

Europeanisation of Foreign Policy:
A Comparative Case Study of Cyprus's and Spain's
Engagement with Kosovo



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Abstract

Although Cyprus and Spain initially emerged as the strongest opponents of engaging with Kosovo, driven by fears over the implications for their independence movements, their practices have since unexpectedly diverged. Therefore, the following research question is posed: *What factors explain the differences in Cyprus's and Spain's engagement with Kosovo since its declaration of independence in 2008?* While both Cyprus's and Spain's relations with Kosovo have been studied, prior research has paid less attention to the dynamics that shaped their decision-making and to engagement practices in isolation from recognition. Building on Europeanisation theory, this thesis conducts a comparative case study to evaluate how domestic political factors, i.e. the state of the separatist conflict, the ideology of political leadership, and the government's reform capacity, shaped Cyprus's and Spain's engagement with Kosovo. The thesis finds that in the case of Cyprus, self-initiated rapprochement can be linked to the ideology of the political leadership. In the case of Spain, the timing of challenges to the EU's engagement with Kosovo can be linked to the period of heightened conflict with Catalonia. With a view to Kosovo's future, the case studies demonstrate that engagement is possible even for the strongest non-recognisers and that the EU has largely succeeded in pushing the boundaries of possible engagement strategies with Kosovo.

Keywords: Europeanisation, EU foreign policy, Kosovo, engagement without recognition

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1. Introduction

In response to Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, the Republic of Cyprus (hereinafter, Cyprus) and Spain emerged as the most prominent opponents within the European Union (EU) to the recognition and engagement with Kosovo. Cyprus famously declared that even if Serbia were to recognise Kosovo as an independent state, it would still refuse to do so itself (Ker-Lindsay and Economides, 2012). Spain reacted by immediately announcing the withdrawal of its forces from NATO's peacekeeping mission in Kosovo (KFOR) and by publicly declaring its support for Serbia (Ferrero-Turrión, 2021). Their shared position on the issue is grounded in their respective territorial issues regarding secessionist movements in Northern Cyprus and Catalonia (Rexhepi, 2025). If they were to recognise Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence, they fear it would set a precedent for those movements to make legitimate claims for independence as well. To avoid any show of support for Kosovo that could be interpreted as unofficial recognition, they also refused to engage with it, meaning they did not establish any political, economic, or cultural relations.

Whereas the states started on the same page, the broad lines of their activities have diverged. In 2013, a noteworthy visit to Pristina by the Cypriot Foreign Minister Ioannis Kasoulides marked a milestone in the normalisation of relations. Furthermore, Cyprus has adapted its stance to be ready to endorse Kosovo's independence if Serbia, as its parent state, were to do the same (Ioannides, 2017). In contrast, the Spanish government has repeatedly taken opportunities to emphasise its opposition. It has actively avoided contact with representatives of Kosovo in political settings and undermined its attempts to join international organisations (Ferrero-Turrión, 2021). In addition, Spain has most recently advanced an annulment case against the European Commission over its decision to admit Kosovo to participate in the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC) (*Case T-370/19, Spain v Commission*, 2020). Consequently, while Cyprus has softened its position on engagement, Spain has taken actions to further distance itself from Kosovo.

To explain the unexpected shift in Cypriot policy, the scholar Isabelle Ioannides argues that Europeanisation has influenced Nicosia's relations with Kosovo (Ioannides, 2017). She claims that since joining the EU in 2004, Cyprus has adopted the EU's policy paradigms and styles and has increasingly aligned with the EU's broader foreign policy goals, which she understands as Europeanisation. As part of this process, she argues that Cyprus has also created room for engagement with Kosovo, reflecting the EU paradigm (Ioannides, 2017).

While the Council of the EU issued a statement in 2008, declaring that recognition of Kosovo would be decided by member states individually in accordance with national practices, the EU continued to demand engagement with Kosovo. The European Commission, in particular, has been firm on supporting Kosovo's integration into the EU. In 2005, it already released a Communication on a "European Future for Kosovo" and subsequently followed up with an array of proposals to further integrate Kosovo and strengthen ties with the EU (Doli and Xhaferri, 2025). The official EU position is to embrace "diversity on recognition, but unity in engagement", which consequently still raises expectations for Cyprus and Spain to foster some form of political, economic and cultural relations despite non-recognition (Doli and Xhaferri, 2025). While they are joined by Slovakia, Romania and Greece in the camp of non-recognisers, the three of them do allow for engagement. Consequently, Ioannides interprets Cyprus's redefinition of its engagement with Kosovo as the result of pressures from the EU and the majority of member states that favour engagement with Kosovo (Ioannides, 2017).

Yet Spain is also a member of the EU and would therefore, in theory, be a candidate for Europeanisation. However, the development of its engagement strategy with Kosovo has run counter to the EU's near-consensus. Its annulment case against the Commission is an example of holding ground and even striking back. Beyond the simple difference in the paths pursued since 2008, this topic consequently raises a broader question about the strength of Europeanisation within EU foreign policy. Therefore, the case of Kosovo and the different engagement practices that non-recognisers Cyprus and Spain adopt towards it serve as a compelling means of identifying the conditions that enable and inhibit Europeanisation of foreign policy. Thus, the following research question is posed: *What factors explain the differences in Cyprus's and Spain's engagement with Kosovo since its declaration of independence in 2008?*

To answer the research question, the thesis examines key events in Cyprus's and Spain's engagement with Kosovo. The underlying premise is that Cyprus and Spain not only initially shared opposition to engaging with Kosovo but also held similar interests, driven by fear of ramifications for their domestic separatist movements. Yet their engagement strategies have differed over time, making them compelling cases to study in comparison to understand which variables may have led to different outcomes. To explain the presence or absence of Europeanisation across instances within each case study, the thesis evaluates three domestic factors against developments in each country's engagement with Kosovo. Those factors are the state of the separatist conflict, the ideology of political leadership and the reform capacity. Subsequently, the findings from both cases are compared to identify the most compelling

factors explaining the differences. The main findings are that the ideology of the political leadership in Cyprus offers the most compelling explanation for its self-initiated engagement, while the intensification of the Catalan independence movement can be linked to Spain's challenges to the EU's engagement with Kosovo.

2. Literature Review

To contextualise the thesis within previous research, the following sections map out studies on the EU's, Cyprus's, and Spain's engagement practices with Kosovo. Reviewing the status of research on the EU's engagement practices is important, as findings that disunity among member-state practices limits the EU's capacity to act underscore the need to understand the factors that guide national-level decision-making. In turn, previous literature on Cyprus and Spain provides the status of the knowledge on which this thesis builds.

2.1. EU Foreign Policy towards Kosovo

The member-state disagreement over Kosovo's status has been a central question in research on relations between the EU and Kosovo. Studies have particularly focused on two main questions. First, the situation raises the question of *how* the EU can act in a policy field that requires unanimity among member states in the absence of consensus on the fundamental question of status. Second, this mismatch between interests raises the question of the *consequences* for the EU's activities in Kosovo.

Regarding the first question, scholars point out that the EU actively seeks institutional loopholes to allow for such action. As an overarching principle, the EU's presence in Kosovo is supported by the choice to set aside the underlying question of statehood and to officially embrace “diversity on recognition, but unity in engagement” (Doli and Xhaferri, 2025). In that spirit, the purpose of supporting Kosovar independence was removed from the EU rule-of-law mission in Kosovo (EULEX), making it a “status-neutral” mission. Through that change, the EU was able to bring most non-recognisers on board, and the mission mandate was approved by the Council of the EU with a “constructive abstention” from Cyprus (Ker-Lindsay and Economides, 2010). In a similar vein, member-state support for the EU to engage in a Belgrade-Pristina dialogue was rooted in a shared belief in the importance of stabilising the Western Balkans, without directly addressing Kosovo's status (Amadio Viceré, 2016). Moreover, EU institutions have been found to develop technical and ambiguous language to maintain an official “status-neutral” position (Bargués *et al.*, 2024). That, for example, includes marking

Kosovo with an asterisk in all documents to indicate that the designation is without prejudice to its position on status. Finally, instead of seeking legitimacy from its own members, scholars point out that the EU has built on prior steps taken by the United Nations (UN) and has diplomatically partnered with the US and NATO to secure support for its activities (Baracani, 2020; Bargués *et al.*, 2024). All in all, there is agreement that the EU's ability to act is enabled by maintaining ambiguity, allowing it to engage with Kosovo without officially endorsing recognition.

Subsequently, these findings have raised questions about the consequences for the EU's output in the absence of full support from its member states regarding the underlying status question. It becomes clear that while these mechanisms are celebrated as successes in overcoming the divisions, the outcomes receive mixed reviews. On the one hand, some scholars maintain that it remains impressive that the EU has been an active mediator between Serbia and Kosovo and has deployed its longest and largest civilian mission (Bargués *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, the "carrot" of accession is claimed to have successfully led Belgrade and Pristina to agree not to stand in each other's way on their European paths and, with that, to gain some element of normalisation in their relations (Kartsonaki, 2020). On paper, its ability to act in the first place is thus praised as a success by some scholars.

On the other hand, there is the argument that, while there may be small achievements, this division among member states impedes efforts to translate into real impact. First, it has been established that internal disputes lead the EU to be reactive to events rather than taking a strategic lead. This reactivity, in turn, leaves a vacuum for other actors, such as the United States, to act (Ker-Lindsay and Economides, 2010; Petrovic and Tzifakis, 2021; Thomas, 2021). The member-state disagreement, therefore, holds it back from carrying out a coherent, timely strategy.

Second, there is criticism that these strategies of overcoming division conceal the real problem and therefore do not provide sustainable solutions. While current activities can proceed without an agreement on status, potential EU membership for both Serbia and Kosovo ultimately requires recognition of statehood (Ker-Lindsay and Economides, 2012; Kartsonaki, 2020; Bargués *et al.*, 2024; Doli and Xhaferri, 2025). As van Elsuwege puts it: "It does not seem that the asterisk will 'melt away like a snowflake' as Edita Tahiri, Kosovo's chief negotiator with Serbia, argued back in 2012." (Van Elsuwege, 2017, p. 409). Thus, there is consensus among scholars that if Kosovo's EU aspirations are to be taken seriously, a status agreement must be reached sooner or later, and current measures postpone the decision.

Third, building on this argument, the internal division is claimed to limit its perceived credibility. Given that all actions are decided slowly, and disagreement persists, over time, measures have come to be perceived as symbolic rather than as contributing to a real prospect for accession (Esch, 2011; Koeth, 2013; Beysoylu, 2018). Furthermore, the EU's strategic ambiguity results in arrangements that only provide half-satisfying solutions for both sides. Kosovars do not feel fully acknowledged and supported, while Serbs find that the EU is overstepping the line of what is acceptable (Baracani, 2020; Kartsonaki, 2020).

In turn, the limited credibility is also reflected in Serbia's and Kosovo's responses to EU initiatives. Both parties are reportedly increasingly sceptical of the EU-led negotiations and perceive concessions made in agreements as trade-offs for personal gain rather than as efforts to pursue the original purpose of normalising relations (Beysoylu, 2018). Analyses of EU-Serbia relations also show that while Serbia implements the EU's accession standards for material gains, it is not discursively changing its stance towards the EU or Kosovo (Kostovicova, 2014; Economides and Ker-Lindsay, 2015). Overall, the EU is found to be losing credibility, which also diminishes its leeway to make a real impact in stabilising relations.

What emerges from the extensive literature on EU-Kosovo relations is that, while the EU appears to mask internal disagreements over Kosovo and remains a key player in the region, it still pays a price for the underlying problem. However, as the scholar Stjepan Novak points out, from a legal perspective, the EU cannot unilaterally resolve this issue, as it lacks competence to recognise states, and the act remains voluntary for its member states. Yet he also highlights that the Treaty on the European Union requires member states to support the Union's external policy and to refrain from actions that could jeopardise its interests (Novak, 2023). Therefore, in theory, there is a formal obligation to align with the EU stance on engagement with Kosovo. Consequently, it is interesting to examine the behaviour of individual member states and to assess the potential for this obligation to take effect, making the investigation of the strongest opponents particularly compelling.

2.2. Cyprus's Engagement with Kosovo

In contrast to the widely researched EU-Kosovo relations, Cyprus's engagement with Kosovo has been addressed in only a few studies. Most scholars have approached those relations from a static perspective, focusing on why Cyprus has refused to recognise Kosovo as an independent state. There is a shared understanding that the choice is guided by its "national problem" or "Cyprus issue", which describes the unresolved territorial conflict with the self-

proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). In line with its emphasis on maintaining territorial integrity on the island, it therefore supports Serbia's territorial integrity and views Kosovo's claim to independence as unlawful (Berg, 2009; Kasim, 2020; Rexhepi, 2025). Against this backdrop, studies have primarily focused on the implications of developments in Kosovo for the TRNC's ability to secure a legal basis for independence (Berg, 2009; Doğan, 2013; Kasim, 2020). The Cypriot position on Kosovo has therefore traditionally been perceived as permanent and solely focused on the recognition practice.

Breaking away from this traditional view, Ioannides conducted a study in which she identifies a redefinition of how the government of Cyprus engages with Kosovo. The first significant shift she points out is that although it was initially the only state strictly opposed to the establishment of EULEX, it ultimately yielded to pressure from the other states. Cyprus ultimately enabled its deployment through its “constructive abstention” and agreed to the renewal of its mandate every two years. Second, the government has softened its discourse, now maintaining that if Serbia and Kosovo were to reach an agreement on independence, it would also endorse statehood. Third, informal dialogue has increasingly taken place through cooperation among civil society organisations. Fourth, and most significantly, in 2013, the Cypriot Foreign Minister met the Prime Minister of Kosovo on the margins of the UN General Assembly (GA) and subsequently visited Pristina (Ioannides, 2017). Taken together, she suggests that these shifts show that Cyprus has supported the EU's interests in the region and has therefore been influenced by a process of Europeanisation.

In their study on the impact of the euro crisis on the Europeanisation of Cypriot foreign policy orientation, George Christou and George Kyris have a more nuanced view. Overall, they agree that since its accession in 2004, Cyprus has increasingly aligned its foreign policy institutions and practices to the EU and that the euro crisis has further entrenched that trend. However, in areas closely related to the Cyprus issue, including relations with Kosovo, policies have been treated more instrumentally, without normative alignment (Christou and Kyris, 2017). While their analysis does not directly contradict Ioannides' interpretation, it puts it into perspective: changes in the Cypriot approach to Kosovo are remarkable, but they remain small steps towards the EU position and do not signify a full embrace of Kosovo's European integration.

In sum, the Europeanisation of Cypriot engagement with Kosovo has already been studied. However, aside from the study of the impact of the euro crisis, it has not been examined how domestic factors enabled instances of rapprochement. Thus, the thesis can build on those studies to better understand the factors that influence Europeanisation.

2.3. Spain's Engagement with Kosovo

The literature on Spain's positioning vis-à-vis Kosovo spans a variety of issues. As a foundation, scholars have found agreement on the underlying motivation for Spain's choice of non-recognition. While Spain participated in the 1999 intervention to end the conflict between Serbian forces and the Kosovo Liberation Army and contributed to the subsequent peacekeeping mission, the declaration of independence led to a complete rupture in relations. Spain immediately announced the withdrawal of its forces and sided with Serbia in opposing the legality of Kosovo's declaration of independence (Ferrero-Turrión, 2021). Scholars have therefore identified the fear of the implications the recognition of Kosovo would have on the Catalan independence movement as the main driver of Spain's policy (Sarriá and Demjaha, 2019; Ferrero-Turrión, 2021; Daku and Rudaku, 2024; Rexhepi, 2025).

Building on this initial position, some scholars have explored the development of Spain's actions over time. The shared understanding is that, even though Spain had already entirely withdrawn from Kosovo following its unilateral declaration of independence and ceased maintaining any relations, it has managed to distance itself further over the years. While at the EU-Western Balkan Summit in 2010, Spanish representatives still accepted to sit at one table with Kosovar officials, in 2018, the Spanish prime minister, Mariano Rajoy, absented himself from the Summit, reportedly to avoid contact with Kosovo (Sarriá and Demjaha, 2019; Ferrero-Turrión, 2021). In line with this, the Spanish government allegedly issued an order to its diplomats not to engage with Kosovar diplomats in public or in private settings (Ferrero-Turrión, 2021). Thus, beyond breaking official relations, Spain has actively sought to avoid any engagement.

Another way in which its opposition has been demonstrated is its insistence on rigidly monitoring the use of Kosovo's name in documents and on avoiding formulations that could imply its independence. Beyond the use of the asterisk, Spain, for example, also insisted on renaming the so-called WB6, which refers to Kosovo as the sixth member of the group, to the neutral name Western Balkan Partners (Daku and Rudaku, 2024). Spain also actively undermines any attempt to join international organisations, which could imply informal recognition. The combination of these strategies culminated most recently in its 2019 annulment case against the Commission, in which it challenged Kosovo's participation in BEREC. While the act itself shows the extent to which Spain is willing to go to resist any actions that could signify *de facto* statehood, the act only partially succeeded in its favour, as the Court confirmed that Kosovo may be considered a third country. Legal scholarship,

therefore, views this case as a confirmation of Kosovo's place in EU agencies and as encouragement for the EU to continue its pursuit of engagement with Kosovo (Challet and Bachelier, 2021; Kassoti, 2023; Skara and Xhaferaj, 2023; Van Elsuwege, 2023). The case has therefore limited Spain's room for manoeuvre in its resistance.

Finally, Spain's strategies have also been identified to extend to the world of sports. As attempts to exclude Kosovo's athletes from international competitions altogether have proved unfruitful, Spain has turned to symbolic measures to differentiate Kosovo's status. Measures have included prohibiting the display of the flag and the playing of the anthem, as well as modifying the emblems on athletes' uniforms (Gutiérrez-Chico and González-Fuente, 2021). In the most recent meeting in the realm of qualifying games for the 2022 Men's Football World Cup, Spain faced the risk of being excluded from the tournament altogether if it did not follow protocol by allowing flags, anthems and emblems. Thus, as a measure of last resort, Spain limited its show of opposition by recommending to broadcasters to use lowercase letters ("kosovo") to differentiate it from recognised states (Gutiérrez-Chico and Pulleiro Méndez, 2023). Thus, within the confines of what is possible, Spain has also made its aversion to Kosovo visible in the sports world, even as it faces increasing constraints in that arena.

Taken together, these facets make it clear that Spain is portrayed as unshakable in its position and as showing no sign of complying with the EU's agenda of engagement with Kosovo. Comparing the literature on Spain and Cyprus, it thus emerges that scholars have established a divergence in their positioning vis-à-vis Kosovo. As Ioannides put forward the process of Europeanisation as the explanation for Cyprus's change in orientation, Spain's actions consequently reflect a lack of Europeanisation's influence.

2.4. Research Gap

The research question merits attention at both the scientific and societal levels. On the one hand, Cyprus and Spain, as individual cases in the context of engagement with Kosovo, require further exploration. While Cyprus's engagement with Kosovo has already been examined using the Europeanisation framework, developments in Spain have not yet been examined through that lens. Furthermore, in both case studies, the question of independence movements is assumed to be the only factor influencing policy decisions. However, through this assumption, studies have overlooked other domestic conditions that may shape the choices. Therefore, this thesis contributes to the research by systematically evaluating the various domestic factors that may play a role in the Europeanisation process. Finally, in both cases, the elements of

recognition and engagement are often conflated. While recognition is an important matter regarding Kosovo, foreign policy encompasses a range of tools. Therefore, this thesis takes a different approach by separating the two and solely examining engagement in depth.

On the other hand, it is compelling to study the two strongest non-recognisers, Cyprus and Spain, in a focused comparison. Given that the two states have developed policies that run in opposite directions despite their shared initial position, understanding the factors shaping their policies becomes even more interesting. To uncover the variables that influenced this difference, the thesis thus fills the gap by nuancing the theoretical approach of Europeanisation by including domestic conditions, beyond the sole factor of independence movements, to examine how developments within member states shape their susceptibility to Europeanisation of foreign policy.

Turning to the societal relevance, the literature demonstrates that the EU faces a fundamental challenge in making a credible impact in the Western Balkan region, due to disagreement within the EU over policy towards Kosovo. Thus, investigating the factors that shape policy changes also provides insight into the potential to overcome disagreement. The research findings may thus have further implications for Kosovo's future.

3. Theoretical Framework

To explain the changes in policy orientation in Cyprus and Spain, the thesis employs Europeanisation theory. More precisely, Kyriakos Moumoutzis's conceptualisation of Europeanisation is combined with Héritier and Knill's domestic political factors that determine the process's strength and direction (Héritier and Knill, 2001; Moumoutzis, 2011). Together, they are well-suited to explain the differences, as they shed light on the steps that occur between an EU decision and its incorporation at the national level. The theory thus guides the analysis of the internal decision-making processes that have led to foreign policy choices in both countries following decisions made at the EU level. In the following sections, the main tenets of the theory are explained, and the intended use of its concepts is laid out.

3.1. Europeanisation of Foreign Policy

Around the turn of the century, ideas about Europeanisation gained traction in research. However, the concept's popularity has also led to widely differing understandings and applications. The broad agreement among scholars is that it is a phenomenon describing an adaptation to the EU's ways of doing things. Yet, scholars applied this idea to a variety of

contexts, such as explaining changes in institutional structures, policies, standards, cultures, identities and discourses (Radaelli, 2003). Similarly, the affected entity also varied, ranging from member states to candidate states and to non-European partners (Olsen, 2002). There has also been disagreement over whether it is a top-down, bottom-up, or horizontal process through which member states influence one another. Most importantly, it was also left unaddressed what criteria would have to be met for a phenomenon to be called Europeanised, and interpretations became very broad (Radaelli, 2003). These differences reflect a tendency to apply the concept loosely wherever it seemed convenient, which in turn led scholars to question its usefulness (Olsen, 2002). As Radaelli puts it, “If everything is Europeanized to a certain degree, what is not Europeanized?” (Radaelli, 2003, p. 5).

To narrow down the meaning of Europeanisation to a concept that differs from preexisting theories and allows for the identification of a single set of phenomena, Moumoutzis argues for its use to describe the incorporation of the results of EU policy processes into domestic systems of governance (Moumoutzis, 2011). Importantly, he aligns with Radaelli’s distinction that Europeanisation is not about convergence or harmonisation of member-state positions but rather about national adaptation that follows after an EU position has been formulated (Radaelli, 2003). This sets Europeanisation apart from theories of European integration. While those explain how and why states intensify cooperation and develop shared institutions, Europeanisation explains how integration into the EU, in turn, changes national policy (Moumoutzis, 2011). To put it in his words, “If agency (EU Member States) and structure (the EU) are mutually constitutive and integration theory informs us of how agency is structuring, then Europeanization is best suited to direct our attention to how agency is being structured.” (Moumoutzis, 2011, p. 612).

Europeanisation initially found most application in the policy fields over which the EU retains competence. However, over time, it has also come to be used more widely in foreign policy. While it is true that member states themselves shape foreign policy by consensus, it must be noted that an agreement in the Council does not perfectly reflect member states’ preferences; rather, it is a compromise preferable to the status quo (Moumoutzis, 2011). Thus, an EU position can ultimately still differ from the national stance and requires adaptation. In fact, it becomes particularly interesting to explore Europeanisation in the context of this intergovernmental field precisely because national adaptation occurs on a voluntary basis.

In this understanding of Europeanisation, two different causal mechanisms have emerged from previous analyses, both reflecting the voluntary nature of foreign policymaking in the EU. One line of logic focuses on the process of socialisation, which explains policy

change through the redefinition of national policy preferences resulting from EU-level interactions. Through the interactions, policymakers become convinced of the appropriateness of the EU approach to a policy problem. In turn, out of conviction, they ensure that the position is adopted in the domestic realm as well (Moumoutzis, 2011). This mechanism thus has a constructivist approach, in which internalised EU rules guide the national decision-making process.

The other causal mechanism is a process of strategic calculation, through which implementation occurs by a logic of utility-maximisation. In contrast to adopting the EU position due to a redefinition of national policy preferences, the decision is based on maximising personal gains from incorporation in relation to other national policy goals. The change in policy is therefore the result of a cost-benefit analysis of an alternative course of action and reflects a more instrumental facet of Europeanisation aimed at achieving national foreign policy goals (Moumoutzis, 2012). This causal mechanism therefore employs a rational-choice logic, in which personal gains explain the choice to pursue policy change. While the two mechanisms have opposite explanatory logics, the common denominator remains that member states voluntarily adapt to the EU position out of individual conviction, be it normative or instrumental.

In his conceptualisation of Europeanisation, Moumoutzis points out that empirical evidence does not provide sufficient support for the claim that norm internalisation results from socialisation. He therefore argues for a research design based on the strategic calculation mechanism, in which the costs and benefits of each course of action are assessed. However, the causal mechanisms can also be viewed as interlinked. A policymaker may be convinced of the appropriateness of an EU approach, but if the position is too difficult to sell at home due to domestic constraints, Europeanisation may still fail. Thus, alignment with strategic calculation is a prerequisite for socialisation to bear fruit in the incorporation process, with the original impulse still emanating from the EU level.

3.2 Alternative theoretical approach

Aside from Europeanisation theory, liberal intergovernmentalism could also be suitable for explaining why Cyprus has become softer on the EU paradigm than Spain. This theory views policy decisions as the result of intergovernmental bargaining shaped by asymmetrical interdependence (Moravcsik and Schimmelfenning, 2019). Weaker bargaining power arises from a greater need for EU support. Thus, on a general level, a smaller state with a weaker

economy and greater reliance on receiving EU funds is considered to have less bargaining power in the EU.

Compared with the other EU member states, Spain has the fourth-largest GDP (1.59 trillion euros in 2024), the second-largest territory (502,654 km²), and the fourth-largest population (48.6 million in 2024) (Eurostat, 2025, 2026; Statista, 2025). In contrast, Cyprus has the second-smallest GDP (0.03 trillion euros in 2024), the fourth-smallest territory (9,213 km²) and the third-smallest population (0.97 million in 2024) (Eurostat, 2025, 2026; Statista, 2025). Furthermore, Spain is a net contributor to the EU, with a net contribution of 1.463 million euros in 2023, while Cyprus is a net recipient of the EU, with a net receipt of 134 million euros in 2023 (Yanatma, 2024). From the perspective of liberal intergovernmentalism, those factors, taken together, give Cyprus less bargaining power in the EU and make it more likely to adapt to the EU's position than Spain (Moravcsik and Schimmelfenning, 2019).

However, Europeanisation has been selected over liberal intergovernmentalism for several reasons. First, from the liberal intergovernmentalism perspective, it can be argued that since Spain, as the larger power in the EU, is already opposed to the EU position, Cyprus could simply follow its lead. Therefore, the fact that Cyprus holds less bargaining power does not compromise its ability to oppose the EU position if it can join forces with the stronger Spain and therefore does not explain why it has softened its stance. Second, liberal intergovernmentalism is also limited in its explanatory power when accounting for Cyprus's self-initiated meeting with Kosovo in 2013, as this did not arise from a Council meeting in which it had to succumb to the pressures of other member states. In turn, Europeanisation theory does encompass voluntary adaptation to EU positions and is therefore more fitting. Third, Europeanisation theory has been selected over liberal intergovernmentalism because a focus on domestic factors in explaining policy choices is deemed more plausible. As EU-level demand for engagement with Kosovo is seen as a constant variable that applies equally to all member states, the rationale is that the variable that differs must lie at the domestic level.

In sum, Europeanisation can therefore be expected to hold explanatory value to identify the factors that cause the differing strategies between Cyprus and Spain. Building on Moumoutzis' conception of Europeanisation, the next section maps out which domestic factors may influence such a strategic calculation on the choice of Europeanisation.

3.3. Conceptualisation of Domestic Constraints to Europeanisation

In their study of national implementation of European road haulage liberalisation policies, Hérítier and Knill identified a set of factors that explain the different adaptations to the regulation (Hérítier and Knill, 2001). In essence, those variables encompass different conditions in the domestic politics that determine the member state's receptiveness to incorporating EU policy at the national level, i.e. to Europeanise.

It must be noted that those explanatory variables were identified and developed in the context of national adaptation to EU policy in supranational competences. In the study by Hérítier and Knill, the Commission introduced a regulation prescribing liberalisation of road haulage, and the authors analysed the legislative changes in EU countries that either reflect liberalisation or maintain interventionism. Yet, with some modifications, the factors are also appropriate to the analysis of the Europeanisation of foreign policy. A joint decision taken in the Council can still be at odds with a national policy position, and the decision to incorporate it at the national level hinges on a strategic calculation that considers other domestic policy priorities (Moumoutzis, 2011). The factors identified by Hérítier and Knill represent domestic constraints that can shape strategic calculations to incorporate an EU decision. Thus, with some modifications, their framework can also apply to the context of foreign policy.

In their study, the first explanatory variable determining the potential for change at the national level is the *stage of liberalisation*. In their analysis of road haulage policies, this component was considered in terms of whether liberalisation reforms were already underway or caught some countries off guard (Hérítier and Knill, 2001). Naturally, if reforms are already in the works, receptiveness to an EU guideline proposing the same revision is greater. Translating this variable into the context of implementing engagement policies with Kosovo in Cyprus and Spain, a domestic condition to consider could be the *state of the separatist conflict*. If the member state is in the midst of a critical phase of its own separatist conflict, its receptiveness to engaging with a contested state perceived as a separatist movement is lower. Thus, the first domestic factor that will be considered in the strategic calculation is the *state of the separatist conflict*.

The second explanatory variable identified by Hérítier and Knill is *ideology*. In their study, they differentiate between states in which an interventionist logic prevails and those that favour liberalisation. They argue that a country that strongly believes in an interventionist policy is less likely to be responsive to a European demand to liberalise (Hérítier and Knill, 2001). Translating this factor into the Kosovo context, differences in approaches to contested

states and to European cooperation prevail among political parties and leaders. Thus, the action to be implemented can be examined against the political leadership's ideological outlook.

The third factor determining differences in structural adjustment is the government's *capacity for reform*. On the one hand, reform capacity is determined by the number of *veto powers*, which could arise in different contexts. For example, federalist-decentralised political systems, multi-party coalition governments, more autonomous ministries and participation of associations in decision-making create more veto players (Héritier and Knill, 2001). A greater number of veto players is said to negatively impact the potential for change – the more actors with diverse interests, the less opportunity for change (Börzel and Risse, 2003; Radaelli, 2003). On the other hand, the *strength of the executive leadership* is considered. A fragmented, short-lived, and conflict-ridden leadership is less likely to implement changes (Radaelli, 2003). If a power struggle between different groups characterises the functioning of politics, the decision to implement reform becomes another source of conflict rather than a basis for working together to incorporate European policies (Héritier and Knill, 2001). Thus, the second component enables the first: only if veto players pursue different agendas and are in conflict does the potential to implement reforms at the EU level become limited. As this factor is applicable to the Kosovo context without modifications, the third factor included in the analysis will also be the *reform capacity* of governments.

Taken together, the stage of the separatist conflict, the ideology of political leadership, and the reform capacity constitute three domestic factors to be considered in a strategic calculation for incorporating an EU position. Importantly, the road haulage case study shows that not all factors need to apply simultaneously to predict the inhibition of Europeanisation, or vice versa. For example, both Germany and Italy were in a pre-liberalisation stage and subscribed to an interventionist ideology; the only difference that explains the change in the former is a medium level of reform capacity, whilst the latter's capacity was low (Héritier and Knill, 2001). Therefore, one factor can be enough to change the picture.

In sum, the theory raises the following expectation: in instances of action that represent Europeanisation, at least one domestic constraint that outweighs the explanatory strength of the other factors is absent. In instances of action that do not entail Europeanisation, at least one domestic constraint that outweighs the explanatory strength of the other factors is present.

The following section specifies how these concepts will be observed, which is summarised in Table 1 on page 16.

3.4. Operationalisation of Domestic Constraints to Europeanisation

To begin with, a change in national foreign policy that takes place after an EU-level foreign policy norm, practice, or procedure has been established needs to be identified (Moumoutzis, 2011). A series of Council decisions has been taken to approve actions related to engagement with Kosovo that can serve as the point of departure for establishing such a position. Importantly, the analysis does not focus on the stances taken by Cyprus and Spain in the Council discussion, but rather on what they did with the decision afterwards. A subsequent participation is classified as a sign of Europeanisation. Furthermore, self-initiated actions that align with or contradict the general stance of “unity engagement” are included, with alignment reflecting Europeanisation, whilst a challenge to the position indicates its absence. In sum, Europeanisation is thus observed as a change in policy that reflects the EU position, whilst its absence is reflected either in inaction or in an action that challenges the EU’s policy goals.

Following the assessment of actions reflecting the presence or absence of Europeanisation, the three factors derived from Héritier and Knill are used to explain the decision-making process. The first explanatory variable concerning the *state of the separatist conflict* is applied to the disputes with Northern Cyprus and Catalonia, respectively. The state is deemed to reflect a period of non-receptivity to engagement with Kosovo when relations are deteriorating. Attributes of deteriorating relations are renewed calls for independence, failed negotiations, or other situations in which opposing views stand in conflict. Thus, the timing of decisions is evaluated against the background of developments: If the domestic conflict poses a challenge, engagement with Kosovo is less likely.

The second explanatory variable concerning *ideology* assesses how a form of engagement relates to the leadership’s belief system in other policy areas. First, it is assessed which belief system the form of engagement belongs to. Then, the leadership’s attitude towards this belief system is evaluated by examining actions taken in other instances. For example, endorsing EULEX would reflect a broader belief in international intervention; thus, it must be assessed how the leadership relates to international interventions in other contexts. If a leader is consistently critical of international intervention missions, then it is likely that the leader is also sceptical of EULEX.

The third explanatory variable concerning *reform capacity* encompasses a variety of attributes. Overall, it must be distinguished between federalist-decentralised political systems and unitary-centralised political systems. However, because the overarching system does not change across decisions, only the political climate at that time is assessed for individual

observations. First, it is established whether the action occurs under a single-party government or under a coalition government. Second, because a multitude of actors alone does not constitute an obstacle to reform, the government's fragmentation is also assessed. This means that it is evaluated whether the different players are in conflict over fundamental topics. Third, it is also taken into consideration how much support the leadership has – for example, the withdrawal of coalition partners, scandals surrounding the leadership, declining approval ratings, early elections and a no-confidence vote are deemed signs of low support. Taken together, these indicators aid the assessment of leadership strength, which in turn informs reform capacity.

Table 1: Operationalisation of Europeanisation and the factors of domestic constraint

	Europeanisation	State of the separatist conflict	Ideology	Reform Capacity
Present	Policy change that reflects the EU position	Domestic separatist movement poses a challenge; active confrontation	Policy contradicts fundamental beliefs	Low: federalist-decentralised, multi-party coalition, fragmented leadership, low approval
Absent	No policy change or a change that challenges the EU position	No active independence claim or renewed rapprochement	Policy aligns with fundamental beliefs	High: unitary-centralised, single party, integrated leadership, high approval

4. Research Design

4.1. Comparative Case Study

To identify the factors that account for differences in engagement practices between Cyprus and Spain, the thesis conducts a structured, focused comparison guided by the domestic factors influencing Europeanisation. As George and Bennett explain, a comparative case study is structured by systematically comparing two cases, asking each the same set of questions.

Additionally, the case study is focused if those questions emerge from a specific research objective and a theoretical focus that matches this objective (George and Bennett, 2005).

In this study, Cyprus and Spain are treated as cases within the broader phenomenon of the EU's influence on national foreign policymaking. The research objective is to explain the difference in their engagement with Kosovo. To attain this objective, the theoretical focus is on Europeanisation, which explains the process of incorporating EU decisions into national policy. More concretely, the aim is to test the three domestic factors – the state of the separatist conflict, ideology of the political leadership and the reform capacity of the government – that may constrain this process. Thus, the “set of questions” that will be asked of each case study emerges from the operationalisation of those concepts. This means that each factor is explored individually on each observation for each case to identify which one(s) may explain a policy choice. Subsequently, the findings of both cases are compared to draw conclusions on the factor(s) that may explain the difference in actions between the two states (George and Bennett, 2005).

The time frame covers the period from the unilateral declaration of independence in 2008 to the implementation of visa liberalisation in 2024. The year 2008 offers a suitable starting point because both Kosovo's declaration of independence and the establishment of the EU-led EULEX mission were the first to bring up the question of whether to engage with Kosovo as a contested state. The year 2024 has been chosen as the endpoint because it is the year in which the last Council decision related to engagement with Kosovo, i.e., visa liberalisation, was implemented.

The observations for each case study have been chosen along two categories. The first concerns the national reactions to Council decisions. Major milestones in EU-Kosovo relations, approved by the Council, include the 2008 establishment of the EULEX mission, the entry into force of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) in 2016, Kosovo's participation in Union programmes since 2017, and the visa liberalisation that entered into force in January 2024. While EULEX and visa liberalisation raise expectations for implementation at the national level, the SAA and participation in the Union programme do not do so explicitly. The SAA with Kosovo is of a particular kind, as it is an EU-only agreement that does not require ratification by individual member states and encompasses cooperation only in areas of EU competence (Van Elsuwege, 2017). Similarly, Kosovo's participation in Union programmes, such as Horizon Europe and Erasmus+, does not concern the domestic level as it mainly entails the reception of EU funds and is directly implemented by the EU office in Pristina (European

Commission, 2020). Thus, only the decisions on EULEX and visa liberalisation are included, as they generate expectations of national incorporation.

To complement the analysis of actions post-Council decision and to encompass the diversity of actions that Cyprus and Spain have taken vis-à-vis Kosovo, observations are also included on the overarching EU stance of “unity in engagement”. Engagement is defined as the establishment of any form of political, economic and cultural relations (Armakolas and Ker-Lindsay, 2020). Thus, actions that reflect self-initiative in engaging with Kosovo are also included in the analysis and are deemed a sign of Europeanisation. Conversely, actions that entail an avoidance of engagement are also included as a sign of an absence of Europeanisation.

The data used in the analysis are primarily drawn from English-language, freely accessible news outlets covering events in Cyprus and Spain. The timeline of events related to the separatist conflict, the leadership's ideology, and the stability of the government between 2008 and 2024 was pieced together by searching for keywords related to these topics on the internet. The sources of the information were selected from news outlets deemed trustworthy. Furthermore, this material was supplemented by public statements from political leaders and secondary sources.

This choice is motivated by the nature of the analysis. As Europeanisation concerns the concrete actions that Cyprus and Spain have taken on a national level following an EU decision, and the analysis focuses on the political climate that shaped those choices, the main interest lies in the facts on the ground at that time. Thus, the focus is less about how politicians would now assess past actions in an interview or about the language used by legislators in a document outlining a policy change. Journalistic reports are therefore deemed appropriate for providing information on events on the ground, which aids the assessment of the state of the separatist conflict, the leadership's ideology, and the reform capacity.

However, the choice also comes with drawbacks. The reliance on journalistic evidence limits the data collection to publicly available information. Therefore, the analysis does not encompass interactions behind closed doors or informal motivations that have shaped decisions. Nevertheless, other sources of data, such as policy documents or even interviews, cannot guarantee access to such confidential information either. Thus, the limited access compromises the reliability of the findings, but is not considered grounds to rely on another source of data.

4.2. Case Selection

Armakolas and Ker-Lindsey introduced a categorisation of EU member states to map out the broad lines of relations with Kosovo. Expanding on the traditional view that distinguishes recognisers from non-recognisers, their classification also considers engagement, which they argue is an important complementary factor in supporting Kosovo. Engagement is understood as the “establishment of working political, economic and cultural relations” and is a separate component from recognition (Armakolas and Ker-Lindsay, 2020). From this classification emerge four categories. First, strong recognisers, such as Germany and France, recognise Kosovo and have fostered close relations, supporting its integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. Second, weak recognisers, such as Poland and Czechia, have chosen to recognise but maintain limited official diplomatic relations. Third, soft non-recognisers, which are Greece, Slovakia and Romania, belong to the group that refuse to recognise Kosovo but maintain significant contact, each also having established a Liaison Office in Pristina. Fourth, hard non-recognisers, which are Cyprus and Spain, neither recognise nor maintain official diplomatic relations with Kosovo.

Considering these four categories of states within Europeanisation theory, non-recognisers are the most interesting cases to study. Recognisers are already aligned with the EU’s push for Kosovo’s European perspective; thus, there is no need to adapt national policy, and no measurable effect of Europeanisation is to be expected. Thus, the pool of case studies to choose from is reduced to the non-recognisers Greece, Slovakia, Romania, Cyprus and Spain.

As the aim of the thesis is to test the theory, crucial case studies using a least-likely-case design are most suitable (Levy, 2008). Being hard non-recognisers, Cyprus and Spain are the least likely cases for Europeanisation in their engagement with Kosovo and therefore provide particularly interesting observations for better understanding the conditions under which Europeanisation is possible. Furthermore, studying Cyprus and Spain in comparison is particularly interesting because together they constitute the most similar system design for testing variables in the process of Europeanisation. This means that the cases share many characteristics but yield different outcomes, allowing the isolation of explanatory variables that account for the differences. The difference in outcomes for Cyprus and Spain is that, over the years, the former has relaxed its relations vis-à-vis Kosovo, whilst the latter has at times challenged EU engagement with Kosovo. This difference is particularly puzzling, given the following shared characteristics.

First, as emerges from the categorisation by Armakolas and Ker-Lindsey, Cyprus and Spain share a broad line in their policy as hard non-recognisers. They have thus traditionally supplemented their firm non-recognition with the avoidance of contact with Kosovo. In contrast, Romania, Slovakia and Greece have been less rigorous on refraining from engagement, having each established a Liaison Office in Pristina. Thus, the first similarity that sets the two cases apart is their policy combination of non-recognition and non-engagement.

Second, beyond the shared non-engagement, their non-recognition is informed by comparable domestic concerns that set them apart from other non-recognisers. What differentiates Cyprus and Spain from other cases is that they face active secessionist claims that pose a core problem in their national politics and guide their policies. Whilst Romania's and Slovakia's positions are also grounded in their fear that Hungarian minorities may make secessionist claims, the hypothetical nature of this threat still leaves more room for pragmatism in engaging with Kosovo without recognition (Rexhepi, 2025). Similarly, Greece's non-recognition, based on its concerns over the implications for the Cyprus issue, is not a deeply troubling issue of its own territorial integrity and therefore also leaves room for manoeuvre (Rexhepi, 2025). What binds Cyprus and Spain in their positions is therefore a fear over territorial integrity and national stability that motivates non-engagement with the contested state of Kosovo.

Third, another important similarity is that Cyprus and Spain align strongly with the EU on many other issues (Cantalapiedra and Pardo, 2014; Christou and Kyris, 2017). This is a particularly relevant factor with a view to an emerging research agenda of de-Europeanisation of foreign policy. In recent years, the observation that states are increasingly pursuing their national agendas without coordinating with fellow member states has introduced this new research. The crucial point about de-Europeanisation is that it is not simply an issue-specific rejection of an EU stance but rather a challenge against foundational European values and/or procedural norms (Müller, Pomorska and Tonra, 2021). Thus, the general support for the EU suggests that this instance of opposition can be studied as issue-specific rather than as part of a larger structural obstruction that can be labelled de-Europeanisation.

Taken together, those three similarities are important factors that could have explained the divergence in how Cyprus and Spain relate to Kosovo. However, it must be noted that the power asymmetry between the states adds a dimension that differentiates the two cases beyond their different decisions. While compared with all other EU member states, those two are the most similar and comparable in their relations with Kosovo, this is not a perfect comparison. Yet, in the context of this research, the comparable nature of the motivation that informs the

position is deemed a more important factor. As the aim is to test the domestic constraints on Europeanisation, a state's power in the EU does not play a direct role in that process. In contrast, the separatist movement does shape domestic constraints, making the prioritisation of choosing states informed by comparable national insecurity more important than selecting comparable powers in the EU. Thus, for the purpose of comparing cases guided by an assessment of domestic factors, the imperfection of the comparison is accepted as a limitation of the research design.

4.3. Strengths and Limitations

The comparative case study approach has been chosen as the most suitable method for several reasons. First, the focus on the smaller sample size allows for a deeper understanding of the facets of the puzzle at hand (Gerring, 2004). As the research aims to explain the differences in decision-making between two states, an in-depth understanding of the political contexts is required. Foreign policy decisions are influenced by context-specific factors, such as domestic political developments, which are difficult to quantify and require a deeper engagement with the national context. In turn, a case study approach allows for the better capture of these nuances than approaches focused only on measurable variables.

Second, building on this aspect, a case study also has greater conceptual validity, as the small sample size allows for a more consistent application of the concepts (George and Bennett, 2005). Studying the Europeanisation of foreign policymaking across all EU member states simultaneously would be misleading, as the conditions influencing their decision-making are not comparable and are context-specific. Thus, focusing solely on Cyprus and Spain to examine the Europeanisation of engagement with Kosovo allows for the adaptation of the factors to comparable national contexts, rather than stretching the concepts to accommodate different phenomena. An in-depth comparative approach is therefore more appropriate than a large statistical design.

Third, this also means that the complexity of the phenomenon of Europeanisation can be better accommodated in the analysis (George and Bennett, 2005). As the study by Héritier and Knill shows, Europeanisation is not merely influenced by the presence or absence of certain factors, but rather by the specific features of a factor and how it interacts with others. Therefore, interpreting the factors as a case study is crucial for connecting them to an outcome.

However, these benefits also come with drawbacks. Naturally, the other side of the coin of being able to pay more attention to the unique contexts of each case is that the case study

has a limited representativeness and generalisability (George and Bennett, 2005). If certain factors are particularly relevant to explain one case, it is very possible that the same would not apply to a different case. Yet, the goal of this study is not to make general claims about the inhibition of the Europeanisation process, but rather to explore the reasons behind the particularly puzzling difference between Cyprus and Spain. Therefore, the benefit of being able to go more in-depth into their national contexts outweighs the limitations of limited representativeness and generalisability.

Another limitation is that it is difficult to isolate the analysed variables from the influence of other factors, making it challenging to draw strong causal conclusions and introducing indeterminacy (Levy, 2008). The comparative approach, through a most-similar systems design, aims to minimise the issue by not interpreting observations from one case study in isolation. Furthermore, the case studies' in-depth evaluation of the various aspects that can influence foreign policymaking means that the plausibility of different factors can still be weighed against one another. Thus, while no bulletproof causal claim can be made, the aim is to find plausible explanations.

5. Analysis

The subsequent sections evaluate key moments in the engagement practices of Cyprus and Spain with Kosovo. Using the set of factors derived from Héritier and Knill's study, each choice is examined against the background of the presence or absence of those factors (Héritier and Knill, 2001). In the first case study on Cyprus, the Council decisions are presented individually, with background provided. However, to avoid repetition, this background is not repeated for the second case study of Spain. For ease of reference, the findings are also individually summarised in Table 2 on page 33 and Table 3 on page 44. Subsequently, the observations of the two cases are compared, and the findings are discussed in light of the research question.

5.1. Cyprus

5.1.1. Political Context

As an overarching factor, Cyprus is a unique case in its policymaking approach. Among EU states, Cyprus is the only presidential republic in which the president, directly elected by the people, serves as both head of state and head of government (DG COMM, 2025a). This

grants the president considerable formal constitutional power over political affairs, as the president does not depend on parliamentary confidence and can appoint governments independently (Ker-Lindsay, 2006; Adamides, 2024). In the context of this study, this is an important factor to take into account, as it means the Cypriot president always possesses stronger veto power, which could either support the willingness to reform or block policy change.

5.1.2. EULEX (2008)

With the UN mission in Kosovo ending, the EU saw the need to establish its own presence in the region. Complementing its previous achievements in supporting economic development and reconstruction under UN presence, the new mission aimed to strengthen the rule of law in Kosovo (Odendahl, 2009). On the 4th of February 2008, 13 days prior to Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence, the Council of the EU adopted a Joint Action that established EULEX (*Council Joint Action 2008/124/CFSP*, 2008). Leading up to this decision, Cyprus was the only state that remained uncompromisable in its opposition – even after the question of Kosovo's statehood was separated from the EU mission (Ker-Lindsay and Economides, 2010; Ioannides, 2017). Ultimately, under pressure from the other member states, Cyprus gave way and abstained from the vote. Subsequently, the mission began operations on the 9th of December 2008, albeit without staff from Cyprus (Ioannides, 2017). Until today, the EULEX mission mandate has been approved by the Council every two years, but Cyprus has continued to refrain from contributing. Thus, Cyprus did not implement the EU decision at the national level, meaning it did not Europeanise in this matter.

Regarding the state of the separatist movement, the period leading up to and following the Council's decision to approve the mandate saw significant developments in the Cypriot territorial conflict. The beginning of 2008 was marked by an election race in Cyprus, in which a central topic was the declining support by Greek Cypriots for the country's continued division. While the outgoing president, Tassos Papadopoulos, took a hard stance against reunification, his rival, Dimitris Christofias, advocated for renewed efforts and made unity his priority (Smith, 2008b). Ultimately, Christofias won the elections on 24 February 2008 and soon thereafter fulfilled his election promise by meeting Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat, which led to a re-launch of reunification negotiations (Smith, 2008b). In April 2008, the first result of this rapprochement was the reopening of Ledra Street, the main commercial street in the centre of the capital, Nicosia, which had been closed since the 1960s, making it a significant symbol of overcoming divisions (Jacobson *et al.*, 2009). Once Christofias took

office, a period of rapprochement between the two conflict parties was therefore launched. By December 2008, when EULEX was deployed, the state of the separatist movement was reassuring, suggesting it did not pose a domestic constraint on engaging with contested Kosovo.

A more compelling basis for rejecting participation in EULEX lies in Christofias' ideology. In a statement before the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in September 2008, he made his opposition to international interventions clear. On the one hand, he viewed foreign interventions following Cypriot independence to have "prevented the development of this homeland for the benefit of all Cypriots" (Christofias, 2008). On the other hand, looking towards the future, he also stressed that the agency should lie in the hands of the Cypriots themselves and that it is possible to have "an agreed solution that will serve the interests of Cypriots and not those of any foreigners" (Christofias, 2008). Furthermore, he believed that such a solution must be maintainable without an international administration on the island. Reflecting on his shared agreement with Talat, he stated: "Together, we envisioned a Cyprus for Cypriots without the presence of foreign troops" (Christofias, 2008). The way he views the role of international intervention in the fate of his own country thus suggests that he would not wish to support the same for Kosovo. Thus, the interventionist nature of EULEX conflicts with Christofias' rejection of international intervention, which makes a compelling case for constraining participation in the mission.

Finally, turning to the reform capacity, Christofias from the Progressive Party for the Working People (AKEL) formed a three-party coalition government with the centrist Democratic Party (DIKO) and the Movement for Social Democracy (EDEK) (*Cyprus Mail*, 2009). Early in his presidency, disagreements between the parties over a suitable approach to reunification talks with Northern Cyprus emerged. Sharp criticism of his extension of "a hand of friendship" to the Turkish Cypriot leader, led by his eagerness to find a solution, came in particular from DIKO, who saw his approach as a sign of capitulating to Turkish Cypriot demands (Smith, 2008a). Therefore, Christofias was not only sharing the leadership with two other parties, but they also stood in conflict on the most fundamental policy issue of solving the national problem, reflecting a fragmented leadership. Yet he continued to engage with the Turkish Cypriots, suggesting that the fragmentation did not pose a domestic constraint on his pursuit of the agenda. Thus, while there was a conflict within his multi-party coalition, his ability to implement his decisions does not suggest that his reform capacity was the leading factor inhibiting Europeanisation on the EULEX mission.

In sum, the decision not to allow for national contributions to the EULEX mission is most likely tied to an ideological conflict. While Christofias was working with a fragmented

coalition government, his own rejection of interventionism appears to have already stopped the decision-making before it could be discussed with other veto players. Therefore, his rejection of international interventions is the most compelling factor in explaining the absence of Europeanisation in this matter.

5.1.3. Council Presidency (2012)

For the first time since its accession in 2004, Cyprus assumed the presidency of the Council of the EU in the second half of 2012. Alongside the main priority of finalising the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework, the enlargement process remained prominent on the agenda, focusing on both candidate and potential candidate states (Passas and Katakalous, 2012). Regarding Kosovo, Erato Kozakou-Marcoullis, the Foreign Minister of Cyprus, stated: “On Kosovo, despite our well-known position of not recognising Kosovo’s Unilateral Declaration of Independence, allow me to stress that the Cyprus Presidency will employ a balanced approach, taking into full consideration the views of all the member states of the EU” (Kozakou-Marcoullis, 2012). While this statement remains vague, it reflects a greater degree of compromise than in 2008 and marks a step towards accommodating the EU position. Thus, although this evidence of change is comparatively weak, the voluntary acceptance of discussing Kosovo in the context of enlargement is taken as a sign of Europeanisation.

Viewed from the perspective of developments in Northern Cyprus at the time, the presidency collided with unfortunate timing. Earlier in 2012, a series of tripartite meetings between the UN, the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots was discontinued after talks reached a stalemate, with neither side willing to make the necessary concessions (Morelli, 2012). With no solution for the national problem in sight, the conflict over secession has therefore reached a stage of renewed estrangement. In turn, the timing is arguably ill-suited to becoming more accommodating of engagement with Kosovo.

Nonetheless, the “balanced approach” regarding Kosovo aligns with Christofias’ ideology. As his keen interest in renewed talks with the Turkish Cypriot leader reflects, he was a pragmatic leader who sought dialogue to resolve conflicts. In turn, the stance of considering different views on Kosovo, in contrast to EULEX's interventionist nature, aligns with this diplomatic approach. Additionally, Cyprus, holding the rotating presidency for the first time, may have provided further motivation to prove itself as a neutral chair and a fair broker between different positions. Thus, from an ideological point of view, the willingness to accommodate different views on Kosovo aligns with Christofias’ beliefs but may also be tied to the novelty of holding a Council presidency.

Turning to the reform capacity, by the time Christofias' government took over the presidency, his leadership had become significantly challenged domestically, and both coalition partners had withdrawn from the government. The Cypriot markets were severely weakened by the financial crisis, so much so that the dispute over how the crisis was handled has replaced the dispute over how the national problem was handled as the main point of conflict within the government (*Politico*, 2012). On top of these two issues, support for Christofias suffered another setback after an explosion that triggered an energy crisis. In July 2011, containers of munitions exploded next to a naval base, killing 13 people and damaging the largest power station in Cyprus (Jones, 2011). As Christofias has taken this decision to store those munitions that were intercepted on their way to Syria instead of destroying them, he was largely blamed for this incident. The strength of his leadership was thus significantly compromised, which arguably makes the accommodation for engagement with Kosovo less likely. However, this domestic situation may also have motivated efforts to maintain good relations with European partners amid declining support at the national level. In turn, accommodating discussions that allow for different views provides a low threshold for showing a cooperative attitude in the EU.

Looking at the larger picture, whilst the deteriorating situation with Northern Cyprus and the political, financial and energy crisis posed constraints to opening to the EU position on Kosovo, Christofias' pragmatism and conviction of dialogue matched his "balanced approach". Thus, ideology also appears to be the leading factor in this decision, this time giving way to Europeanisation. Yet, it must also be taken into consideration that this was the first Council presidency of Cyprus and, therefore, may have added expectations to serve as a neutral chair. Furthermore, the lack of national support may provide another incentive to cooperate at the European level to maintain good relations abroad.

5.1.4. Visit to Pristina (2013)

On the margins of the UNGA in September 2013, Cypriot Foreign Minister Ioannis Kasoulides met with Kosovar Prime Minister Hashim Thaci and Foreign Minister Enver Hoxhaj (Ker-Lindsay, 2015). Adding another layer to this significant moment for their bilateral relations, Kasoulides followed up with a historic visit to Pristina soon after (Ioannides, 2017). Reportedly, those actions were deliberately made public as a signal from Cyprus that it does not seek to impede Kosovo's European integration (Ker-Lindsay, 2015). Taken together, this was an exceptionally significant moment in the larger picture of Cypriot engagement with

Kosovo and represented a self-initiated moment of Europeanisation within the policy paradigm of “unity in engagement”.

Alongside the initiative of meeting with the Kosovar government, the UNGA served as a platform for the newly elected president, Nicos Anastasiades, to pursue renewed rapprochement with Northern Cyprus. In his remarks before the Assembly, he called on Türkiye and the Turkish Cypriots “to become partners in the effort for the reunification of a peaceful, secure and prosperous homeland”, a call that was well received (UN News, 2013). Furthermore, he met with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to explore possibilities for relaunching negotiations in a format that involved the UN (UN News, 2013). He therefore also showed initiative to turn his words into actions. Thus, the self-initiated engagement with Kosovo, in line with the EU position, clearly coincides with the beginning of a renewed pursuit of a settlement with Northern Cyprus.

Turning to ideology, the step towards Kosovo and the making way for EU action reflect the larger picture of Anastasiades’ principles. On the one hand, he was deemed an even more pragmatic president than Christofias to advance reunification talks with Northern Cyprus. In fact, he supported the original UN-backed Annan Plan for reunification, which was rejected by the majority of Greek Cypriots in 2004 (Gardner, 2013). Thus, his willingness to compromise on Northern Cyprus is likely to translate to other international issues as well. On the other hand, he was also more open to the EU. He ran his election campaign on the promise to seek a bailout from the EU, which Christofias refused to do (Kambas, 2013). Furthermore, in contrast to the rather isolated Christofias, who was the EU’s sole Communist leader, Anastasiades was actively forging close ties to European leaders – reportedly also having good relations with Angela Merkel, Germany’s chancellor (Gardner, 2013). Finally, Foreign Minister Kasoulides was a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) until he took office in 2013. His work in the EU context may therefore also suggest an inclination to work with the EU rather than against it. The pragmatic outlook, combined with intensified socialisation with other EU leaders, could therefore explain the signal not to stand in the way of its plans for Kosovo.

Finally, regarding reform capacity, Anastasiades of the centre-right Democratic Rally (DISY) took office in February 2013 and was supported by the centrist DIKO and the centre-right European Party (EVROKO). The primary focus at the beginning of his term was on recovering from financial difficulties and leading the country out of the crisis (Kambas, 2013). However, Anastasiades’ plan to seek a bailout from the EU faced resistance within the government, given the substantial concessions Cyprus would have to make to obtain help. As a result, a clear majority in the parliament rejected the first bailout plan in March 2013 (Fox,

2013). Yet in the face of no viable alternative, the Anastasiades government ultimately settled for an agreement a few days later (Traynor, Moulds and Amos, 2013). Nevertheless, the conflict within the government reflects a limited capacity for reform, which makes a change in policy vis-à-vis Kosovo less plausible.

This significant dependence on EU support raises the question of whether the renewed outlook on reunification negotiations and the ideological alignment with solution-oriented dialogue are sufficient to account for this milestone in engagement with Kosovo. From the perspective of liberal intergovernmentalism, the situation suggests that, in the face of dependency, signalling support for the European mission of integrating Kosovo is a trade-off for EU financial support. In fact, in 2013, a renewed push for engagement with Kosovo also came from the Commission, in its proposal to negotiate an SAA, with discussions starting in October of that year. Thus, reaching out to Kosovo can be seen as a sign to lend the SAA negotiations greater credibility by showing its support for the integration. Therefore, rather than domestic factors giving way to the incorporation of the EU paradigm, it would result from external coercion.

However, in their study of the impact of the euro crisis on Cypriot foreign policy more broadly, Christou and Kyris report that, according to a Cypriot official, the change in government was a more significant factor in driving policy change than the crisis itself. The interviewee claims that Anastasiades was keen to follow the mainstream of European policy and integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures (Christou and Kyris, 2017). Therefore, while the dependency on the EU must be acknowledged, there is reason to believe that the visit to Pristina was more voluntary than the result of EU coercion.

In sum, the meeting and the ensuing visit to Pristina represent a significant sign of incorporating the EU stance of engagement with Kosovo into Cypriot foreign policy. Following the assessment of the three domestic factors and the Cypriot official's perspective, ideology appears to be the most compelling variable shaping this decision. However, it cannot be denied that external pressure from the EU may also have influenced the strategic calculus at a time when Cyprus was highly dependent on its help.

5.1.5. Second Bilateral Meeting (2022)

In July 2022, during an annual Round Table organised by Greece and the news outlet *The Economist*, with the support of the European Parliament and the European Commission, Cypriot Foreign Minister Kasoulides and Kosovar Prime Minister Albin Kurti reportedly held a bilateral meeting (Koha Ditore, 2022). According to the government of Kosovo, Kasoulides

affirmed his support for the EU visa liberalisation plan and told Kurti that he wants to improve communication and cooperation between Cyprus and Kosovo (Koha Ditore, 2022). This meeting thus represents another major milestone in the engagement with Kosovo, not only by holding another bilateral meeting but also through the explicit support for the EU initiative. Both the engagement paradigm and the intended visa liberalisation policy were thus incorporated on the national level, demonstrating another instance of Europeanisation.

Looking at developments in Northern Cyprus, the period between 2015 and 2017 was a hopeful stage, with talks assessed as the closest yet to a solution (Miles, 2017). Yet in 2017, the negotiations came to an unfruitful end. Most notably, the situation reached a stalemate, as the Turkish Cypriot leader remained uncompromising in demanding state recognition of the TRNC, whilst the government under Anastasiades sought internationally supported reunification (Faustmann and Sözen, 2023). While no concrete event occurred in 2022, Kasoulides' meeting still falls within a period when no solution to the conflict was in sight, and the views of both sides were in direct disagreement. The state of the separatist conflict, therefore, did not give rise to a hopeful outlook that could motivate rapprochement with Kosovo.

Turning to the ideological factors that could influence this second bilateral meeting, the conditions were the same as in 2013. The pragmatic, dialogue-oriented, and EU-supportive Anastasiades was still the president, and the meeting was again held by Kasoulides, the former MEP. Importantly, Kasoulides served as Foreign Minister for only a brief period in 2022, after Nikos Christodoulides, who had held the position since 2018, resigned. As Kasoulides had already shown his more open stance towards Kosovo as Foreign Minister in 2013, it fits the picture that he agreed to another consultation when he was back in office. It is therefore noteworthy that the two significant bilateral meetings with Kosovo took place in 2013 and 2022, when Kasoulides was the Foreign Minister, and Anastasiades was president, showing ideological coherence in the attitude toward Kosovo.

Considering the reform capacity at the time of Kasoulides' second meeting and expression of support, the Cypriot government found itself in turmoil. Earlier in 2022, Nikos Christodoulides, who had been the Foreign Minister since 2018, had resigned. This move followed an internal conflict within his party, DISY, over the selection of the candidate for the next presidential election in February 2023. As a result, he resigned early to run for president as an independent candidate (Kambas, 2022). While Héritier and Knill would predict that a fragmented leadership would not allow for reform, this instance shows the contrary. Arguably,

it is precisely the fragmentation that offered Kasoulides an unexpected window of opportunity to act on the Kosovo issue again.

In sum, this second bilateral meeting reinforces the incorporation of the EU stance of engagement with Kosovo into Cypriot foreign policy. The most compelling explanatory factor is that Kasoulides was the foreign minister in both instances and, therefore, his personal convictions over engagement with Kosovo present a persuasive argument. In turn, the fact that this form of engagement was repeated five years later, when Cyprus recovered from the financial crisis, supports the assessment that, in 2013, personal convictions may have outweighed pressure from the EU.

5.1.6. Visa Liberalisation (2024)

Visa liberalisation with Kosovo, allowing travel to the EU without a visa for up to 90 days, has been discussed since the Commission began negotiations on the SAA in 2013. The Commission confirmed that the requirements for the visa liberalisation were met in 2018. While the European Parliament approved the proposal in 2019, the Council did not approve it until March 2023. Importantly, according to reports, the approval process in the Council has been held up for several years due to opposition from other member states, such as France, the Netherlands and Germany, who feared an increase in irregular migration (Marciacq, Emini and Zweers, 2022). In contrast, as Kasoulides's 2022 show of support demonstrated, Cyprus explicitly supported visa liberalisation. The implementation of visa liberalisation in 2024, aligning with the EU position at the national level, is consequently not surprising but nevertheless indicates Europeanisation.

Looking at developments in Northern Cyprus, the deadlock in negotiations persisted. In fact, contrary to expectations, an anticipated trilateral meeting with the UN Secretary-General and the Cypriot leaders at the UNGA in September 2023 did not materialise. The only notable development is that the Turkish Cypriot leader, Ersin Tatar, made a concession on accepting a UN special envoy on the Cyprus Problem. As a result, in December 2023, Maria Angela Holguin Cuellar, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Colombia, was appointed and took office in January 2024 (Sözen and Faustmann, 2024). However, with the appointment of a UN special envoy as the only concession the Turkish Cypriot side was willing to make, the outlook for fruitful reunification negotiations remained bleak. Thus, the state of the separatist conflict does not provide conditions that could motivate engagement with Kosovo.

On the ideological side, when comparing Cypriot support for the visa liberalisation with Kosovo to other such agreements, this endorsement aligns with its practices. Cyprus is also one

of the fiercest opponents of discussions on the contested state of the Republic of China (Taiwan) within the EU's foreign policy, as it views it as another case mirroring its situation with Northern Cyprus (Ferri, 2024). Yet, within the EU framework, Cyprus has also granted visa liberalisation to Taiwan (*Visa waiver for Taiwanese passport holders approved*, 2010). In fact, this instance already set a precedent for the separation between granting visa liberalisation and recognition, as none of the EU member states recognises Taiwan as a state. Thus, granting visa liberalisation to Kosovo, on the condition that it meets the requirements, contributes to policy coherence and is also backed by precedent, which shows that it is possible without implying recognition.

Turning to the strength of the executive leadership, Nikos Christodoulides took office as the president of Cyprus in March 2023. Having run as an independent candidate, he also formally appointed his ministers as independent. However, in practice, they are largely aligned with four different parties: DIKO, EDEK, the Democratic Alignment (DIPA) and the Solidarity Movement (Sözen and Faustmann, 2024). Thus, his cabinet is composed of a diverse set of ministers, who have their loyalties with different parties. Yet, no fundamental conflict between the actors was apparent in 2023. Thus, the government provided fruitful conditions for the reform of visa regulations with Kosovo.

In sum, the implementation of visa liberalisation in 2024 was to be expected, given the previous expression of support. Still, considering that this practice also aligns with the handling of visa liberalisation with another contested state, Taiwan, and occurred amidst good reform capacities, the domestic constraints on implementation were limited.

5.1.7. Assessment of Europeanisation

Looking at the past 18 years of engagement with Kosovo, it becomes clear that the only notable sign of protest at EU action occurred during the discussions leading up to the deployment of EULEX and the subsequent non-participation in the mission. Ever since, Cyprus has shown Europeanisation in its engagement practices with Kosovo. During its Council presidency in 2012, it was a pragmatic player, accommodating different positions and allowing Kosovo to be included in discussions, thereby engaging with it in multilateral contexts. Beyond pragmatism, Cyprus has also taken steps towards Kosovo through the two bilateral meetings held by Kasoulides, which are the most significant signs of the national incorporation of the EU's engagement paradigm with Kosovo. Finally, the support for and implementation of visa liberalisation also showcase a greater willingness to facilitate exchanges with Kosovo.

When the events and domestic constraints to Europeanisation are examined side by side over time in Table 2 below, the connection between the two is mixed. First, regarding the developments with Northern Cyprus, periods of estrangement and rapprochement alternated. Yet, since 2010, Cyprus has remained constant in accommodating engagement with Kosovo, and periods of estrangement have not appeared to influence those decisions. Thus, the state of the separatist conflict did not pose a domestic constraint to the decision to incorporate EU stances on Kosovo at the national level, i.e. Europeanisation.

Second, regarding reform capacity, the political climate in Cyprus has been turbulent for most of the past two decades. Conflicts over approaches to reunification efforts have been a recurring theme in the different coalition governments. Most notably, in 2013, when the historic visit to Pristina took place, Cyprus was amid both the financial and energy crises, yet engagement with Kosovo was possible. The element that may help shed light on this discrepancy is the president's strong veto power in Cyprus. In fact, the pattern of each president following his approach regarding Northern Cyprus, despite disagreements within the coalition, shows the president's comparatively strong constitutional power. Thus, while the strength of executive leadership does not correlate with signs of Europeanisation, the president's veto power helps explain why the third factor emerges as the strongest explanatory variable.

Ideology is the most compelling factor explaining the presence or absence of Europeanisation. While EULEX conflicted with Christofias' rejection of international intervention, all other actions were largely consistent with the government's guiding principles. In turn, the clearest signs of rapprochement through the bilateral meetings occurred under the presidency of Anastasiades, who was considered keen to align with EU policy paradigms and to integrate Cyprus into its structures. Thus, in the context of Cyprus's constitutional set-up, these differences underscore the importance of the beliefs held by those in power. Returning to Moumoutzis' understanding of Europeanisation, this may also be seen as supporting the view that ideology is a factor enabling the effects of socialisation. While it is difficult to assess which element comes first, the combination of Anastasiades being keener on integration into the EU, having closer ties to other European leaders, and being the President when the two most significant rapprochement initiatives occur certainly suggests a connection among those components.

In sum, the analysis of Cypriot engagement with Kosovo in light of the explanatory factors of Europeanisation shows that policy shifts are largely tied to the ideologies of those in power. Given that in Cyprus, the president holds more constitutional powers, it is plausible that this factor outweighs the other domestic constraints.

Table 2: Policy Changes and Domestic Constraints in Cyprus' Engagement with Kosovo

Event	Europeanisation	State of the separatist conflict	Ideology	Reform Capacity
EULEX (2008)	Absent: Non-participation in the mission	Rapprochement: Christofias and Talat launch reunification negotiations	Conflict with the rejection of international intervention	Low: Multi-party coalition, conflict over reunification approach
Council Presidency (2012)	Present: “balanced approach” on Kosovo	Estrangement: Reunification talks failed	Aligned with the belief in dialogue	Low: coalition partners withdrew, economic and energy crisis, low approval
Visit to Pristina (2013)	Present: self-initiated engagement	Rapprochement: Intention to relaunch negotiations	Aligned with the belief in dialogue and EU support	Low: Multi-party coalition, disagreement over bailout
Bilateral Meeting (2022)	Present: renewed self-initiated engagement	Estrangement: Deadlock in negotiations	Aligned with the belief in dialogue and EU support	Low: Leadership fragmented, elections coming up
Visa Liberalisation (2024)	Present: implementation on the national level	Estrangement: Deadlock in negotiations	Aligned with visa liberalisation practice with Taiwan	High: informal four-party coalition without apparent conflict

5.2. Spain

5.2.1. Political Context

Regarding the overarching issue of veto powers, Spain is a parliamentary monarchy, meaning the Prime Minister is the head of government, while the monarch is the head of state (DG COMM, 2025b). This also means that the Spanish Prime Minister depends on parliamentary majority support and can be removed from office by a no-confidence vote in

parliament. In practice, this means that if a Prime Minister lacks parliamentary control or a supporting coalition, their political strength is compromised. While this is an important factor in the domestic constraints that influence strategic calculation, in foreign policy, the prime minister is said to dominate decision-making and is therefore less constrained (Cantalapiedra and Pardo, 2014).

5.2.2. EULEX (2008)

Spain approved the mandate of the EULEX mission and initially agreed to send Spanish police officers to Kosovo. However, when it came to the mission establishment in December, Spain refused to send its own staff (Reuters, 2008). Like Cyprus, it has approved the mission every two years since 2008, but still refuses to participate. Therefore, when it came to incorporating the EU position at the national level, Spain did not Europeanise on this matter.

Looking at developments in Catalonia, relations at the time were good. In 2006, Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero allowed a referendum on a new Autonomy Statute for Catalonia, which granted the region greater self-governing powers (Tremlett, 2006). Furthermore, his government regularly cooperated with Catalan parties in the parliament to pass legislation. Accordingly, Zapatero both supported Catalonia's claim for greater autonomy and worked with Catalan parties, signalling good relations. Thus, the domestic situation in that regard did not pose a direct threat that could have influenced a decision to reject support for an EU mission in Kosovo.

Regarding the compatibility with ideology, Zapatero was critical of international interventions. One of his key election promises in 2004 was to end Spain's participation in the Iraq war, based on the conviction that it was not a legal intervention (Jeffery, 2004). Given that the EULEX mission also lacked an explicit UN mandate, Spain justified its non-participation on the grounds that the legal question was still unresolved (Reuters, 2008). Furthermore, it must be noted that the Council approved EULEX before Kosovo declared its independence. Following Kosovo's declaration, Spain was among the first to respond with explicit non-recognition, on the grounds that it believed that it violated international law (Traynor, 2008). Thus, the changed circumstances in Kosovo added another facet to the hesitancy regarding the mission's legality. The ultimate rejection of participating in EULEX can therefore be linked to Zapatero's more cautious and critical approach to international interventions.

Turning to the reform capacity of Zapatero's government, his Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) was the only party in the leadership, albeit in a minority government. Despite being in the minority, his government was known for a drastic shift in Spanish politics

and the successful introduction of a series of reforms. Most notably, he introduced an array of social policies, ranging from social welfare reforms to a new law for reproductive rights and the expansion of the renewable energy sector (Karlsen, 2011). Thus, despite relying on other parties in parliament to pass legislation, Zapatero maintained strong leadership and pursued his election promises. His reform capacity thus does not appear constrained and cannot explain the difficulty of passing a contested mission in his government.

The most compelling factor explaining the reluctance to participate in EULEX is therefore Zapatero's critical stance on international interventions. A fundamental scepticism of the mission, therefore, outweighed the effect of relaxed relations with Catalonia and a strong government.

5.2.3. EU-Western Balkan Summit (2010)

In the first half of 2010, Spain took on the Council presidency for the fourth time since joining the EU. While not the primary focus of its presidency, enlargement did feature on Spain's list of objectives. Alongside its strong focus on Croatia and Türkiye, Spain also sought to provide a European perspective for all the Western Balkan partners, albeit without mentioning Kosovo (Molina, 2010). Following up on this ambition, Spain hosted the 2010 EU-Western Balkan Summit in Sarajevo, which also included representatives of the Kosovo government at the ministerial meeting. This inclusion was quite remarkable given the non-recognition and absence of any formal relations. As the expert Ignacio Molina in Spanish EU-policy making noted, "in June Spain held a successful and pragmatic meeting in Sarajevo in which it was able to bring together representatives of Serbia and Kosovo, and what is even more promising, take part itself" (Molina, 2010, p. 7). The Summit thus marks a significant moment when Spain allowed engagement with Kosovo in a multilateral setting. It therefore entails Europeanisation, as it reflects the EU's position on engagement with Kosovo in its national policy.

With regard to developments in Catalonia, as in the rest of the country, the region was severely hit by the economic crisis. However, whilst economic dissatisfaction may be associated with increased support for independence from Spain, there is no causal link between the two (Bel, Cuadras-Morató and Rodon, 2019). In fact, the independence movement only experienced its surge later in the summer of 2010 and is linked to the ruling of the Spanish Constitutional Court on the Catalan Statute of Autonomy. Thus, with no active threat from Catalan separatist movements in June 2010, there was no concern about engaging with Kosovar representatives at the Summit.

Turning to ideology, the decision to include Kosovo in the EU-Western Balkan Summit aligns with Zapatero's pragmatic approach to Catalonia. His cooperation with Catalan parties and willingness to accommodate more autonomy for the region reflect an attitude of solution-oriented dialogue. Thus, while remaining firm on non-recognition of Kosovo, facilitating engagement at the EU-Western Balkan Summit aligns with a pragmatic, diplomatic approach. His ideological background, therefore, may explain the decision to engage with Kosovo in a multilateral setting.

Regarding the reform capacity, in 2010 Zapatero was in his second term as prime minister, again leading a single-party minority government. In this renewed term, however, his executive leadership had been compromised in strength. In the face of the worsening economic crisis, Zapatero had to break his promise not to cut social spending and implement austerity measures, which led to protests (Tremlett and Moya, 2010). Furthermore, the employment rate had reached 20% in 2010, adding another layer to public discontent (Tremlett and Moya, 2010). His leadership was thus fiercely challenged amid the crisis, which also led to early elections in 2011. Thus, his reform capacity was compromised and cannot be linked to the Europeanisation of engagement with Kosovo.

Given the fragile state of the economy, it must be noted that the lack of protest against the EU engagement with Kosovo may also be linked to the dependence on an EU bailout. However, help from the EU in the form of loans through the European Stability Mechanism only materialised in 2012, and at the same time, Spain also found itself in economic trouble in 2008 ('Spain', 2025). Therefore, it is difficult to pinpoint a concrete connection between the Summit's hosting and dependence on the EU at that time.

In sum, the Catalan separatist movement's inactivity and Zapatero's pragmatic ideology may explain the openness to the inclusion of Kosovo. While there may also have been less room to protest the EU's stance amid economic difficulties, the connection between the two is weaker.

5.2.4. EU-Western Balkan Summit (2018)

The first clear sign of protest from Spain over the EU's engagement with Kosovo came during the 2018 EU-Western Balkan Summit in Sofia in May. Ahead of the Summit, Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy from the People's Party (PP) submitted a letter stating his opposition to Kosovo's European integration (Velebit, 2018). As the Summit addressed the WB6, which encompasses the entirety of the Western Balkans, including Kosovo, he highlighted that Kosovo should not be treated as a state like the other partners and refused to accept its

participation in the Summit. As Kosovo remained invited, Rajoy in turn did not attend the Summit. This behaviour thus represents a challenge to the EU's engagement with Kosovo and is therefore a sign of a lack of Europeanisation.

Looking at the situation in Catalonia, conditions have significantly changed since the last EU-Western Balkan Summit in 2010. Shortly after the Summit, the Spanish Constitutional Court issued its ruling on the 2006 Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia, which Zapatero had supported but the PP had appealed. Among other things, the Court clarified that references to "Catalonia as a nation" and to the "national reality of Catalonia" had no legal value and reaffirmed the "indissoluble unity of the Spanish nation" (Calamur, 2017). This was the watershed moment that sparked protests in July 2010 and renewed ambitions for independence (Queralt Jiménez, 2014).

Over the years, the situation escalated until, in October 2017, the Catalan secessionist movement reached its pinnacle. On October 1, Catalonia held a referendum on independence, and subsequently, Catalan President Carles Puigdemont and other regional leaders signed a declaration of independence of Catalonia (Jones, 2017). However, in the face of opposition from Madrid, Puigdemont initially suspended the implementation to negotiate a solution with the government (Jones, 2017). Yet instead of finding a mutually agreed solution, Rajoy invoked Article 155 of the Constitution, suspending autonomy and imposing direct rule over Catalonia, which was intended to take effect on 28 October (Burgen, 2017). Running out of options and out of time, the Catalan parliament ultimately voted on the matter on 27 October 2017 and unilaterally declared Catalonia an independent state (BBC, 2017). However, after receiving Senate approval, direct rule over Catalonia entered into force, leading to a failed declaration of independence (BBC, 2017). Confrontation between Catalonia and Madrid thus reached its worst state in the entire struggle for independence, catapulting Spain into its worst political crisis. With the situation escalating in Spain, signalling opposition to engagement with the contested state of Kosovo within the EU is thus a highly plausible consequence.

Regarding the ideational outlook of Rajoy and the PP at large, it is noteworthy that their attitudes toward both Catalonia and Kosovo are more dogmatic than those of the PSOE. This difference can, for example, be seen in the fact that Zapatero (PSOE) supported the 2006 Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia, whilst the PP appealed it before the Constitutional Court (Queralt Jiménez, 2014). Ultimately, the ruling on that matter was also the catalyst for renewed ambitions for independence. Furthermore, although the PP was not in power in 2008, when Kosovo declared its independence, it was still the first political party in Spain to challenge this action (Ker-Lindsay and Armakolas, 2017). Thus, while the Catalan declaration of

independence is the most compelling factor in the behaviour at the Summit, it also reflects the more dogmatic nature of Rajoy and the PP.

Finally, regarding reform capacity, in his second term as Prime Minister, Rajoy experienced increasing difficulties. After several failed attempts to form a coalition and several renewed elections in 2016 that did not change the situation, Rajoy formed a minority government (Gerard, 2016). However, this political constellation did not provide him with sufficient support, and after one and a half years in office, no meaningful reform was implemented (Torres, 2018). Ultimately, the lack of political support was evident on June 1, as Pedro Sanchez of the PSOE initiated the first-ever no-confidence vote in Spain and ousted Rajoy with narrow approval from the Spanish parliament. While the confidence vote occurred after the Summit, discussions and movements towards it were already underway (Müller, 2018). Thus, in addition to the ongoing conflict with Catalonia, Rajoy's leadership was significantly challenged, diminishing the potential to engage with Kosovo.

In sum, while the declaration of independence and the political crisis surrounding it are the most compelling factors in explaining the need to signal non-recognition and non-engagement with Kosovo, the likelihood of engagement with Kosovo was also constrained by Rajoy's ideology and faltering leadership.

5.2.5. Annulment Case (2019)

In March 2019, the Commission decided to extend participation in the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC) to Kosovo. The decision was justified based on Article 35 of the Regulation establishing BEREC, which was amended in 2018 to include "Union bodies, third countries and international organisations" (*Case T-370/19, Spain v Commission*, 2020). However, in June 2019, Spain challenged this decision on the grounds that Kosovo cannot be described as a "third country" and therefore sought its annulment before the Court of Justice of the European Union (*Case T-370/19, Spain v Commission*, 2020). In September 2020, the Court dismissed the action, finding that Kosovo can be considered a "third country", distinguishing the definition of a country from that of a state (*Case T-370/19, Spain v Commission*, 2020). Thereafter, Spain appealed this judgment, and ultimately, in January 2023, the Court annulled the decision. However, it maintained its view on the interpretation of a "third country" and instead annulled the decision on the grounds of the Commission's lack of competence to make such a decision (*Case C-632/20 P, Spain v Commission*, 2023). This action is a clear example of undermining the Europeanisation of

engagement with Kosovo, as Spain challenged the EU's position on Kosovo's inclusion in a European agency.

Looking at the state of the separatist conflict, tensions between Madrid and Catalonia have persisted since the declaration of independence. In October 2019, the Spanish Supreme Court sentenced Catalan separatist leaders to up to 13 years in prison for their secessionist activities in October 2017 (Torres, 2019). In response, independence supporters took their anger to the streets of Catalonia, blocking streets, metros, a motorway between Spain and France, and Barcelona's international airport (BBC, 2019b). In turn, Catalonia's president Quim Torra, declared that he would like to hold another vote for independence in the next two years (BBC, 2019a). While this eruption of unrest occurred after the initial annulment case, it may be tied to the decision to appeal the judgment, signalling opposition to decisions that may imply recognition of a contested state by defining it as a country.

Regarding ideology as a factor, it is striking that this challenge against engagement with Kosovo occurred under a PSOE government, which has traditionally been more pragmatic on questions of engagement with Catalonia and Kosovo. The fact that, following Rajoy's absence from the 2018 Summit, Sanchez again attended the EU-Western Balkan Summit in 2020, where Kosovo was also represented, was deemed as a turning point under a more pragmatic Sanchez (Demjaha and Sarriá, 2021). Especially since the annulment case is a self-initiated action, it therefore does not fit the PSOE's less confrontational line. In this case, other factors are therefore more likely to have influenced the decision.

Examining reform capacity, another factor in the strategic calculation emerges. Shortly before the annulment case was initiated, Spain had undergone general elections, showcasing an increasingly fragmented political landscape. While the PSOE under Sanchez received the most votes, it did not manage to secure a majority. In contrast to previous elections in which the PSOE and PP were the main players and governed without coalition partners, other parties have gained more support in April 2019. Joining the already established left-wing Podemos and the right-wing Citizens party, a new far-right party, Vox, entered parliament for the first time (Gutiérrez and Clarke, 2019). A second election in November, rather than alleviating coalition-formation issues, further strengthened the PP and Vox (Chislett, 2019). Ultimately, Sanchez formed a minority coalition government with the left-wing Podemos party and was sworn in as Prime Minister in January 2020 (Euractiv, 2020). The annulment, therefore, occurred during a period of political deadlock in Spain, and the subsequent appeal was filed under his minority government, both of which limited reform capacity.

Taken together, the situation in Catalonia is the most compelling factor to have weighed on the strategic calculation of Sanchez's government. At the same time, political fragmentation also limited the capacity for reform to implement the BERIC decision, especially amid continued confrontation with Catalonia. Therefore, the domestic political climate appears to provide a plausible explanation for the overruling of the PSOE's pragmatic approach and the subsequent absence of Europeanisation.

5.2.6. Visa Liberalisation (2024)

Spain was strongly opposed to the visa liberalisation with Kosovo. Even after approval in the Council in March 2023, Spain declared that it would not apply the rule to Spanish territory on the grounds that, if it does not recognise Kosovo, it also does not recognise its passports. Nonetheless, when the EU decision entered into force in January 2024, Spain unexpectedly changed course and declared that it would recognise Kosovar passports and allow entry without a visa (Dunai and Jopson, 2024). Ultimately, Spain Europeanised by incorporating the EU decision into its national regulation.

Looking at developments in Catalonia, the situation has changed since the annulment case. To calm tensions and set a path towards reconciliation, Sanchez took the first step by pardoning the imprisoned Catalan leaders in 2021. The pardon entailed the release from prison; however, it did not allow the leaders to take office as politicians again (Gallardo, 2021). Nevertheless, the reception of this decision was not as positive as hoped for. Both opponents and supporters of the Catalan independence movement have publicly shown their dissatisfaction. Opponents of independence feared that this decision would encourage the independence movement to resume activities. Furthermore, some disagreed with ending a prison sentence early for those found guilty in the first place (BBC, 2021). Supporters of independence felt renewed anger over the initial imprisonment and believed the pardon was necessary but not sufficient (BBC, 2021). Thus, while this was an attempt to alleviate tensions, the opposite was achieved. Continued tensions with Catalonia may therefore have constrained Sanchez in passing the controversial reform on visa liberalisation earlier in 2023.

In contrast, by January 2024, Sanchez had found more success in seeking rapprochement with Catalonia. In November 2023, he went a step further in his reconciliation efforts and agreed to an Amnesty Deal that, in addition to releasing the separatist leaders from prison, also overturned their sentences, allowing them to re-enter politics. Beyond the focus on the leaders, it also covers a range of other activities between 2012 and 2023, including amnesty for hundreds of other pro-independence activists (Jones, 2023). While it was heavily criticised by

the opposition within the government, it certainly alleviated the situation in Catalonia and is perceived as a step towards reconciliation there (Jones, 2023). Thus, in January 2024, there was an outlook toward rapprochement with Catalonia, potentially influencing a relaxation of policy toward Kosovo as well.

Examining the factor of ideology, Sanchez's general shift in direction on Catalonia, first pardoning the sentenced leaders and subsequently agreeing to an Amnesty Deal to pursue reconciliation, reflects his more conciliatory stance. He also showcased this attitude on Kosovo matters by chairing another EU-Western Balkan Summit during Spain's Council presidency in December 2023, with the president of Kosovo, Vjosa Osmani, present (European Western Balkans, 2024). Yet, looking at the political landscape in Spain, more compelling factors than his ideology emerge.

The Council discussions surrounding visa liberalisation coincided with a no-confidence vote advanced by the far-right Vox party. While Sanchez maintained confidence, with 201 of 350 lawmakers voting against the motion, the debate preceding the vote offered grounds for uncovering fundamental conflicts. As Deutsche Welle reported: "The parliamentary debate was marked by acrimony, with legislators attacking each other over personal and policy issues, involving anything from climate change, feminism, the economy and Spanish democracy" (Deutsche Welle, 2023b). Thus, while the vote of no confidence was unsuccessful, Sanchez's leadership was still publicly challenged, heightening tensions in the political climate. Furthermore, following poor election results for the PSOE in local and regional elections in May, Sanchez scheduled the general elections for earlier in July 2023. Thus, with a focus on upcoming elections and fragmentation in the political landscape, it was an unlikely time to make a contested reform on visa liberalisation with Kosovo.

The election results saw the PP come in first. However, its desired coalition partner, Vox, received fewer votes than in 2019 and, as a result, fell short of forming a majority coalition government (Deutsche Welle, 2023a). Ultimately, Alberto Nunez Feijoo, the leader of the PP, failed to form a government that received parliamentary approval. In turn, Sanchez, with the second-most votes, was given a chance to fulfil this role and succeeded – notably through the controversial support of two Catalan pro-independence parties in return for signing the debated Amnesty Deal (Hedgecoe and Kirby, 2023). As a result, Sanchez was sworn in for another term as Prime Minister in November 2023. However, the decisions that allowed him to form the coalition are heavily criticised and make his beginnings very fragile.

Comparing executive leadership during the time of opposition to the government that approved it reveals a fragmented political landscape. The main difference, however, is that

Sanchez has become immensely dependent on Catalan support. In fact, the agreement to the Amnesty law in return for the support of the Catalan parties demonstrates this dependence. The Spanish government rejects the claim that Catalan parties played a role in the pivot on the visa liberalisation policy. However, the Financial Times reports that a representative of the Together for Catalonia party said that the party was “glad it could shelve its own plans to promote the passport issue in the Spanish parliament” (Dunai and Jopson, 2024). In general, the Catalan regional government is notorious for its support for Kosovo's recognition. In June 2024, regionalist parties in Catalonia and the Basque Country also advanced an initiative to reconsider recognition of Kosovo. While the initiative ultimately did not pass with 293 votes against it in parliament, it does show their active involvement in redefining the relations (Weizman, 2024). Thus, it can be concluded that the reliance on the support of Catalan parties for his fragile government played a role in the Europeanisation of visa liberalisation in Spain.

In sum, the unexpected shift in national policy on visa liberalisation for Kosovo can be attributed largely to the role of Catalan parties in the new government formed in November 2023. Ultimately, Sanchez's more open approach to questions of contested statehood enabled the position of Catalan parties in the first place and would also make him more receptive to their influence.

5.2.7. Assessment of Europeanisation

When looking at the general trend in Spain's engagement with Kosovo, it becomes clear that, aside from non-participation in EULEX, the main period of protest occurred between 2018 and 2023. Prior to that, Spain accommodated the EU's engagement with Kosovo by hosting the 2010 EU-Western Balkan Summit, approving the SAA with Kosovo in 2015, and approving Kosovo's participation in Union programmes in July 2017. Under Sanchez, Spain resumed participation in EU-Western Balkan Summits in 2020 and, most notably, pivoted its policy on visa liberalisation in 2024. Thus, contrary to the picture painted by scholarly works on Spain's engagement with Kosovo, the most pronounced disengagement lasted only a few years.

Looking at the events and domestic constraints side by side in Table 3 below, the most compelling factor to explain this trend is the state of the separatist conflict. The fiercest protests against EU engagement with Kosovo, in the form of Rajoy's absence from the 2018 Summit, the 2019 Annulment Case, and the 2020 Appeal, can all be traced to the escalation of the independence movement. Given that Spain's non-recognition is tied to fears of the Catalan separatist movement, it is very likely that, amid uncertainty about the repercussions of its

actions, there is a strong domestic constraint on engaging with Kosovo. Conversely, the Catalan challenge also motivates opposition to separatist movements elsewhere.

Regarding ideology as a factor, its explanatory strength is less indicative. While it is the main factor explaining the decision not to participate in EULEX, it does not provide definitive explanations for other decisions made. In fact, while a case can be made that the PSOE is more conciliatory than the PP, the Annulment and Appeal case, which occurred under the PSOE's leadership, does not fit this picture. Arguably, ideology might rather be a factor that indirectly influences decisions by impacting the state of the separatist conflict. As the watershed moment in the renewed claim for independence followed the ruling on the 2006 Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia, initiated by the PP, the more confrontational attitude indirectly catalysed the movement. Conversely, Sanchez's more conciliatory approach toward Catalonia led to appeasement and support for Catalan parties, which in turn appears to encourage a softer course on Kosovo. While ideology is therefore not a leading factor, it does influence decisions indirectly.

Finally, the reform capacity also offers fewer indicative explanations for changes. For example, Zapatero had showcased his ability to pass an array of reforms in the early 2000s. Therefore, if he had wanted Spain to participate in EULEX, his minority government would not have been a constraint on implementing such a policy. Conversely, with the fragile government that Sanchez formed at the end of 2023, the reform capacity was low, and yet he implemented the reform on visa liberalisation with Kosovo. Therefore, there are two counterexamples to the explanation that low reform capacity inhibits Europeanisation.

However, a more compelling case can be made for the relevance of the nature of the coalition partners, rather than how fragmented the government is. With Catalan parties entering government at the end of 2023, the link to the unexpected reversal of the visa liberalisation policy is quite plausible. It therefore remains to be seen how much influence the Catalan parties can have on the current government to intensify engagement with Kosovo.

In sum, the factor that holds the most consistent explanatory value on developments in Spain's engagement with Kosovo is the state of its separatist movement. However, ideology and the political constellations within the government have also played a secondary role in indirectly shaping decisions affecting relations with Catalonia and Kosovo.

Table 3: Policy Changes and Domestic Constraints in Spain's Engagement with Kosovo

Event	Europeanisation	State of the separatist conflict	Ideology	Reform Capacity
EULEX (2008)	Absent: non-participation in the EU mission	Good relations: Zapatero supports Catalonia and cooperates with Catalan parties	Conflict: Scepticism over legality of the mission	High: single-party government
EU-Western Balkan Summit (2010)	Present: facilitation of engagement with Kosovo in multilateral setting	Good relations: no active independence claims	Aligned: participation of Kosovo aligns with support for dialogue	Low: economic crisis, low approval
EU-Western Balkan Summit (2018)	Absent: non-participation in EU engagement with Kosovo	Active conflict: political crisis following the declaration of independence	Conflict: PP more confrontative on and opposed to separatist movements	Low: Failed coalition talks, minority government, corruption scandal
Annulment Case (2019)	Absent: direct challenge to EU engagement with Kosovo	Active conflict: Renewed unrest following the sentencing of separatist leaders	Engagement through BEREK aligned with conciliatory approach of Sanchez	Low: Political deadlock in 2019, minority government in 2020
Visa Liberalisation (2024)	Present: implementation on the national level	Rapprochement: Amnesty deal	Aligned with conciliatory approach of Sanchez	Low: Fragile multi-party coalition with Catalan parties

5.3. Case Comparison and Discussion

Comparing developments in the Europeanisation of engagement with Kosovo in Cyprus and Spain, the findings confirm that, although neither state participated in EULEX, their engagement policies have developed differently over time. Most notably, beyond complying with EU decisions, Cyprus has since then also sought self-initiated rapprochement through bilateral meetings in 2013 and 2022. In contrast, after a period of compliance up to the

approval of Kosovo's participation in Union programmes in July 2017, Spain has taken steps to challenge engagement with Kosovo by boycotting the 2018 EU-Western Balkan Summit and by advancing the annulment case against the Commission in 2019. The step of implementing visa liberalisation in January 2024 may be considered a turning point in Spain's approach to EU engagement with Kosovo. Nevertheless, Spain's Europeanisation so far is limited to implementing Council decisions, whilst Cyprus has also taken its own initiative to engage with Kosovo.

As the case studies demonstrate, whilst the question of handling separatist movements is one of the main concerns in domestic politics in both cases, developments on that front can only be linked to engagement policies with Kosovo in Spain. This difference in influence can be explained by the different characters of the movements. First, the declaration of independence of the TRNC lies further in the past, whilst Catalonia only recently experienced an uprising demanding independence, giving it a more pressing character. Second, the TRNC has already established itself as a *de facto* state, functioning on its own institutions, whilst Catalonia remains an autonomous community embedded within the political and legal framework of Spain. Third, as a result, political discussions on those topics widely differ. As developments in recent years have shown, the question in Cyprus lies between maintaining the status quo of a *de facto* divided island and pursuing reunification. In contrast, in Spain, the question is how to ensure that Catalonia does not become a *de facto* state in the first place. Thus, the developments in Cyprus may have had less influence on decision-making, as the changes were less drastic, merely oscillating between rapprochement and estrangement, in contrast to the Spanish referendum on independence, which was far-reaching. Thus, while in both case studies this factor varied over time, its explanatory value is limited to Spain because the movements' characteristics differ.

Another difference the analysis illustrates is that ideological factors remain consistent with actions taken in Cyprus, whilst in Spain, their influence is less evident. Most remarkably, the two clearest instances of engagement with Kosovo occurred in Cyprus under President Anastasiades and through Kasoulides. In contrast, the most significant challenges to EU engagement with Kosovo in Spain occurred under two different prime ministers and parties, who traditionally differ in their approaches to sensitive independence issues. This difference in impact, therefore, suggests that the state of the separatist conflict weighed more into the strategic calculation than ideational factors in Spain.

Nevertheless, as discussed in the case study of Spain, the ideological factor arguably indirectly influences the developments in the policy towards Kosovo by affecting the state of

the separatist conflict. The first protests in Catalonia in 2010 resulted from the PP's challenge to the 2005 Statute of Autonomy before the Constitutional Court, whilst the period of reconciliation was initiated by the more conciliatory PSOE. Overall, ideology therefore plays a role in strategic calculation but becomes secondary when the state of the separatist conflict constrains decisions to begin with. Yet ideology appears to affect the state of the separatist conflict and, therefore, indirectly influences decision-making regarding Kosovo, albeit with a time lag.

Turning to the factor of the reform capacity, both Cyprus and Spain have experienced a series of fragile governments in the past decade. In theory, because this factor is the same in both cases, it cannot explain the difference between the two. However, given that the Cypriot president holds greater constitutional powers, whilst the Spanish prime minister is dependent on parliamentary majorities, there is more room for manoeuvre in Cyprus, despite disagreements within the government. At the same time, as the implementation of visa liberalisation in Spain suggests, the dependence on Catalan parties for parliamentary support appears to have influenced the reform. Thus, while reform capacity more broadly does not seem to be the leading factor, differences in government structure may have influenced the divergent paths.

In sum, the findings demonstrate that instances of rapprochement between Cyprus and Kosovo and of estrangement between Spain and Kosovo can each be primarily attributed to distinct factors. In the case of Cyprus, the most striking similarity between the two instances of engagement through bilateral meetings is that Anastasiades was the president and Kasoulides was the foreign minister. In the case of Spain, the most compelling similarity between the instances of challenge to engagement is that relations with Catalonia were deteriorating significantly. However, it must be noted that those factors do not influence decisions on their own. As the example from Spain shows, Sanchez's conciliatory leadership was not enough in 2019 to secure Kosovo's participation in BEREC. Conversely, if Northern Cyprus and the Republic of Cyprus were hypothetically in a military conflict with one another, the fact that Kasoulides is a foreign minister would most likely not be enough to catalyse engagement. Therefore, the factors are mutually constitutive and cannot offer explanations in isolation.

6. Conclusion

The thesis set out its investigation on the basis of the puzzling observation that Cyprus and Spain differed in their engagement practices with Kosovo despite their shared initial position in 2008. Prior research shows that disunity among member states hampers the EU's effectiveness in Kosovo by undermining both credibility and the ability to act in a timely manner. In turn, understanding the factors that shape the different decisions made by its member states helps identify how this disunity may be changed. Thus, the main objective of the thesis was to identify the most plausible domestic constraints that enhanced and inhibited the Europeanisation processes in different decisions made by Cyprus and Spain. The analysis of instances of (dis)engagement with Kosovo was thus assessed using the factors of the state of the separatist conflict, the ideology of the political leadership, and the government's capacity for reform.

The analysis has demonstrated that the explanatory power of some factors exceeds that of others. In the case of Cyprus, developments in its engagement practices did not seem directly connected to developments in relations with the TRNC nor with the strength of the political leadership. Thus, the only factor consistently linked to engagement-related Europeanisation was the ideology of the political leadership. Most notably, the two and only instances of self-initiated rapprochement occurred through the same foreign minister, Kasoulides. In the case of Spain, the most striking connection to its period of challenging engagement with Kosovo can be made with the pinnacle of the Catalan independence movement. The paramount nature of this factor has put the importance of ideology into the background, whilst the influence of reform capacity does not appear to influence Europeanisation on engagement with Kosovo.

Overall, the findings suggest that the state of the separatist conflict constitutes the strongest domestic constraint on Europeanisation. The reason the separatist conflict had less influence in the Cypriot case is that its claim to independence is not as pressing, and the maintenance of the status quo has become the norm. In turn, political ideology retains secondary explanatory value, and the influence of reform capacity appears comparatively weak. However, the difference between Cyprus being a presidential republic and Spain being a parliamentary monarchy may explain why the ideology of the political leadership had a stronger impact in Cyprus, where the president holds stronger constitutional veto powers.

The findings also have ramifications for Europeanisation theory. In relation to the theory, Cyprus and Spain represent the least likely cases as they have traditionally been viewed as non-recognisers and non-engagers. However, as the findings demonstrate, even in those

cases, EU decisions on engagement have been incorporated at the national level. In turn, the domestic factors identified in Héritier and Knill's study provided a useful framework for evaluating the constraints that shape Europeanisation.

Beyond this case study, the findings also have wider implications for the future of EU engagement with Kosovo. First, a striking secondary finding is that Cyprus and Spain have shown greater compliance with EU initiatives than expected. Apart from the 2018 EU-Western Balkan Summit, both states have allowed for multilateral engagement with Kosovo in the context of EU enlargement. Furthermore, the implementation of visa liberalisation in both member states is a remarkable milestone in the Europeanisation of engagement. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Commission has been successful in pushing the boundaries of engagement with Kosovo. In turn, this means that, for Kosovo, there is a perspective of increasing rapprochement within the limits of activities that do not entail recognition.

However, the implications of the findings also highlight that the effect of Europeanisation is beyond the EU's control, given that domestic constraints have been shown to influence the choice of implementation. On the one hand, when it comes to the implementation of EU engagement initiatives, the case of Spain has demonstrated the dependence on the developments in Catalonia. On the other hand, when it comes to self-initiated engagement, the case of Cyprus has showcased the dependence on the convictions of individuals within the government. Thus, the process of Europeanisation is sensitive to domestic political conditions that the EU cannot directly control.

Whilst the thesis set out to investigate engagement practices, it must be noted that recognition of Kosovo remains a different story. As the lack of response to its 2022 application for EU membership demonstrates, non-recognition remains the main obstacle to a credible path towards candidate state status. Most importantly, the only possibility for Cyprus and Spain to recognise Kosovo is for Serbia to recognise Kosovo first. Thus, most weight lies in a fruitful dialogue between the two. Nonetheless, engagement remains a valuable goal, and rapprochement with the EU provides Kosovo with new possibilities.

Finally, when assessing the findings, the limitations of the case studies must be kept in mind. First, the qualitative assessment of the decisions makes it difficult to establish clear causality and is based on the plausibility of competing explanations. Second, in line with the research aim, the findings are limited to explaining the difference between Cyprus and Spain in their engagement with Kosovo. Third, the analysis relied on publicly available information and media reports and therefore does not account for informal meetings or statements.

Building on these findings, several areas for future research emerge. This thesis solely focused on the domestic factors that influence Europeanisation. Other projects could consider the impact of international events or developments within Kosovo on foreign policy decisions. Furthermore, it could be explored how nationals from non-recognising EU member states behave in a capacity that represents the EU when engaging with Kosovo. For example, it could be explored what role the former EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, played as a representative of EU interests while also being a former Spanish politician. Finally, given the dynamic nature of domestic conditions in Cyprus and Spain, it remains to be seen how their strategies evolve, which may spark new research avenues.

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