governing bodies: towards a pragmatic autonomy in the steers of sports", *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, DOI: 10.1080/19406940.2014.925953

Giddens, A. (1984). *The Constitution of Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Giulianotti, R. Collison, H, Darnell, S & Howe, D. (2017). "Contested states and the politics of sport: the case of Kosovo – division, development, and recognition", *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* 9(1): 121-136, DOI: 10.1080/19406940.2016.1217251

Grant, T.D. (2009). *Admission to the United Nations: Charter Article 4 and the Rise of Universal Organization*. Amsterdam: Brill

Hell, A. (2020). "Breaking Down Barriers: Being The 'First Serb' On Kosovo National Team Brings Trouble For Teen Soccer Star". *Radio Free Europe*. February 29th, 2020. Available at: "<https://www.rferl.org/a/first-serb-on-kosovo-national-team-means-trouble-for-teen-soccer-star/30461589.html>

Huddleston R. J. (2020) "Continuous recognition: A latent variable approach to measuring international sovereignty of self-determination movements", *Journal of Peace Research* 57(6): 789-800

Ioniță, C. (2017) "Russia in the Balkans: A View from Kosovo" in: Armakolas, I., Demjaha, A., Elbasani, A., Schwandner- Sievers, S., Skendaj, E. and Tzifakis, N., eds., *State-building in post- independence Kosovo: Policy Challenges and Societal Considerations*. Prishtina: Kosovo Foundation for Open Society

Jackson, R. (2011). *Sovereignty*. Cambridge: Polity

Kelmendi, F., Selimi, P., Meta, R. (2015). *Kosovo in UNESCO – As We Are: Stories old and new of a country thriving*, Pristina: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kosovo. Accessible at https://issuu.com/mfakosovo/docs/as_we_are_vo2_s

Krasniqi, G. (2016) "Kosovo's sport fight for international recognition and glory". *Prishtina Insight*, May 16th, 2016. Available at <https://prishtinainsight.com/kosovar-sports-fight-international-recognition-glory/>

- Krasniqi, G. (2018). "Contested territories, liminal polities, performative citizenship: a comparative analysis", *RSC Working Papers*, 13. Available at: <https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/52225>.
- Krasniqi, G. (2019). *Albanian Nationalism(s) and Power Struggles in Kosovo: The Rise of a Polycentric Nation*, Palgrave MacMillan
- Krasniqi, S., Krasniqi, B. (2019). Sport and peace-building in post-conflict societies: the role of the Open Fun Football Schools in Kosovo. *Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research*. 11(3): 145-147. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/JACPR-07-2018-0369>
- Kurtulus, E.N. (2005). *Sovereignty*. London: Palgrave.
- Kyris, G. (2022). 'State recognition and dynamic sovereignty', *European Journal of International Relations*, 28 (2): 287-311
- McGuinness, M. (2020) "The Kosovo football team, national symbols and identity. 'A team of eleven named men'". In J. O'Brien, B. Holden, X. Ginesta, eds., *Sport, Globalisation and Identity: New Perspectives of Regions and Nations* (p. 52-68). London: Routledge.
- Mills, R. (2018). *The Politics of Football in Yugoslavia. Sports, Nationalism and the State*. London: IB Tauris.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hellenic Republic. *Liaison Office in Pristina*. Available at <https://www.mfa.gr/missionsabroad/en/pristina-en>
- Montoro, J. M. (2021). "Imaginary and Media Consumptions of Otherness in Kosovo: Memories of the Spanish Civil War, Latin American telenovelas, and Spanish football". In I. Armakolas, A. Demjaha, A. Elbasani and S. Schwandner-Sievers, eds. *Local and International Determinants of Kosovo's Statehood – Volume II*. Prishtina: KFOS
- Li, C. P. (2015) "New Leaders with Old Lenses? China's Conflict Frames Toward Taiwan", *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 20: 67-85
- Olympic Studies Centre. *Archive*. Correspondence with the Olympic Committee of Kosovo, 1992-1999. Lausanne.
- Olympic Studies Centre. *Archive*. Minutes of the 127th IOC Session. Lausanne.
- Pegg, S. (1998). *De Facto States in the International System*. Farnham: Ashgate

Pula, B. (2004): "The emergence of the Kosovo "parallel state," 1988–1992", *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, 32:4, 797-826

Ramcharan, B.G., ed. (1997). *The International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia Official Papers, Volume 2*. Hague: Kluwer Law International, p. 1285

Reus-Smit, C (1997). "The Constitutional Structure of International Society and the Nature of Fundamental Institutions." *International Organization*, 51:4, 555–89

Rodríguez, A. and Constantini, L. (2021). "El Gobierno ultima un giro histórico en las relaciones de España con Kosovo". In: *The Objective*, November 20th. 2021. Available at: <https://theobjective.com/espana/2021-11-20/espana-giro-historico-relaciones-kosovo/>.

Salihu, F. (2019) "Blue, Yellow, White – Football, Politics, Identity". *Kosovo 2.0*, February 16th, 2019. Available at <https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/blue-yellow-white-football-politics-identity/>.

Sonntag, A., B. García (2020). "National Teams, Multiple Loyalties. A Discussion of three Football Case Studies". *Papeles del CEIC*, 1, 224. Available at <https://papelesceic.identidad-colectiva.es/2020-1/07-Papeles-CEIC-1-20.html>

Thompson, J. E. (1995). "State Sovereignty in International Relations: Bridging the Gap between Theory and Empirical Research", *International Studies Quarterly* 39(2): 213-233;

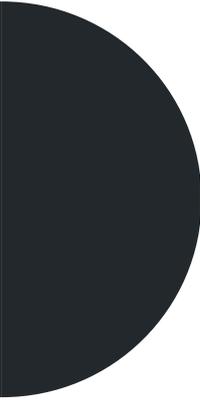
Vila Sarriá. P. and Demjaha, A. (2021). "Kosovo and Spain at the EU Level: a Battle of Semantics", Prishtina, KFOS

Visoka, G. (2018). *Acting Like a State: Kosovo and the Everyday Making of Statehood*. London: Palgrave.

Visoka, G., Newman, E., & Doyle, J., eds. (2019). *Routledge Handbook of State Recognition*, Abingdon: Routledge

Wight, M. (1977). *System of States*. Leicester: Leicester University Press

These findings suggest that there is room for Kosovo's sports policy makers and key people in those processes to transfer their expertise to other cultural institutions via workshops, technical exchanges, and an in-depth comparative review of how different cultural governing bodies work, how Kosovo can most successfully argue its case, and which path should be the best to allow Kosovo's expansion of membership in international fora.



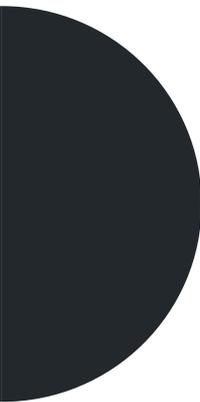
About the authors

George Kyris

Dr George Kyris is an Associate Professor at the University of Birmingham, UK. Previous affiliations include the University of Warwick, the LSE and the University of Manchester. His main research interest are statehood conflicts, and the role of international organisations in them, and sovereignty debates.

He has published a monograph (Routledge 2015), articles for academic journals such as the European Journal of IR, the Journal of Common Market Studies and Ethnopolitics and writes regularly for non-academic outlets, such as the Guardian.

Juan Manuel Montoro



Juan Manuel Montoro is a freelance researcher, journalist and consultant residing in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. He teaches Semiotics at the Catholic University of Uruguay and previous studies include a MA in Semiotics at the University of Bologna. His research interest focuses on global consumption of popular culture, semiotics of cultural identities and the relations between sports and nationhood.

He has published op-eds and articles about Kosovo in media outlets like Marca, Letras Libres and Kosovo 2.0. As practitioner he works with branding and ad agencies in the private sector.

