

Language inflicted power dynamics in international mediation

Mediator's discourse influences on international mediation processes

Radboud Universiteit



Bachelor's thesis

Timon Driessen | s1061736

BSc Geography, Planning and Environment

Radboud University – Nijmegen School of Management

Supervisor: M. Van der Velde

Word count: 22402

27 June 2024

Summary

This Bachelor's thesis deals with how a mediator's discourse influences an international mediation process. International mediation is a pivotal instrument in the resolution of disputes and conflicts. The mediator's role can take different forms in these processes. The mediator's background, experiences, beliefs, and even unconscious biases can influence their approach to the conflict, the parties involved and the mediation process, potentially affecting the effectiveness of the mediation process and what is perceived as possible solution. In addition, a mediator always participates in the mediation process with its own interests. An effective mediation process requires legitimacy, credibility, trust and a mutual will to resolve the conflict. One part that plays an important role in the overall process is the internal dynamics between the acting parties. This includes power dynamics between the conflicting parties, but also between the negotiating parties and the external mediator(s). The use of power is also reflected in the strategies used by mediators. Power dynamics in international mediation have to do with the power that the mediator has over the process and its outcomes, as well as over the mediating parties.

One important aspect in which the mediator's power comes about, is in the discourse it shapes about the conflict and the mediation process. The discourse applied by the mediator – in essence its choice of words, tone, framing of issues and actors – is central to what its role encompasses. Discourse refers to the story that the mediator helps to construct during the mediation process. This narrative is not just a collection of past events, but a reframing of the conflict in a way that theoretically opens up possibilities for resolution. How a conflict is perceived affects how it is managed.

The objective of this research is to critically assess the power dynamics within international mediation, through the case of the EU-led Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, and how these dynamics are instigated by the dominant discourse the mediator creates. Understanding the impact of a mediator's discourse on the dynamics and outcomes of international mediation is of great importance, in order to understand the mediation process and to be able to advance it. This is done by examining whether the mediator creates a specific discourse that exploits these power relations and is based on the mediator's background, and how this discourse affects the mediation process. This has led to the formulation of the following research question: *How does a mediator's discourse influence international mediation processes?*

In order to provide an answer to this question, a Critical Discourse Analysis has been conducted. This method allows one to look at the relationship between language and power, which is essential to this research in order to understand how a mediator's discourse comes about. A total of 270 documents – ranging from announcements of a meeting, speeches, press remarks to official agreements – have been analysed. Thematic analysis is used to identify themes related to the mediator's background and power dynamics, while discursive analysis is used to analyse the language used by the mediator and how this language may reflect its background and the power dynamics in the mediation process. Particular attention was paid to the linguistic strategies used to construct a particular image of the EU and its influence on the outcomes of the dialogue, as well as to the framing of issues and other actors. As a result of that method, a clear dominant discourse is set out, including its relation to the mediation process and the mediator's background and power in creating that discourse and shaping the process.

In essence, the dominant discourse set out by the EU is that the EU-facilitated Dialogue is the sole viable path for progress in the relationship between Kosovo and Serbia. The EU's entanglement with the conflicting countries through the intertwining of 'normalisation of relations' and the 'European path' of Kosovo and Serbia, legitimises but also

influences the EU's role in the mediation process and thus the mediation process itself. The EU succeeds in creating a discourse that, according to that same EU, legitimises its role as mediator. At the same time, this discourse significantly influences the dynamics and outcomes of the international mediation process. Making a successful Dialogue a prerequisite for both countries to continue on their EU path, creates a power dependency of Kosovo and Serbia on the EU. The EU will do its best to maintain the balance of power as described in the discourse; dependence of Kosovo and Serbia on the EU. The question is to what extent and for how long this view will hold, as new global powers arise which might interfere with alternative interests and discourses. This the EU must consider in the continuation of the Dialogue.

Table of Contents

- Summary ii
- 1. Introduction..... 1
 - 1.1 Research objectives 2
 - 1.2 Research questions 3
 - 1.3 Societal and scientific relevance..... 3
 - 1.4 Thesis outline..... 4
- 2. Literature review5
 - 2.1 International mediation..... 5
 - 2.2 Mediation strategies / negotiation / arbitration..... 6
 - 2.3 Mediator credibility 7
 - 2.4 Power dynamics 8
 - 2.5 Mediator’s background..... 9
 - 2.6 The power of text 10
 - 2.7 Conceptual model 11
- 3. Theoretical framework..... 12
- 4. Exploration of the case 13
 - 4.1 Conflict background 13
 - 4.2 EU historic efforts..... 13
 - 4.3 Negotiation characteristics 15
 - 4.4 Mediator’s effectiveness 15
 - 4.5 EU discourse..... 16
 - 4.6 Mediator’s complicators 17
 - 4.7 Ambiguity..... 17
- 5. Methodology 19
 - 5.1 General research approach..... 19
 - 5.2 Critical Discourse Analysis 19
 - 5.3 Content Analysis..... 20
 - 5.4 Data collection 20
 - 5.5 Data analysis 21
 - 5.5.1 Operationalisation..... 22
- 6. Results 23
 - 6.1 Quantitative results 23
 - 6.2 The Discourse..... 25
 - 6.2.1 Importance 25
 - 6.2.2 Implementation..... 26

6.2.3 Commitment	26
6.2.4 Justification	27
6.2.5 Facilitation	28
6.2.6 EU dominance	29
6.2.7 Positive/negative	30
6.2.8 Ambiguity	31
6.3 EU's background	31
6.3.1 Unity	31
6.3.2 Balkan = Europe	32
6.4 EU's power	33
6.4.1 EU presence	33
6.4.2 Legal justification	34
6.4.3 Dependency	34
6.4.4 EU dominance	35
6.4.5 Kosovo/Serbia's responsibility	35
6.5 Process	36
6.5.1 Fair process	36
6.5.2 Urgency	36
6.5.3 High-level	37
6.5.4 Link Dialogue-EU path	37
7. Analysis	39
7.1 Discourse	39
7.2 Discourse vs. reality	40
7.3 The future of the Dialogue	41
7.4 Evaluation conceptual model	42
8. Conclusion and discussion	43
8.1 Conclusion	43
8.2 Discussion	44
Bibliography	46
Annex	49
Annex 1: Collected data	49
Annex 2: Codebook	49

1. Introduction

“Mediation is as common an occurrence in international politics as is conflict”
(Zartman & Touval, 1985).

Mediation of international crises has seen an increase since the end of the Cold War. In the Cold War, 32 percent of international crises were mediated compared to 48 percent in the post-Cold War period (Starkey, Boyer & Wilkenfeld, 2016). In line with this trend, academic studies about international mediation has seen an increase in the last few decades as well (Wallensteen & Svensson, 2014).

International mediation is a pivotal instrument in the resolution of disputes and conflicts between nations. In a world where competing interests and geopolitical tensions lead to conflict, the role of mediators in solving these conflicts is crucial. They serve as third parties trying to assist the conflicting parties in reaching an agreement. It is the responsibility of the mediator to create an environment of trust and constructive negotiation, in order to de-escalate and eventually help lasting peace come about. A key characteristic of the mediator is its neutrality and impartiality (Astor, 2007). Without it, trust among the conflicting parties and confidence in the process is not established. A fair mediation process is crucial to commit the parties to the process and work towards resolution.

The role of a mediator can take different forms in these processes. Despite the impartiality, mediators often do not come empty-handed. They often bring knowledge and expertise to the negotiation table. Understanding of specific issues or international mediation in general, allows the mediator to provide solutions proven effectively and tailor-made to the situation at hand. The amount of knowledge, capacities, and the relation to the conflicting parties influence in which way the mediator will play a role, in degree of significance.

The mediator’s background, experiences, beliefs, and even unconscious biases can influence their approach to the mediation process, potentially affecting the dynamics and outcome of the mediation process (Vuković, 2011). In any case, the discourse applied by the mediator – in essence its choice of words, tone, framing of issues and actors – is central to what its role encompasses. This thesis seeks to delve into the ways in which a mediator’s discourse shapes a mediation process, including its outcomes and success.

The mediator’s discourse depending on the effectiveness, can de-escalate tensions and create a sense of mutual interest in resolution. Opposite of that, a biased discourse can worsen conflicts and undermine the mediation process (Chiluwa, 2021). Therefore, understanding the impact of a mediator’s discourse on the dynamics and outcomes of international mediation is of great importance.

For this thesis, a case study has been selected to provide an in-depth analysis of an international mediation process. The EU-facilitated Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia is in this respect an intriguing mediation process that includes dynamics of great interest to this research. The EU refers to this process as the ‘Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue (on the normalisation of relations)’. For the sake of convenience and clarity, ‘the Dialogue’ will be used as common reference to the process.

The mediator’s discourse is a crucial element in the composition of international mediation. By analysing that discourse and its origin and effects comprehensively, this research will strengthen the theoretical and practical understanding of international mediation processes.

1.1 Research objectives

International mediation has been a much studied topic for the past 35 years. Since conflict is always present, mediation will always be there, because mediation has become a widely used method in response to (armed) conflict, especially since the end of the Cold War (Greig & Diehl, 2012). Frameworks have been conjured up on how mediation can lead to effective outcomes and, above all, resolution. The mediation process itself is so context-specific that it is difficult for scholars to provide a general outline of how to conduct an international mediation process. However, much has been written on the facilitation and design of mediation processes (Bercovitch, 2009). An effective mediation process requires legitimacy, credibility, trust and a mutual will to resolve the conflict. One part that plays an important role in the overall process is the internal dynamics between the acting parties. This includes power dynamics between the conflicting parties, but also between the negotiating parties and the external mediator(s). The power dynamics that the mediator brings to the process, and the ability to shape the agenda and outcomes, raises questions about the importance of the mediator's interests in the mediation process, and how this process is shaped by the mediator's interests and attitudes towards the conflict parties (Astor, 2007). What is the role of the mediator's own history, culture and identity, and how does its relationship with the conflicting parties shape the process as a whole? The background of the mediator is likely to influence its interests and the language it uses in the process to achieve those interests. The language and resulting narrative surrounding the mediation process might influence the process itself and its outcomes.

The aim of this research is to critically assess the power dynamics within international mediation, through the case of the EU-led Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue [between Kosovo and Serbia], and how these dynamics are instigated by the dominant discourse created by the mediator. Discourse is central to this study. The question is what the discourse is, what aspects it consists of, how it came about and how it is used as a form of power in the mediation process. The aim is to examine how the mediator influences the mediation process through its background and power relations with the conflict parties. This will be done by examining whether the mediator creates a certain discourse that exploits these power relations and is based on the mediator's background, and how this discourse influences the process.

This research will provide insight into how an external party exploits power in a situation of international mediation/dialogue by building a certain discourse and how this power is based on the mediator's own background. We know that the EU has been successful in creating certain discourses and what Gashi (2020) calls 'simulated power' to legitimise its role as sole mediator. This research examines what this discourse is, how it is constructed and how it influences the mediation process.

1.2 Research questions

The objectives of this research have led to the following question:

How does a mediator's discourse influence international mediation processes?

In order to answer the main research question, the following sub-questions have been developed:

- How does a mediator create a dominant discourse on the mediation process?
- How are the mediating parties and the process represented in the mediator's discourse?
- How does a mediator's background affect the mediation process?
- What role does discourse play in the power dynamics in international mediation processes and its outcomes?

1.3 Societal and scientific relevance

A clear overview of the power dynamics within international mediation processes and its effects on this process helps the creation of more fair and effective mediation processes. Insight into the role a mediator's background plays in all this, provides the acting parties and the people of these countries clearness and transparency of the process, which contributes to mutual confidence and trust – aspects that are needed in a successful mediation and dialogue process. A proper assessment of the process itself rather than the mere outcomes can provide a fresh look on other protracted mediation processes, like the Civil wars in Syria, Yemen or Sudan – although these concern very different types of conflict where violence (unfortunately) plays a much bigger role. Research so far is often focussed on the process as a whole and the effectiveness of the mediator's effort. However, the very role of the mediator is more limitedly scrutinised. How a mediation process is discursively represented by that mediator is a key part if you want to understand the whole situation (Smith, 1997). A critical analysis on how power is negotiated and exercised, could provide new insight on power dynamics within mediation processes, and eventually lead to more effective policy.

Obviously, peace is salient for all people and in the long run serves the interests of all parties. Therefore, peace should always be strived for and new insights on the process could provide a leap in the progress to peace. Clarification on how to make a process more effective, by understanding all the cogs in the process, can contribute to resolution.

Mediation practice and research often are disconnected. A more diverse approach is essential to understand mediation. This approach needs to consider the situatedness of the mediator within the process. A closer dialogue between policy and research could enhance the effectiveness of international mediation (Wallensteen & Svensson, 2014).

While there is academic literature concerned with the influence that a mediator's background has on the mediation process, there remains a gap: how the mediator deliberately builds a discourse around the process. This research aims to add to the academic knowledge on the mediator's role in the process and uncover the role of language and narrative in the mediator's translation of its background into the mediation context. An analytical approach to text rather than the process becomes more apparent. Both the contextual setting and specific characteristics create the particular context in which mediation takes place (Starkey et al., 2016). According to Kakavá (2005), the mediator lacks power to control the outcome of the mediation process, directly. That same mediator, however, is responsible for the dominant discourse that might influence the mediation process more indirectly. Chilwa (2021) has already discussed the connection between discourse and conflict, arguing language is an important factor in the mobilisation of conflict – think for

example of hate speech. This research will look at discourse in the light of resolving that conflict. By examining how the mediator's characteristics affect the discourse on a mediation process and with that the contextual setting in which it takes place, a deeper understanding of the relationship between discourse, background and the mediation process will be established.

1.4 Thesis outline

After this introductory chapter, chapter 2 starts with introducing the reader to a couple of important definitions. The chapter continues with a review of the most important literature to the topic and will introduce the key concepts this thesis revolves around as well as the conceptual model. Chapter 3 will set out the theoretical framework of this thesis. Chapter 4 is an important chapter in order to understand the case study that is central to this research, that of the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue. The methodology is discussed in chapter 5. Chapter 6 sets out the results of the analysis on the basis of the key concepts. Then, chapter 7 elaborates on the empirical results and discusses a more thorough interpretation on those results. This thesis is concluded by chapter 8, which entails a conclusion that answers the research questions and a discussion on the limitations of and recommendations following this research.

2. Literature review

In this chapter the key concepts of this research will be dealt with. Looking at what we know about the power dynamics in these international mediation processes and how discourse comes into play, will lead to a conceptual model with the projected relations that will be researched in this thesis. First, mediation as a theoretical concept will be examined, after which power, background and discourse will be introduced as key concepts.

2.1 International mediation

Mediation is “an instrument of conflict management that can be applied to a wide variety of conflict types” (Greig & Diehl, 2012, p. 2). In this field, that type of conflict is often violent. The word mediation implies that there is always a third party involved that manages the conflict situation between two parties. The utility of the mediator is to achieve an outcome of the conflict the parties themselves would not be able to bring about. In addition, most definitions agree on the non-binding and voluntary character of mediation (Bergmann, Haastrup, Niemann & Whitman, 2018). Defining a highly dynamic and contextual process with myriad factors potentially influencing it, such as international mediation, has occupied scholars for decades. However, the most acknowledged scholarly definition of mediation is from Bercovitch (2009, p. 6):

“[Mediation is a] process of conflict management, related to but distinct from the parties' own negotiations, where those in conflict seek the assistance of, or accept an offer of help from, an outsider (whether an individual, an organization, a group, or a state) to change their perceptions or behavior, and to do so without resorting to physical force or invoking the authority of law.”

By ‘changing behaviour is meant settling their conflict or resolve their differences. The objective of mediation can vary from ending violence, to settling the dispute, to a complete resolution of the conflict.

International mediation is a tripartite and, above all, voluntary process, which means that the disputing parties retain control over the outcome of the process (the process itself is often structured by the mediator) (Bercovitch, 2009). The conflicting parties have to accept the intervening party and the third party has to accept its role as mediator. Contrary to other sorts of third-party intervention, there is no direct use of force by the intervener and the third-party does not choose sides (Zartman & Touval, 1985). However, Shapira (2009, p. 34) notes that “even though mediators lack the formal power to impose an outcome on the parties, they are still powerful professionals who use a variety of powers in the exercise of their professional role, and have considerable influence on the parties, the process, and its outcome”. In line with this, the mediator always participates in the mediation process with its own interests apart from the obvious conflict settlement (Zartman & Touval, 1985) and through these interests affects the process. The same can be said for the negotiating parties, according to Zartman & Touval (1985). Intervention by a mediator is accepted because they expect it will favour some of their own interests, apart from the overall goal of peace.

In an international mediation process, the mediator has its own interests at stake and a resolution is desirable. A protracted conflict could damage the mediator's relationship with the parties or even upset the regional balance. Or, going further, the mediator may see territorial or economic gain by influencing the negotiation process in such a way as to increase its influence. If the game is well played by the mediator, the negotiating parties become dependent on the mediator for every bilateral issue, because the mediator establishes its position as the only possible line of communication between the parties. Ultimately, the

guarantee of an agreement perpetuates the mediator's involvement and importance. Facilitating a dialogue is not only the role of a mediator, but also that of a stakeholder with its own interests in the future of the region. These interests are partly shaped by the mediator's background. The mediator also brings certain assumptions, ideas and knowledge that will shape the mediation process (Bercovitch, 2009). The mediator is not an independent outsider looking in on the process. Once mediation begins, the mediator becomes part of the process and thus part of the conflictual relationship and power dynamics.

A mediator steps in "when it is apparent that progress cannot be achieved without some form of outside involvement" (Starkey et al., 2016). The process of mediation can take place when a conflict has reached an impasse and both parties have nothing more to gain. International mediation is welcomed when the conflict parties' own efforts to resolve the conflict are unsuccessful and neither party wants to incur further costs as a result of the conflict (Bercovitch, 2009). The conflict parties expect mediation to produce a more favourable outcome than a protracted conflict. A mediator legitimises its intervention by emphasising the goal of conflict resolution (Zartman & Touval, 1985). The third party intervenes to advance a resolution process and prevent the conflict from spreading. The parties to the conflict see mediation as a means of preventing further escalation and have a monitor - in the form of the mediator - who will uphold an agreement if one is reached.

2.2 Mediation strategies / negotiation / arbitration

Mediation differs from other processes that might be applied in contexts of conflict. Negotiation is often a bilateral process rather than a tri- or even multilateral one. There is no intervention by a third party, but rather a process of negotiation between two parties (or coalitions of parties). When the negotiation process between two parties is facilitated by a third party, we speak of mediation - a two-actor negotiation becomes a multi-actor negotiation. Arbitration is more binding and contrasts with the voluntary nature of mediation. Arbitration involves a judicial process and an outcome that the parties must comply with (Zartman & Touval, 1985).

The highly dynamic nature of mediation ensures that there is no set way of mediating. In order to achieve the goal of the mediation process, mediators may use different strategies and adopt different roles. The strategy depends on the mediator's interests and capacities, as well as on what is perceived to be most effective in the specific context of the conflict (Bercovitch, 2009). The intensity of the conflict may require a certain level of intervention. Bercovitch, Anagnoson & Wille (1991) distinguish three broad mediation strategies that vary in their level of intervention. From low to high they are: conciliation-facilitation, procedural (also known as formulative) and directive (manipulative) strategies.

Conciliation-facilitation is mostly concerned with providing lines of communication and assigns a passive role to the mediator. The mediator tries to build trust and establish a working relationship. Difficult disputes, such as those over identity, ethnicity and autonomy, first need a basis of mutual trust before mediation efforts can talk about resolution.

Secondly, procedural strategies involve the mediator in the mediation process and formulate the characteristics of the process, such as types of meetings and agendas. The mediator is involved in the 'environment of mediation' and common interests are identified. Simple issues are dealt with first, before moving on to more difficult ones.

The most active strategy is known as 'directive'. In this case, the mediator also intervenes in the content of the process and tries to influence the conflict parties. The mediating parties are encouraged and manipulated to accept agreements. Carrots and sticks are used to steer the parties in the right direction. These are either incentives (carrots) or

punitive measures (sticks) used by the mediator to encourage parties to compromise (Vuković, 2020). Examples of carrots are economic aid, humanitarian aid and security guarantees, while sticks are for instance economic sanctions, military threats or cutting off diplomatic relations. The effectiveness of this tactic depends on the mediator's skills and capacities in the international arena.

Bercovitch et al. (1991) found that the more active the strategy, the more effective it is. Gurses, Rost and McLeod (2008) analysed the impact of mediation on the longevity of peace after civil conflict. Their findings suggest that mediation is generally correlated with more durable peace. However, they also found that mediation by superpowers, which could exert coercive pressure on the conflicting parties, tended to increase the likelihood that the conflict would resume. In a separate study, Möller, DeRouen, Bercovitch & Wallensteen (2011) found that in territorial disputes, particularly those involving secession, facilitative and formative strategies proved more effective. Beardsley (2008) found that the use of artificial incentives by mediators, especially powerful mediators, can be detrimental to achieving lasting stability. This implies that aggressive and forceful approaches may be counterproductive in the long run. Interestingly, it seems to point to the possibility that the most sustainable agreements are those forged with minimal external intervention. These agreements have been reached 'more naturally', and might have come about without having to be interfered with from outside too.

The number of issues involved in a mediation process affects the complexity of the negotiation and its outcome (Starkey et al., 2016). The more issues, the more complex the negotiation. However, more issues also offer the possibility of more possible successful outcomes, as parties can claim success on any issue that is in their favour. The situation can become a positive-sum game, where everyone can win something, rather than a zero-sum game, where only one can win at the expense of the other. A 'positive negotiation atmosphere' combined with a positive sum game is important in preventing future crisis situations (Starkey et al., 2016).

2.3 Mediator credibility

Mediators can be global organisations such as the UN, regional organisations such as the European Union and the African Union, groups of states, individual states, religious organisations or even individuals such as recognised diplomats (Starkey et al, 2016). When the mediator is an organisation made up of multiple actors, it acts as a coalition and should act in a unified manner. However, this is not always the case. Different interests of individual actors within the coalition complicate the negotiation process (Starkey et al, 2016). In complex negotiations, there is consensus on some issues, but disagreement on others. For example, no Israeli government official will prevent Israeli settlement in the West Bank, but there may still be disagreement about the timing and number of these settlements.

The mediator may have different reasons for taking on the role of mediator. The protection of its own political interests may be the main motive, if the continuation of the conflict is unfavourable to these interests. Serious interest in the conflict and its resolution calls into question the neutrality of the mediator. The actor may have a mandate in a regional or international context that justifies intervention, or (one of) the parties to the conflict may have asked the third party to mediate. Mediation can also be seen as a tool to increase and consolidate the mediator's influence by making him or herself indispensable to the conflicting parties and securing a degree of esteem (Bercovitch, 2009). In this sense, mediation is a political tool that provides an opportunity to pursue one's own interests in a covert and legitimate way.

In order to be successful and have fruitful negotiations, the parties to the conflict must trust the mediator and believe that he or she can achieve effective results. Therefore, the mediator needs a certain level of credibility in order to have leverage (resources and influence) over the mediation process and to lead the conflicting parties towards reconciliation and, ultimately, resolution. The parties to the conflict must be willing to engage in a mediation process with the putative mediator. "Mediator's credibility concerns the extent to which disputants think that (1) the mediator's offer is believable (i.e., the mediator is not bluffing and/or is not being deceived by the opponent), and (2) the mediator can deliver the offer (i.e., she can make the offer stick)" (Maoz & Terris, 2006). As international mediation is voluntary, without leverage a mediator will not be accepted by the conflicting parties. The potential mediator has to prove its usefulness (Touval & Zartman, 2008). A mediator is accepted "not because of its neutrality but because of its ability to produce an attractive outcome. The mediator's power, or leverage, comes from the parties' need for a solution, from its ability to shift weight among parties, and from side payments" (Zartman & Touval, 1985).

2.4 Power dynamics

The role of power in international mediation is reaffirmed when Zartman & Touval (1985) argue that a mediator is given leverage not because of his or her neutrality, but because of his or her ability to bring about an acceptable outcome to the conflict. The mediator is given power in the negotiation process if the parties to the conflict are convinced that the mediator is interested in achieving a mutually acceptable outcome. This does not necessarily imply impartiality, but it does prevent the possibility of total partiality, which would not produce an outcome acceptable to both sides.

Power and power dynamics are complex and comprise many aspects. Economic, political, military, territorial, demographic, historical power all potentially influence the mediation process and outcome. Power is situational and dynamic, making it a complex concept to grasp. Power dynamics in international mediation have to do with the power that the mediator has over the process and its outcomes, as well as over the mediating parties. Dynamics can be influenced by characteristics of both the mediator and the mediating parties, resources such as economic power, and bargaining power (i.e. status) (Mayer, 1987).

The use of power is also reflected in the strategies used by negotiators. Power is used to achieve goals and can be used overtly or covertly (Starkey et al., 2016). Overt use of power tactics is most common in competitive negotiation situations, while covert use is more common in collaborative negotiations.

The mediator role that breathes power politics is the manipulative role. The mediator uses its power to move the parties towards agreement. Becoming a full participant in the mediation process initiates the power dynamic in a triadic way – two conflicting parties and the mediator (Zartman & Touval, 1985). Weight shifting is one of the ways in which a mediator exercises power and influences power dynamics in international mediation processes. The mediator is responsible for maintaining the balance that brings the two parties to a stalemate where the mediator's intervention is seen as the only solution to break the stalemate. An agreement must be reached before the situation changes, otherwise the mediator loses its power and potential expanded role in the region.

Carrots and sticks are tools used by the mediator to exert power over the mediating parties and are useful when the process threatens to become deadlocked. However, too much use of power can discredit the mediator, who runs the risk of being ousted as an accepted

mediator by one or both parties. Mediation is voluntary and non-binding, so the mediator is not untouchable. Too much punishment through sanctions ends up punishing the mediator itself. If the negotiating parties no longer think the current mediator is the one who can deliver an agreement, they will start searching for someone else.

The dominant idea in negotiation theory is that of reciprocity. This concept, which advocates that both parties offer equivalent concessions as they work to reach an agreement, highly values the act of compromise (Starkey et al., 2016). The dynamics of international negotiation and mediation are often surrounded by competition over identity. Identity politics – over ethnicity, race, religion, gender – are potential sources of conflict. Competing identities can be both the source of conflict and a complicating factor in a broader conflict involving other disagreements. However, it is important to find common ground across competing identities to ensure successful negotiation.

Culture and identity are important in mediation. Commonalities in culture and identity can enhance negotiation efforts. Negotiating with someone like oneself increases the potential for negotiation. However, 'sources of differentiation' are likely to replace these commonalities and again complicate negotiation (Starkey et al., 2016). It is important that the mediator uses its skills to build trust. If the mediator is familiar with the culture and identity of the conflicting parties, successful mediation may be more likely. A closer connection of the mediator to the culture and identity of one or both negotiating parties may give the mediator more leverage in the process.

2.5 Mediator's background

A mediator's background includes its education, training, cultural competence, historical background, personal biases and previous experiences. This background can influence their perception of the conflict, the parties involved and the possible solutions. Biases in the context of the conflict can limit possible solutions and strongly influence the outcome, in favour of one of the parties or the mediator (Vuković, 2011). A mediator with a diverse background can bring a broader perspective to the table, potentially leading to more creative and acceptable solutions. On the other hand, a mediator who is too diverse in terms of internal dynamics may only complicate the mediation process.

Contrary to Zartman & Touval (1985), it is generally accepted that the neutrality of the mediator is important for the legitimacy of the mediation process. However, true neutrality is impossible and its perceived presence in mediation often masks the real dynamics of power (Astor, 2007). Despite its theoretical importance, neutrality is regularly lacking in practice. Mediators are often convinced that they need neutrality to maintain legitimacy, but find it unattainable in practice. The idea that neutrality is possible and even essential obscures the true dynamics in practice and presents an untrue reality (Astor, 2007). As discussed earlier, mediators bring their own interests and perceptions to the mediation process. It is highly unlikely that these interests will be completely neutral in the complex context of the conflict.

Certain states promote their preferred solutions because they have a specific interest in a conflict. This is often the case with great powers and regional actors with political objectives in their neighbourhood. As a result, these mediation attempts are often intertwined with the foreign policy objectives of these actors, obscuring whether the focus is on the optimal interests of the conflicting parties or on the interests of the state orchestrating or supporting the mediation process (Wallensteen & Svensson, 2014).

A mediator brings a specific position and perspective to the international mediation process - this is called the mediator's situatedness (Astor, 2007). It affects the dynamics between the parties and can lead to power imbalances. The mediator's background as well as its beliefs and (unconscious) biases can influence their role in the mediation process and the potential effectiveness of the process.

The background of the mediator and its relevance to the mediation process depends on the constitution of the mediator itself. Is it an individual, an independent state or group of states, an international organisation, an NGO or local civil society? If the mediator is made up of several actors, its background is more complicated than that of a clearly defined single actor.

2.6 The power of text

In everyday life, discourse can refer to a form of language or a way of speaking. Common sense 'discourse' equals 'language use'. In the more theoretical approach, discourse is a much more complex phenomenon, and includes 'the who, how, why and when' of language use (Van Dijk, 1997). The language in question encompasses both spoken and written communication. An essential component of discourse is that it is not simply a communicative act, but a "verbal interaction" (Van Dijk, 1997). Interactions take place in social situations which influence the language that is used. In short, discourse is about language in context. That context is a contributor to as well as a result of the language used and therefore the dominant discourse that emerges actively.

Representation of actors in conflict and construction of events are responsible for enabling conflicts to occur. Conflicts can be instigated and constructed by language. Speech and text can contain elements that trigger conflict, like aggressive language (Kakavá, 2005). Power relations during conflict shape and are shaped by discourse. Dominant parties manifest their power and capacities in the conflict through language.

In light of this research, discourse refers to the story that the mediator helps to construct during the mediation process. This narrative is not just a collection of past events, but a reframing of the conflict in a way that theoretically opens up possibilities for resolution. How a conflict is perceived affects how it is managed (Chiluwa, 2021). The role of the mediator is to guide the parties towards a shared narrative that acknowledges each party's perspective while guiding them towards mutual understanding.

Given the mediator's own interests in participating in the process mentioned earlier, the discourse could also function as a tool to achieve those interests. The mediator comes with a certain bias and its own view of the future prospects of the conflict parties and the region in general. By creating a discourse that defends the mediator's role and potentially influences the mediating parties in their attitudes and interests, the outcome of the mediation process can be heavily influenced by the discourse created (Smith, 1997).

The ability to shape the dominant discourse has to do with power. Asymmetry in conflict also translates to asymmetry in the discourse and in the mediation process. Ultimately, the power lies in the pen. The one who formulates the agreements - the mediator - holds the power. The content is negotiated, but the tone and specific choice of words can be adapted to the mediator's preferences. This applies not only to the official documents resulting from the mediation process, but also to all communications in and around the process that form the mediator's discourse of the conflict. Language structures the social context in which mediation takes place. The way issues are framed, the language used, even the tone, all build the dominant discourse.

2.7 Conceptual model

The assumed relationship between the main concepts is shown by the conceptual model below.

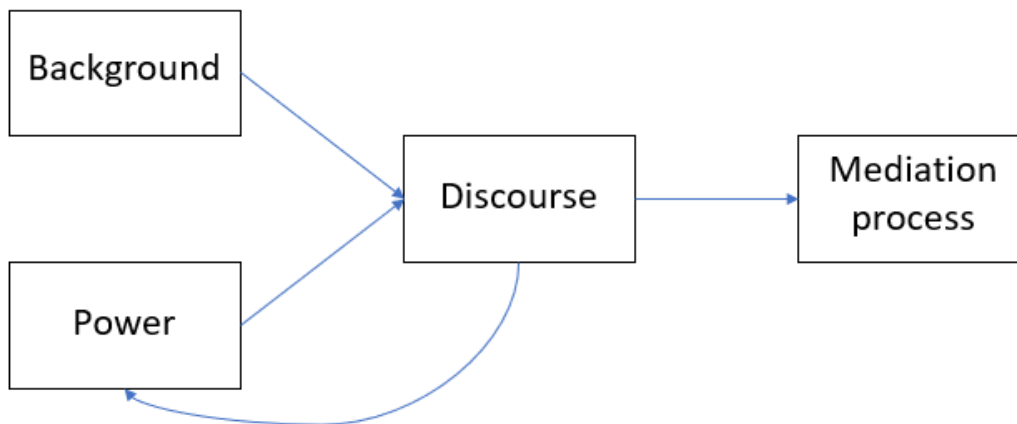


Figure 1: conceptual model

Fuelled by the mediator's power and background, a discourse is formed about the conflict and the mediation process. This discourse is expected to influence the dynamics within the mediation process and its outcomes. This discourse, in turn, creates power on the part of the mediator in that it allows it to influence the mediation process and at the same time validate the discourse.

The relationship that is central to this research is that between the mediator's discourse and the mediation process. The mediation process is a complex phenomenon that is shaped by many variables, and every international mediation context is unique. At least background and power of the mediator could be examined more directly, but many more concepts can point at mediation process in a more comprehensive research; characteristics, capacities, historical and/or social context, strategies, nature of the dispute. Just to show how complex and connected with many aspects the concept of mediation is. All these variables come into play in international mediation, but cannot be addressed all simultaneously in this thesis. The influence of discourse on the mediation process is of special interest and importance since it is underexposed in academic mediation literature but does play a major role.

So, in the complex game called mediation, what is the role of the mediator's discourse? The intended outcome of this study is a clear discourse that emerges from the EU's communication, and knowledge of how this discourse emerged and is used in the mediation process to steer it towards the EU's own interests. These own interests are expected to include demonstrating the success and legitimacy of the EU's efforts as facilitator of the Dialogue.

3. Theoretical framework

A theoretical foundation of the key concepts has been provided in the previous chapter. To examine the projected relations from the conceptual model, a Foucauldian lens on power and knowledge is used during this research.

Foucault talks about the fundamental nature of power, not class over class or state over subjects. Power as an immanent force of nature that is not directly observable, but is everywhere and therefore empirical. Power is not simply hierarchical, it circulates, it moves all around us – power is everywhere (Foucault, 1995). Foucault believed that power is not solely exercised through institutions or individuals. It operates through language and discourse.

According to Foucault, power dictates the terms of knowledge. Power decides what is, what can be and should not be known, according to the knowledge producer. Power produces knowledge and therefore: ‘the object of knowledge is subject to power’ (Foucault, 1995). If you extend this thought, you could say that power dictates what is truth, or at least what is seen as truth. This relates to the ‘simulated power’ by Gashi (2020), in that the EU dictates the discourse around the Dialogue. ‘Simulated’ because a power dynamic is not evident but has to be created. The power over the process and its outcomes appears to be legitimate but is in fact questionable due to the lack of coherent power within the EU. The narrative of the EU-led Dialogue disciplines Kosovo and Serbia to act in a certain way.

Foucault’s theory of power can offer a particular perspective on international mediation processes, such as the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue. It could provide a new insight into how power dynamics engage in the Dialogue. Shapira (2009) mentions the significant role knowledge plays in mediation power dynamics. Transparency is not always guaranteed and the mediator often has superior knowledge in the field of international mediation. The EU’s role in the Dialogue could be seen as an exercise of power. Through its aim to normalise relations and integrate both parties into the European network, the EU could be influencing the political and social structures of Kosovo and Serbia. Foucault’s idea that knowledge is both a product and an instrument of power – the idea of power/knowledge – can be applied to the Dialogue as well. Through its role as mediator, the EU shapes the discourse and knowledge surrounding the Dialogue. This can affect the power relations between the conflicting parties, as the discourse that is established through the Dialogue influences perceptions and policies (Gashi, 2020).

The signed agreements and the field of knowledge produced through this Dialogue can be seen as manifestations of Foucault’s power/knowledge concept. The creation of knowledge (the agreements) is intertwined with the EU’s exercise of power (EU’s influence over the Dialogue and the region’s future). These affect and strengthen each other.

4. Exploration of the case

This chapter will provide an overview of the Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. The most important events, dynamics and other essential concepts to understand the analysis that will follow, are set out. A critical review of renowned academics is used to put the Dialogue in the light of this thesis. This chapter builds on the previous one, but is specific to the case study.

4.1 Conflict background

The last dispute after the dissolution of Yugoslavia is a thorn in the side of the 'European project' (the effort to achieve greater economic, political and social integration between European countries, securing a strong Europe). Since the collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1992, the friction between Serbia and Kosovo has never been resolved. Croatia and Slovenia (1991) were the first to declare independence, followed by Macedonia (1991) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992). Finally, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1992-2003) dissolved into a federation of Serbia and Montenegro. In 2006, Montenegro also declared independence, marking the end of what had been known as 'little Yugoslavia'. Unlike the other former Yugoslav republics, Kosovo could not assert its independence in the same way because it was never a republic itself but an autonomous province, making it a more complex and difficult case. During the Yugoslav conflicts, the population of Kosovo resisted the Serbian regime, which led to a violent escalation in the late 1990s. The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) fought Serbian forces in the Kosovo War of 1998-1999. NATO intervention ended the hostilities, Serbian forces withdrew and Kosovo was able to begin building its state-like institutions, culminating in its unilateral declaration of independence on 17 February 2008.

The dispute between Kosovo and Serbia is largely characterised as an ethnic conflict. The population is overwhelmingly ethnic Albanian (over 90%), with only 1.5% ethnic Serb. A legacy of ethnic hatred and lack of trust is characteristic of the Western Balkans, much of which was experienced in the 1990s. Tensions between Kosovo and Serbia remain to this day.

4.2 EU historic efforts

The EU's ambition to maintain its role as a major global actor can be seen in a number of developments. The EU's role as an international mediator received a boost in 2009 with the launch of the "Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities". The EU aimed to develop a "more systematic approach to mediation" in order to strengthen its mediation capacities (Bergmann & Niemann, 2013). The year 2010 saw the birth of the European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU's foreign and security ministry and implementer of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). As the external service, the EEAS represents and speaks for the EU on the international stage. In 2020, the "Concept on EU Peace Mediation" was introduced as an update of the 2009 Concept. The Concept on EU Peace Mediation aims to "further boosting the EU's role as a leading peace mediation, conflict prevention and peacebuilding actor" (Council of the European Union, 2020). In a decade, the geopolitical context has changed, but the EU's ambition for greater geopolitical diplomatic power has not.

The EU's involvement in Kosovo began with its leadership of the economic development pillar of UNMIK (UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo), which was set up in the immediate aftermath of the Kosovo war. Later, just before Kosovo's declaration of independence, the EU consolidated its involvement with the establishment of its European

Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) (Economides & Ker-Lindsay, 2010). The EU has been facilitating the process of dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia since 2011, supported by a resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly on 9 September 2010 which “welcomes the readiness of the European Union to facilitate a process of dialogue between the parties; the process of dialogue in itself would be a factor for peace, security and stability in the region, and that dialogue would be to promote cooperation, achieve progress on the path to the European Union and improve the lives of the people” (UNGA, 2010).

With both Kosovo and Serbia presenting European integration as their main foreign policy goal, the EU is in a unique position to use its power in the international arena (Gashi, Musliu & Orbie, 2017). The EU's leverage in the mediation process could potentially push for significant negotiations through dialogue to reach agreement on sensitive issues. The core of the Dialogue is the 'normalisation of relations'. However, the Dialogue has long focused on issues 'on the ground' and has not yet addressed Kosovo's statehood. "Technical issues" were at the core of the Dialogue in the first two years, in order to build a minimum level of trust and avoid discussing Kosovo's status and other sensitive, symbolic issues (Bieber, 2015). The technical agreements reached between 2011 and 2013 concerned seemingly trivial discussions on diplomas, cadastral records and energy, but also international representation and freedom of movement. As noted by Visoka & Doyle (2015), the Dialogue 'spilled over' to the political level, as these seemingly 'technical issues' already had some political overtones.

So far, 2013 is seen as a breakthrough with the signing of the 'First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalisation of Relations', better known as the Brussels Agreement. This agreement included a 15-point text and was the first agreement between officials from Kosovo and Serbia. The countries agreed to 'normalise relations' and not to block each other's path to the EU. Serbia would withdraw its presence in northern Kosovo in exchange for a degree of self-government for Kosovo Serbs and the establishment of an Association/Community of Serb Municipalities (ASM/CSM). The points are vague and unclear, and only Kosovo has officially signed the agreement (Serbia signing an agreement with Kosovo would imply recognition of Kosovo as an autonomous entity), adding to the substantive and legal ambiguity of the Dialogue. Since then, the Dialogue has witnessed different stages and a huge number of agreements, often interpreted differently by the two opposing parties (Bieber, 2015). No comprehensive agreement has ever been discussed and the implementation of signed agreements is deficient. Meetings are held frequently and usually result in the agreement of a new document with key points for the parties to work on in the coming period. 'Continuing the implementation of previous agreements' is usually one of the key points. Despite the clear objectives, the Dialogue has mainly produced words rather than deeds.

The last agreement stems from 2023, known as the 'Agreement on the path to normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia'. The text states, among other things, that Serbia will not oppose Kosovo's membership in international organisations and that Kosovo will accept a certain degree of self-government for the Serb community within Kosovo, referring to the ASM/CSM (EEAS, 2023). At least a roadmap for the implementation of the agreement was agreed in March 2023.

Because of the many ambiguities in the official agreements, agreed points are interpreted differently and implementation has been limited. Violent confrontations and ethnic tensions continue, and a comprehensive settlement is not in sight. Dialogue can be a tool in mediation processes aimed at opening lines of communication, finding common ground and building

confidence (Council of the European Union, 2020). The EU has been successful in its mediation process in implementing a dialogue process, but this dialogue has not led to de-escalation or a full settlement yet.

4.3 Negotiation characteristics

Kosovo and Serbia find themselves in a collaborative negotiation process, where the negotiating parties have identified common interests which form the basis for a dialogue. There is common ground because both parties are aware of their interdependence and common future interests. There is a mutual interest in engaging in dialogue because of the prospect of economic development and a prosperous European future (Bieber, 2015).

An immediate solution is plausible, but both parties are tough negotiators and do not easily give in to their own interests. They are engaged in an ongoing and complex negotiation. Their perception of the crisis is limited, which puts them in a dialogue environment that is passive and time-consuming without significant results.

The EU has a heightened sense of urgency because of the EU alternatives that Kosovo and Serbia face. China's growing presence in the Balkan region over the past decade challenges the hitherto unquestioned European future of Kosovo and Serbia (Markovic Khaze & Wang, 2020). This puts a time limit on the mediation process. Serbia, however, does not see the situation as a crisis, apart from its continued demand for an Association of Serb Municipalities, and has no urgency to reach a final settlement. It is in the interests of the current Serbian nationalist regime to delay the discussion on Kosovo's statehood. That means no signing of agreements.

4.4 Mediator's effectiveness

Much has been written about the EU's involvement in Kosovo and Serbia. The reason for its involvement is to promote stability and democracy in the Western Balkans and to offer the prospect of EU integration to bring the region closer to the EU (Mexhuani, 2023). The EU receives a high degree of leverage from both parties thanks to the positive incentive of EU integration (Bergmann & Niemann, 2015).

Bergmann & Niemann (2015) measure the EU's mediation efforts between Kosovo and Serbia as moderately effective. They claim that the EU's effectiveness is determined by four factors: leverage, strategy, coherence and conflict context.

Mediator leverage is the set of resources and instruments that the EU can bring to bear in the negotiation process. Consider measures that force the parties to the conflict to change their position, such as economic sanctions or the threat or use of military intervention. On the other hand, positive measures could also provide incentives to the parties, such as economic agreements or the signing of an association agreement. The EU has a great deal of leverage over the parties because of their EU membership aspirations (Gashi et al., 2017).

In line with Bercovitch et al. (1991), three mediation strategies can be distinguished: facilitation, formulation and manipulation. According to Bergmann & Niemann (2015), the EU has been successful in formulating and, above all, manipulating the peace process between the two parties, thanks to the leverage and ambiguity evident in the EU's strategy. On the contrary, the EU insists on its position as a mere "facilitator" and refuses to use the word "mediator" (Gashi, 2020).

Coherence refers to consistency between the policies of individual member states and the EU institutions, which mediate on behalf of all. Limited coherence undermines credibility and this has been the case for the EU. Internal divisions (five member states – Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain – do not recognise Kosovo) have limited the EU's coherence in its mediation efforts.

Finally, and crucial to the above conditions, is the context of the conflict. This refers to the internal cohesiveness of the parties to the conflict, consisting of internal power structures and so-called 'spoiler problems', i.e. the undermining of the peace process by those who stand to lose power as a result of peace. These spoiler problems have complicated the Dialogue: Personal interests of senior political figures ensure that ground-breaking agreements are still not reached because they would damage the integrity of the regime. The Serbian leader would lose face if an agreement on Kosovo's future statehood were signed. A mediation process usually begins when both parties are no longer interested in the conflict and are ready to engage in dialogue. But Serbia's nationalist agenda depends on undermining the peace process and not accepting any serious agreements.

4.5 EU discourse

Gashi (2020) argues that the EU's mediation efforts have not been as effective as Bergmann & Niemann (2015) have found, highlighting the lack of coherence and apparent ambiguity lurking in the process. Gashi (2020) speaks of 'simulated power' – power over the process that appears legitimate but is in fact questionable due to the lack of coherent power within the EU. Mutual recognition is claimed to be one of the main goals, but in reality it is very unlikely to be achieved through the current dialogue. The EU has exaggerated the European prospects of the countries, while in reality EU enlargement in the Western Balkans has been stalled for many decades. Moreover, the EU has suppressed its own role and pursued its own interests in the region (Gashi, 2020). Through these simulations, the EU has created a false reality that obscures the underlying difficulties and creates ambiguities that undermine the Dialogue and the peace process as a whole. It has succeeded in creating a reality that gives the EU leverage as a mediator, while its power in this sense is only 'simulated'.

The actual goal of the Dialogue - the normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia - is effectively presented as the intended and sole purpose, while in reality the EU's goal is to present itself as an international power (Gashi, 2020). The latter is not the message that reaches the popular media, and therefore the discourse succeeds in obscuring the real goals of the EU. The EU's own interests take precedence over serving the purpose of the Dialogue (Gashi, 2020).

Critical scholars argue that the EU plays the role of a biased mediator. Elgström, Chaban, Knodt, Müller and Pardo (2018) argue that the EU's relationship with the mediating parties - Ukraine, Israel/Palestine in their particular study - may influence these countries' perceptions of the EU's efforts and its role as mediator. Warm relations with one or both countries could feed perceptions of the EU as a biased mediator. This bias could affect the (in)effectiveness of the EU's efforts in the Dialogue. However, Elgström et al. (2018) found that in the case of Ukraine and Israel/Palestine, bias is not perceived as the main reason for limited success, but other factors such as the role of other mediators and internal disagreements in the EU. As the EU is the sole mediator in the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue, this 'other mediator factor' does not play a role here.

4.6 Mediator's complicators

Meanwhile, the EU's disunity seems to be a major factor in its ineffectiveness as a mediator in this case. While the EU is always keen to present itself as a unified bloc, standing as a whole for the fundamental values of freedom, equality and security, its foreign policy cannot always rely on this unity. Since not all EU member states recognise Kosovo as a state – only 22 out of 27 do – it is impossible to speak as one. The potential for delay and failure increases as individual parties within the third actor - the mediator - seek different outcomes and have different interests (Starkey et al., 2016). This situation adds complexity and uncertainty to the mediation process and the conflict resolution sought.

Internal discrepancies ensure that the EU cannot intervene in its full capacity, as there will always be member states that do not accept what they see as too far-reaching measures and conclusions. A more active role, which would stimulate the necessary progress in the Dialogue, is hampered by the lack of unity (Mexhuani, 2023). The member states of Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain have their own interests in not allowing the Dialogue to reach the point where the recognition of the state of Kosovo has to be discussed. This would pose too great a domestic risk to secessionist regions, which would see this as an opportunity to demand independence. This has not prevented the EU from taking on the role of mediator, but it does raise questions about the normative power of the EU and its commitment to promoting stability in the region (Mexhuani, 2023).

What this situation of disunity further complicates is not only the EU's power in the region, but also the future prospects for stability and prosperity in the region. The EU has made the normalisation of relations part of both countries' EU accession process. In order to join, Kosovo and Serbia must 'normalise' their relations (EEAS, 2023). As long as there is disagreement, EU integration is not possible. Since both countries see a European future as the only possible future, the EU is in a powerful position to determine the process of the Dialogue. It is primarily political and economic power that the EU wields over the parties to the conflict. The future prospect of EU accession promises both an economic and a political boost.

The link between EU accession and normalisation of relations requires efforts not only from Kosovo and Serbia, but also from the EU member states that do not recognise Kosovo. Accession requires the agreement of all current member states. This means that the current situation of disunity not only makes the Dialogue extremely difficult, but is almost certain to stall the EU integration process. Kosovo will have to find a way to address the concerns of these five countries. Internal divisions in the EU could stall the EU integration of Kosovo and Serbia, which would greatly undermine the EU's mediation role and the parties' willingness to talk (Bergmann & Niemann, 2015). This could damage the entire peace process.

4.7 Ambiguity

The EU-led Dialogue is characterised by ambiguity throughout the process. Ambiguous texts are the only way to keep both parties at the table, given the highly complex relationship between the parties to the conflict. Fundamental debates are deliberately avoided. The results of the ambiguous agreements are concrete, but they are interpreted differently and implementation is lacking. Beysoylu (2018) argues that the limited implementation stems from the parties' reluctance to fully engage, due to doubts about the success of the Dialogue.

The EU deliberately chooses this path of ambiguity in order not to be held fully accountable for the outcomes, while at the same time being able to show that the EU-led Dialogue is producing practical results and is therefore a success of EU foreign policy. Bergmann & Niemann (2015) call it a deliberate strategy in the mediation process. Ambiguity provides the EU with deniability and avoids any responsibility for the Dialogue and its outcomes.

The EU is keen to present itself as an important international actor in the region, as well as the necessary and only legitimate actor (Gashi, 2020). The necessity of the EU's presence and involvement is confirmed by portraying the countries - and the Balkan region more broadly - as 'in crisis' (Chandler, 2008). By referring to both countries' aspirations for a European future and the EU's necessary role in realising this, the EU confirms its role as an international mediator. In this way, it succeeds in disguising the lack of harmony on the question of Kosovo's future statehood. Ambiguity is the EU's strategy in mediating between Kosovo and Serbia, but it is also a direct effect of the lack of unity within the EU, which calls into question the EU's power as a mediator in this conflict.

5. Methodology

This chapter describes the methodological approach used to examine the EU's discourse on the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and its impact on the mediation process. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used as primary tool to examine the agreements, statements and remarks, press releases, and other documents related to the Dialogue. But first, an account of the general research approach.

5.1 General research approach

The research philosophy that fits best with this thesis is interpretivism. Interpretivism is concerned with subjectivity and understanding the meaning of social phenomena. Social phenomena are highly dependent on the context in which they take place and require detailed examination of phenomena in context (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). The context of the mediation process is important to acknowledge and understand in order to make something out of the mediator's discourse. A discourse that is created by the context, but also creates that context in its turn. In contrast to positivism, which seeks objectivity and universal laws, interpretivism defends that reality is a social construct and is understood through meaning, experiences and narratives.

A case study is a strategy characteristic of an inductive research approach, as applied in this thesis. Empirical data is examined on a detailed level to develop generalised insights. The resulting observations from the case study can give rise to theory building. This requires mostly qualitative research. On the other hand, a more deductive approach is also applied. The theoretical framework of discourse and its relationship with conflict and conflict resolution is acknowledged as starting point of this research. The case study builds on that theory and looks at the mediator's discourse in the mediation process more specifically.

The combination of an inductive and a deductive approach ensures a more thorough investigation; the deductive reasoning provides a correct academic basis, while the inductive approach allows for a fresh look at data without approaching it entirely from the theory. This allows the theory to be tested and additional observations to be made that might contribute to or debunk the theory.

5.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

The main body of research has been conducted using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Discourse analysis is the study of how language is used in texts and contexts (Sankar, 2022). It is through the use of language – or any other form of symbolic expression – that the world around us is constituted and structured. Meaning is not objectively pre-given, but is socially constructed through our practical use of language (Bartmański, 2017). Text is always subject to interpretation – it is not neutral, but contains attitudes and values. Language is not only a means of communication but also a tool for constructing social reality. Discourse refers to everything that somehow expresses, communicates or represents 'meaning' (Kibrik, 2011). There is a strong relationship between this meaning and the social context in which it is constituted, and language cannot be separated from its specific context. Over time, 'meanings' are reproduced and become 'normal' and 'natural', marginalising alternative meanings. This means that a particular way of using language creates a dominant discourse that determines what is true and important and what is not. Discourse is the production of knowledge through language.

Critical Discourse Analysis, in particular, is a form of discourse analysis that looks at the relationship between language and power. “[CDA ...] shows how language works in sociocultural and political contexts, focusing on power relations and ideological perspectives reflected in discourse texts, and their wider implications for society” (Chiluwa, 2021, p. 3). The specific use of language informs power relations and reinforces the ideologies and prejudices of discursive power. It emphasises that language is not neutral, but linked to power dynamics in the socio-political context. Thus, CDA is concerned with the actual meaning of language as well as the social changes that discourse conveys as a structure of power.

Foucault's idea of power/knowledge fits well with the method of CDA. Since meaning and the whole reality around us is socially constructed, whoever has the power produces that meaning. Language creates change and behaviour and is therefore an instrument of power (Fairclough, 1995). But it is not only knowledge that is constituted by power. Power is also reproduced through the use of language and the directed production of knowledge. The propagation of a certain truth about an actor's capabilities and legitimate power reproduces that power and becomes 'natural'. Knowledge and power are situated in a social context through language (Clifford, Cope, Gillespie & French, 2016).

It is important to consider not only linguistic practice, but more importantly the social context in which that language is used. As Fairclough (1995) acknowledges, discursive representations always display three discursive layers: linguistic practice, discursive practice and social practice. The 'textual' (written and spoken) never takes place in a vacuum, but is part of a discursive practice, i.e. processes of text production, distribution and consumption. Linguistic practice is explicit, while discursive practice is more implicit. Social practice concerns the wider social context in which expressions take place.

5.3 Content Analysis

Content analysis allows to “conduct an inductive analysis of textual data, form a typology grounded in the data ... use the derived typology to sort data into categories, and then count the frequencies of each theme or category across data” (Tunison, 2023). Themes and concepts are coded and the results can be analysed quantitatively (counting) and qualitatively (interpreting). The focus of the analysis is qualitative rather than quantitative, although there is some quantitative approach as well. Not only can background characteristics and power dynamics be coded, but content analysis may also encounter other recurring themes. The structuring of the data by means of content analysis can bring out new themes that may be independent of the dominant discourse. The main form of analysis is that of discourses, however analysis of content helps to understand themes that are apparent in the text but not necessarily part of the discourse.

5.4 Data collection

Press releases, speeches, statements, announcements and agreements were analysed to identify the dominant discourse(s). As this is a case study, this method will be used to analyse the case of the EU-led Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue. Since the relationship between the mediator's discourse and the mediation process is central to this study, the mediator's discourse, being the EU, was sought. All of the data has an EU filter on it because it is all from an EU point of view, but that is what this study is all about.

The data were collected from the EEAS website. Those documents that concern and relate to the Dialogue have been selected and collected. The search term 'Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue' was used, as this is the official term used by the EU institutions. This resulted in a collection of 300 documents, ranging from a short press statement to a more elaborate summary of the state of the Dialogue at a given moment in the form of a speech. Most of the documents were statements and remarks made before or after a Dialogue meeting, but there were also press moments with question-and-answer sessions. After excluding documents that contained a video of statements that were already available in written form, or that did nothing more than mention the words 'Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue' without corresponding context, the database ended up with 270 documents (see Annex 1 for document references).

The period covered is from November 2011 to April 2024, eleven years after the signing of the Brussels Agreement. Unfortunately, there is not much data in the first few years, including around the first agreement on normalisation in 2013. This is probably due to the relatively low level of digitalisation of the process in the early years. After the first five years of the Dialogue, there is an adequate archive of speeches, statements and more.

5.5 Data analysis

Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional framework is used to systematically analyse EU discourse. This approach within CDA allows us to integrate linguistic, discursive and social analysis.

The research will help to understand the narratives and rhetoric used by the EU on Kosovo and Serbia, and how these may reflect underlying power dynamics. Central to this research are the ways in which language contributes to the maintenance of certain power dynamics between the acting parties. Thematic analysis is used to identify themes related to the mediator's background and power dynamics, while discursive analysis is used to analyse the language used by the mediator and how this language may reflect its background and the power dynamics in the mediation process.

Particular attention was paid to the linguistic strategies used to construct a particular image of the EU and its influence on the outcomes of the dialogue, as well as to the framing of issues and other actors.

Those sections that dealt with Balkan-wide issues without explicitly mentioning the Dialogue were excluded from the analysis. These sections also emphasised the importance of European integration, but in a broader sense, including the economy, energy, rule of law, etc., and concerning the Western Balkans as a whole. Analysing this data would raise other questions, for example about the specific process of EU enlargement, and is beyond the scope of this research on the discourse surrounding the EU-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue.

In line with the methods of Grounded Theory Analysis, a sequence of open, axial and selective coding was used to analyse the data in a concise manner. After a first round of open coding of the first 100 documents, axial coding was used to create a more precise and workable codebook. Codes were merged and renamed to fit the previous results. This set of codes was then tested and fine-tuned on the next 50 or so documents. This resulted in a codebook of 52 codes, which was used to selectively code the entire collection of 270 documents. Selective coding organises the data by allocating those specific and 'grounded' codes to the data. The analysis resulted in a total of 2721 quotations (included in this number is a quantitative analysis of the specific choice of words as to how 'the dialogue' is referred to).

An overview of the codes used, an explanation of their content and the number of references can be found in Annex 2.

Limitations such as potential source bias, data availability and the challenges of interpreting complex diplomatic interactions are acknowledged and taken into account where possible. The potential for researcher bias is considerable in CDA, as the data is interpreted only by the researcher. By drawing on other scholars and their analyses of EU mediation and foreign policy, this bias, if present, is partially countered and a nuanced and academic conclusion is reached.

5.5.1 Operationalisation

A mediator's background consists of factors such as its geography, history, ethnicity, cultural knowledge and geopolitical interests vis-à-vis the conflicting parties. For the EU, in the case of Kosovo and Serbia, geographical proximity, history, identity and the idea of Europeanness would be key background factors. To 'measure' background, the codes *European history*, *European values/identity*, *European integration* were used to distinguish the role of the EU background in the discourse.

Power is measured by coding language that indicates differences in power, capacity, responsibility. As well as evidence of the EU shaping the dominant discourse. Codes related to power include *EU power*, *justification*, *legal legitimacy* and *commitments/promises*.

Discourse is everything and the basis of this research. There are codes that say something about more than just one concept, but show overlaps and possibly relationships. In fact, all codes are related to discourse as they explain what the dominant discourse is made of.

Process is an overarching concept in all the data and overlaps with many other concepts because process is at the heart of what this research is about. The process and how it is influenced by the discourse is measured by codes such as *urgency*, *progress/success*, *link dialogue-EU path*, *comprehensive agreement* and *implementation*.

6. Results

In this chapter, the results that were found following the analysis are explained, in order to be able to answer the sub-questions. First some quantitative insights will be shown, after which the most important results are set out in four paragraphs, each dealing with one of the key concepts.

6.1 Quantitative results

Although this research is predominantly qualitative, in critical discourse analysis some quantitative analysis can be valuable as well. Using specific words or phrases more frequently than others, or referring to something in a very specific way can add to the discourse and give us additional information.

In the word cloud below (Figure 2) are the most common terms in the quotations, i.e. the pieces of text that are encoded. A word cloud of all complete documents encompasses a lot of meaningless words, including the standard footnote of the EEAS website. The cloud below shows the most prominent terms used in the EU's discourse. *Dialogue* is referred to at least 800 times, followed by the capitals and country names (around 400). *European*, *normalisation* and *agreement* are key terms as well – almost 300 references. *Relations* and *implementation* follow closely. These proportions are in line with expectations, as these terms describe the core of the dialogue, namely seeking an agreement on the normalisation of relations as well as implementing the agreement accordingly.

Country names and capital names are used as often. However, when referring directly to the Dialogue, the EU uses the capitals, especially when using the term 'Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue'. When it refers to the parties in the context of the Dialogue, so in the sentences and paragraphs that talk about progress, integration and what is still on the agenda for the mediation process, the country names are much more common.



Figure 2: Word cloud (frequency of words in quotations)

In Figure 3, the frequency of the used codes is represented visually. What stands out is the dominance of the capitals. That is due to the way the EU refers to the Dialogue they facilitate. The most commonly used and most convenient citation that is used is simply “the Dialogue” – over 300 times. The second most commonly used citation, also apparent as header on the EEAS website, is “Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue” or the adjusted way of saying it, “Dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina – 242 times. In 25 of these cases the names were inverted (Pristina-Belgrade). That will be due to inaccuracy as the EU deliberately uses the names in alphabetical order to show neutrality.

In 10 occasions, the country names are mentioned in contrast to the capitals (“Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia”, or “Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue”). This is not according to the standard, because by using the capital names rather than the country names, the EU makes sure the question of Kosovo’s status is avoided. “Belgrade and Pristina” implies that discussions are taking place with the leadership of both parties and also sounds more diplomatic.



Figure 3: Code cloud

Furthermore, it is notable that *normalisation* and *commitment/effort Kosovo/Serbia* are most commonly used. Normalisation (of relations) is the goal of the Dialogue and is, as it turns out, frequently mentioned. The purpose of the Dialogue is reiterated to ensure that all parties remain focused on the objective and maintain sight of the ultimate goal. If achieved, this goal will prove beneficial to both parties involved. This brings us to the commitment shown by Kosovo and Serbia. Commitment to the Dialogue is of critical importance in order to achieve its goal of normalisation.

The discourse set out in the following paragraph is, for all intents and purposes, the EU’s discourse. The collected data is written from an EU point of view and mainly from the personal experiences of the EU High Representative (*High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*) – Federica Mogherini (2014-2019) and Josep Borrell (2019-). More than half of the titles of the documents collected contain the name of Mogherini (77) or Borrell (69) in it. These consist of statements and remarks in a personal capacity. Other documents also mostly involve experiences from the senior officials but in less direct form. The representatives of both negotiating parties – presidents and prime ministers – do not speak directly and are only mentioned from an EU perspective. It is therefore clear that it is the EU and its officials who set this discourse.

6.2 The Discourse

As the result of a critical discourse analysis, this paragraph will set out the dominant discourse of the Dialogue – a discourse shaped by the EU. This paragraph allows us to answer the first two sub-questions: ‘How does a mediator create a dominant discourse on the mediation process?’ and ‘How are the mediating parties and the process represented in the mediator’s discourse?’.

6.2.1 Importance

The importance of the Dialogue is emphasised at almost every opportunity and referred to by the EU as ‘the only way forward’. This not only justifies the EU’s role as a mediator in the conflict, but also endorses the capacities the EU can deploy. If mediation by the EU is the only way forward, it is free to determine the course of the Dialogue as it wishes.

“... making progress in advancing on normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia is possible and underpins the importance of continuing to work within the EU-facilitated Dialogue.” [51:2 p 1 in 07.01.24 Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue Statement by High Representative Borrell on recognition of vehicle license plates EEAS](#)

But why the Dialogue is so important, is because it is in the interest of the citizens. The EU talks about how it is the people in their countries who want the peace and ‘normalisation’, for the sake of their future. Not just for the future of their countries, but for the future of the whole region, because it would open up a new, potentially more prosperous perspective for the region.

“... the success of the dialogue is not measured in terms of its visibility, but in terms of trying hard to reach probably one of the most difficult objectives we have in the region, but that would benefit the entire region and the European Union process of both sides ...” [151:3 p 4 in 16.11.17 Remarks by High Representative Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the press conference following the 4th EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Council EEAS](#)

One of the most recurrent facts in the language used by the EU is the assertion that the Dialogue does not stand for itself. The Dialogue is not held for the sake of the Dialogue, but for the sake of the future of Kosovo and Serbia.

“The dialogue is about normalisation of relations; the objective of the dialogue is not the dialogue, it is the objective of reaching the normalisation of relations.” [151:3 p 4 in 16.11.17 Remarks by High Representative Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the press conference following the 4th EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Council EEAS](#)

This is supported by the fact that both countries’ future prospects lie in the EU, according to the EU itself, as well as Kosovo and Serbia, who share the same aspirations:

“... both recalled that they are attached to the European Union integration, that they give the highest priority to that and that they will continue to work on the European Union-facilitated Dialogue.” [56:2 p 1 in 07.09.20 Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue Remarks by the High Representative Vice-President Josep Borrell upon arrival EEAS](#)

“... there really is no alternative to a European future for Kosovo, that is, a reality clear in Pristina, in Belgrade and in Brussels. In this scheme, everyone will sooner or later accommodate to this inescapable reality.” [4:12 p 2 in 01.06.18 Apostolova Kosovo “is a society tolerant to diversity” EEAS](#)

The Dialogue is not just important for Kosovo and Serbia. Progress in the Dialogue is for the sake of regional transformation. Normalisation of relations is important for the whole region, and beyond:

“The success of this dialogue is key for the stability of the Western Balkans and for the EU itself.” [96:16 p 2 in 12.10.20 Foreign Affairs Council Remarks by the High Representative Vice-President Josep Borrell at the press conference](#)
[EEAS](#)

6.2.2 Implementation

In addition to the importance of the Dialogue itself, the importance of implementing what has already been agreed is regularly mentioned in the texts (121 out of 270) and is often repeated several times within the same text.

“The work must continue urgently, both through the full implementation of agreements already reached as well as by tackling new issues that still need to be addressed.” [74:5 p 1 in 09.12.14 Joint statement on the formation of the new government in Kosovo](#) [EEAS](#)

Full implementation is urged and the importance of the Dialogue and in particular the implementation of agreements is constantly underlined to Kosovo and Serbia. Once again, this is the only way forward. Without the implementation of the agreements, there is no point in the Dialogue.

“... the implementation is of crucial importance and both sides need to take the relevant steps without delay.” [94:3 p 1 in 12.09.16 HRVP Mogherini meets with Foreign Minister Hoxhaj of Kosovo](#) [EEAS](#)

“It [implementation of the agreement] is key for taking the normalisation process forward.”
[113:2 p 1 in 14.09.23 Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue Press remarks by High Representative Vice-President Josep Borrell after the High-Level meeting with Prime Minister Kurti and President Vučić](#) [EEAS](#)

6.2.3 Commitment

Because the Dialogue is the only way forward, commitment from all sides - the EU and both Kosovo and Serbia - is essential if the Dialogue is to make real progress and achieve a successful outcome. Not committing to the Dialogue would mean not committing to a prosperous future for their own country, something the country's leaders cannot sell to their people.

“In their joint statement, both recalled that they are attached to the European Union integration, that they give the highest priority to that and that they will continue to work on the European Union-facilitated Dialogue.” [56:2 p 1 in 07.09.20 Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue Remarks by the High Representative Vice-President Josep Borrell upon arrival](#) [EEAS](#)

“The High Representative welcomed Kosovo’s commitment to the Dialogue, and stressed that a visible and sustainable improvement in relations between Kosovo and Serbia is necessary so that normalisation of relations can take deeper root ...”
[223:1 p 2 in 22.06.16 Federica Mogherini meets Kosovo President EEAS](#)

Not only is this commitment important, but the EU is really putting a sense of urgency on the case, which means that there is a time pressure on the Dialogue. Geopolitical developments are taking place in the region. The increasing presence of both Russia and China in the Western Balkans puts pressure on the EU to draw the region into the EU and its sphere of influence.

“... the game of the aspiring 'new empires', with Russia and China trying to increase their leverage and weaken the EU.” [212:19 p 4 in 21.05.21 Western Balkans we need to change the dynamic EEAS](#)

If the EU fails to do this and delays serious EU enlargement for another twenty years, the region will become the plaything of other global powers. The European integration of the Western Balkans is seen as crucial for the EU, and the normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia is essential to this process. The EU recognises the need for progress in the Dialogue. That is why the member states have decided to appoint a special representative for the Dialogue and the Western Balkans in general in 2020 to underline their commitment:

“[In line with this renewed commitment to the region,] EU Member States unanimously decided to create the post of a European Union Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues and to appoint former Slovak Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák.”
[23:19 p 2 in 04.01.21 The EU-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue in 2020 EEAS](#)

6.2.4 Justification

According to the EU, the Dialogue is justified for a number of reasons. First, because it is working. Progress in normalising relations is being made thanks to the Dialogue. Agreements have been accepted by both sides and some implementation has taken place. The EU uses these successes to justify the Dialogue it facilitates. And these successes come despite the difficulties of the process:

“Our negotiations today were intense, as usually, and not always easy, but what prevailed was the will of both sides to advance the discussions despite the painful and complex issues at hand.” [55:13 p 2 in 07.09.20 Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue Remarks by the EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajčák after the high-level meeting EEAS](#)

“There have been difficult moments and times of crisis and at times may have seemed impossible to continue. However, in the end, both Kosovo and Serbia have shown steadfast commitment, knowing that their paths to the European Union goes right through it.” [70:17 p 2 in 09.03.21 10 years of Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue EEAS](#)

Secondly, there is justification for the EU's facilitation in the sense that this is a UN mandate:

“the EU-facilitated Dialogue, (...) a tasking from the General Assembly of the United Nations to the European Union.” [98:16 p 5 in 12.12.22 Foreign Affairs Council Press remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell after the meeting EEAS](#)

In addition, the EU promotes its expertise and authority as justification for its role in the process. Since the region in question is part of Europe, the EU claims it understands the problems, difficulties and tensions. Since the ultimate goal of the Dialogue is European integration, the EU is the legitimate mediator. “*The EU is the eventual home for Serbia and Kosovo*”, Borrell says ([140:56 p 4 in 16.03.23 Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue Time to take responsibility and move towards the EU EEAS](#)).

6.2.5 Facilitation

Specifically, the EU's legitimacy comes from the fact that it presents itself as a neutral actor. This neutrality is seen as an essential part of why a mediator is the legitimate mediator. ‘The Dialogue belongs to the parties, not to the EU’ is something the EU really wants to make clear. The EU is committed and ready to help, to facilitate, but the parties are the ones who have the responsibility to shape the process, as the High Representatives state:

“The European Union continues to stand ready to help Kosovo and Serbia in every step along the way, but they are the ones who have to take those steps and move forward.” [159:25 p 2 in 17.03.24 Statement by the High Representative on the anniversary of the Agreement on the Path to Normalisation and its Implementation Annex EEAS](#)

“The role of a facilitator is that of creating the conditions, the atmosphere, the possibility, the space for the two sides to come together. The dialogue belongs to them; it does not belong to us. (...) not determining the content of a future agreement, but allowing discussions on what this legally binding agreement on full normalisation of relations could entail.” [62:2 p 6 in 08.05.19 Remarks by High Representative Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the press point with Prime Minister of Albania, Edi Rama EEAS](#)

The emphasis on neutrality and impartiality is a recurring phenomenon and a valuable reason for legitimising the way the Dialogue has been conducted. According to the EU, there are no conflicts of interest and it is up to the parties to come closer together. The EU is only there to facilitate the Dialogue and does not interfere in the content of the Dialogue:

“... we do not dictate or put on the table any outside external proposal. We are there to facilitate the ownership of an agreement that I am sure they can find, if the proper conditions are in place.” [280:31 p 7 in 29.05.19 Remarks by High Representative Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the joint press conference on the adoption of the 2019 Enlargement Package EEAS](#)

The European Union presents itself as a mere facilitator, not a proponent of proposals. Nevertheless, in late 2022, a proposal was put forth by the EU, spearheaded by France and Germany, which would ultimately culminate in the 2023 Agreement on the path to normalisation, a new milestone.

An analysis of the data reveals that a mutual interest between the EU and Kosovo/Serbia is not reserved in the EU's language. The interests of Kosovo and Serbia are frequently aligned with those of the EU, and vice versa. This is because there is a shared future, which often results in aligned interests. All parties have an interest in maintaining stability in the region and fostering amicable relations. This is for the sake of the prosperity of all the countries and their people, because a future of a strong Europe is what all the parties seek:

"The Dialogue is a very important process for Serbia and Kosovo, but also for the region and the European Union." [1:13 p 1 in 01.02.17 HRVP Federica Mogherini's statement after tonight's meeting in the framework of Belgrade Pristina Dialogue EEAS](#)

"A Western Balkans that leaves behind the conflicts and divisions of the past, and chooses instead to live and work together, will contribute to a stronger Europe, and a stronger European Union. This is in the interests of the region, of the EU and of the future of all our citizens." [45:20 p 4 in 06.05.20 High Representative Vice-President Josep Borrell at the EU-Western Balkans Zagreb Summit This is a time for solidarity and enhanced cooperation EEAS](#)

A stronger Europe will, in turn, ensure peace and prosperity in the Balkan region. The continuation of the 'European project' will define the future of Kosovo and Serbia. European enlargement has stalled, and the countries of the Western Balkans have been craving accession for two decades. For this to occur, reforms on the part of the EU are also necessary, which would provide the candidate countries with new energy for their own efforts to reform. It is therefore evident that the EU's interest in enlargement is also in the interest of Kosovo and Serbia.

6.2.6 EU dominance

The Dialogue is also a demanding process for the facilitator. It is not just about Kosovo and Serbia, the EU is also making the Dialogue about itself. Not entirely in line with the dominant discourse, which emphasises the importance for the parties, the EU underlines the toll it is taking to make this Dialogue possible in the first place:

For us (...) facilitating a dialogue is not only about inviting the two parties to exchange, or to sit down and agree on something, but it is very complicated, sometimes very technical and a time and energy consuming work that an entire team in Brussels is doing on a daily basis. [186:18 p 4 in 19.04.18 Remarks by HR VP Mogherini at the press conference with Aleksandar Vučić, President of Serbia EEAS](#)

While the EU should be concerned with what is best for Kosovo and Serbia, because that is the purpose of the mediation process, it also seems very concerned with its own position. It is logical that it wants to justify itself, but this could also be interpreted as a certain complacency creeping into the discourse. Borrell describes the toll it takes:

I want to thank the EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajčák and all his team, and also my team coming from Brussels, for their tireless work. We have been engaged around the clock and I think that they deserve recognition and praise for their work that, believe me, is not always easy. [184:41 p 3 in 19.03.23 Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue Press remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell after the Ohrid Meeting with President Vučić and Prime Minister Kurti EEAS](#)

6.2.7 Positive/negative

Overall, the EU's portrayal of the Dialogue is positive. When talking about the progress and success of the Dialogue, it is usually in a positive light. Positive statements about agreements reached and successful implementation are what the EU likes to report – as this justifies its efforts. In addition, when it is not talking about progress, potential successes take up much of the EU's statements. It speaks positively about the commitment of both countries to the Dialogue and positively about what the Dialogue could achieve in the future.

“... the perspective and the possibility of advancing and reaching an agreement are there.” [160:18 p 6 in 17.04.18 Remarks by HR VP Federica Mogherini at the College read-out to present the 2018 Enlargement package, together with Commissioner Johannes Hahn EEAS](#)

When speaking of the progress and success of the Dialogue, the EU is keen to mention its gratitude to Kosovo and Serbia for their efforts and 'commends the parties for their engagement'. This casts the Dialogue and the parties in a positive light and confirms a good negotiating atmosphere. It emphasises how effective the Dialogue is and that it is the responsibility of Kosovo and Serbia, not the EU.

“I want to thank once more the Presidents and Prime Ministers for their openness and their strong commitment to the Dialogue.” [234:31 p 2 in 24.01.17 Federica Mogherini's statement following the high level meeting in the framework of the EU-facilitated Dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina EEAS](#)

However, it is important to note that not everything is positive. As the Dialogue has not been a linear process of increasing success, there have been moments when the EU had a pessimistic view of the future of the Dialogue. On various occasions, the region has been involved in escalation between Kosovo and Serbia. In these 'times of crisis', the EU condemns the parties' behaviour and urges Kosovo and Serbia to de-escalate and return to the Dialogue table, immediately:

“The EU expects both Kosovo and Serbia to act responsibly and engage immediately in the EU-facilitated Dialogue to find a sustainable solution to the situation in the north of Kosovo that guarantees safety, security and participatory democracy for all citizens and paves the way for the implementation of the Agreement on the Path to Normalisation and its Annex.” [224:1 p 3 in 22.06.23 OSCE Permanent Council No. 1429 Vienna, 22 June 2023 EEAS](#)

Throughout the period, implementation of the agreements has been impeded by both sides, which makes the EU disappointed in the parties. In that context the EU can be very negative about the Dialogue as well, but a spark of hope and conviction regarding the importance and power of the Dialogue remains, despite the lack of implementation:

“... the EU expresses its concern over the lack of implementation by the Parties of their commitments under the Agreement on the Path to Normalisation and its Implementation Annex ...”. [195:1 p 1 in 19.09.23 Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue Statement by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union on expectations from Serbia and Kosovo EEAS](#)

“despite challenges, the EU-facilitated Dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade is a real accomplishment. Yes, it is in times cumbersome and slow. But overall, it has achieved remarkable results.” [185:37 p 5 in 19.04.17 EU-facilitated Dialogue is a real accomplishment EEAS](#)

6.2.8 Ambiguity

Regularly, the EU’s discourse contains ambiguous statements and language-use. For example, what does ‘normalisation of relations’ mean, or the lack of clear deadlines for the implementation of the agreements? However, it has to be noted that the Dialogue can also be quite specific and substantial. For instance, in the 2023 Agreement on the path to normalisation:

Neither Party will block, nor encourage others to block, the other Party’s progress in their respective EU path based on their own merits. [255:16 p 2 in 27.02.23 Agreement on the path to normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia 27.02.2023 EEAS](#)

The Parties shall establish a joint Committee, chaired by the EU, for monitoring the implementation of this Agreement.

Both Parties confirm their obligation to implement all past Dialogue agreements, which remain valid and binding. [255:6 p 3 in 27.02.23 Agreement on the path to normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia 27.02.2023 EEAS](#)

These are concrete points, how effectively the points are then dealt with is another story. But the lines that are drawn are quite specific.

Even in documents that are essentially not about the Dialogue but in which the Dialogue is mentioned in passing – such as certain Council meetings –, the discourse set out in this paragraph is invariably repeated. It is thus very much present and fully embedded in the European institutions and their leaders.

6.3 EU’s background

How the EU’s background plays into the discourse is an important part of scrutinising the conceptual model and essential to be able to answer the main question.

6.3.1 Unity

Showing unity is important for an international organisation like the EU. To be taken seriously on the international stage it is important to express unity. That is what the EU is trying to do in its language in and around the Dialogue. EU unity is expressed by speaking for all Member States. The Dialogue and its results are “supported by the 27 Member States”. The EU talks as one in the Dialogue process. “EU facilitated Dialogue” implies that all member states are behind this Dialogue and negotiations with Kosovo, but five Member States – Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain – do not even recognise Kosovo as a state so how are negotiations with the Kosovar leadership possible?

“... the EU remains determined to continue to assist Kosovo towards lasting stability and prosperity.” [28:13 p 3 in 04.05.23 OSCE Permanent Council No. 1421 Vienna, 4 May 2023 EEAS](#)

“The issue of recognitions is a bilateral issue between Kosovo and EU Member States.” [4:14 p 3 in 01.06.18 Apostolova Kosovo “is a society tolerant to diversity” EEAS](#)

Eventually, for Kosovo to join the EU all current Member States have to agree to the enlargement. Before that, Kosovo will have to find a solution to get the five states on board as well. The EU recognises this is something Kosovo has to settle with the Member States individually and does not claim a role in that process.

One might expect that this disguised lack of unity impacts the EU's weight as mediator. However, its leverage does not seem to be affected and the EU's power is unconstrained. At least according to the data analysed. All data is written by EU officials and institutions so by recognising its own disunity the EU would shoot itself in the foot. Even though the conflicting parties are aware of this fact, they do not seem to perceive the EU's disunity as a reason to reject the EU in its entirety and its role as mediator is still being accepted. For the stage the Dialogue is currently in, this is not yet seen as a problematic feature.

For complex issues, like the Association/Community of Serb Municipalities issue, the EU can bring knowledge and serve as an example. Because the process can be *“inspired by existing European good practices and models. And we have a lot in Europe. We have a lot of cases of associations, municipalities, with different natures, in [almost] every [EU] country you can find a model.”* [7:33 p 2 in 02.05.23 Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue Press remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell after High-Level Meeting with President Vučić and Prime Minister Kurti EEAS](#)

6.3.2 Balkan = Europe

The EU states that ‘their security is our security’. In addition, the EU has a sacred belief that European integration need not be difficult after all, because these countries are Europe already:

“[the Western Balkans] is Europe already - you [do] not have to move anywhere. It's already the heart of Europe.” [29:14 p 4 in 04.09.17 Speech by High Representative Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the 2017 Bled Strategic Forum EEAS](#)

The Balkans being Europe already takes away all questions whether the Dialogue should be linked to European integration so intensely or not. According to the EU, European integration is essential, as is normalisation of relations, for itself but also to be able to integrate into the EU. So, one could argue it is logical to link the two processes, in order to push each other forward.

“... it is now finally time to take the process forward, and to show that Kosovo and Serbia can live together in peace and be part of the European family. A family that overcame so many confrontations in the past and learned to live together in peace.” [113:61 p 4 in 14.09.23 Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue Press remarks by High Representative Vice-President Josep Borrell after the High-Level meeting with Prime Minister Kurti and President Vučić EEAS](#)

“The EU is the eventual home for Serbia and Kosovo.” [140:56 p 4 in 16.03.23 Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue Time to take responsibility and move towards the EU EEAS](#)

A cultural bridge is being built with Kosovo and Serbia. Because they are already European, the EU expects them to act accordingly and in a sophisticated way. This is why the EU has confidence in the parties and the success of the Dialogue. Because of their desire to become more European, they will behave in a European way which pleases the EU.

“With partners aspiring for a European future, we expect a European behaviour. We expect willingness to find European solutions: this is a basic precondition.”
[118:41 p 5 in 14.11.22 Foreign Affairs Council Press remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell after the meeting EEAS](#)

A European family includes all Western Balkans countries. The progress in European enlargement on the Balkans has been slow, to say the least. The ‘European project’ is only completed when all countries that desire to join the EU, have joined. Kosovo and Serbia are two of these countries but the conflict between the two is a great blockage on the road. The EU sees it as its duty to welcome these countries as well, and normalisation of relations between the two is a prerequisite for that to be possible.

The EU’s background affects the mediation process in the sense that the EU is very dedicated to and convinced of the legitimacy of its role in the Dialogue. It feels responsible for the countries in ‘its backyard’ and is therefore committed to the success of the Dialogue.

6.4 EU’s power

In the Dialogue, the EU is not hesitant about making its power known. Mentioning the EU and its facilitating role in the official name is a move that seems innocent, but a power move nonetheless. It confirms its power and the countries’ apparent dependence on the EU. Below are several ways in which the EU exploits its power in the context of the Dialogue.

6.4.1 EU presence

The EU is already present with EULEX (EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo), which justifies its presence and role as mediator to ensure peace and stability also in the long run, as EULEX is ensuring this, together with KFOR (a NATO-led international peacekeeping force) on the short term. With the presence of the civilian mission EULEX as a monitoring and advisory body since 2008, helping with the dialogue is a logical step that fulfils the EU’s commitment to the conflict situation.

During crisis situations (usually in the north of Kosovo), the EU shows its power and credibility, calling the parties to act. In these cases, the EU makes it clear that the Dialogue cannot go ahead if the parties do not de-escalate quickly. The parties are urged to de-escalate tensions and return to the Dialogue table. The EU reiterates the power of the Dialogue and how it is the only way forward for all parties.

“We call on all sides to urgently take measures to de-escalate tensions immediately and unconditionally.” [5:4 p 1 in 01.06.23 OSCE Permanent Council No. 1425 Vienna, 1 June 2023 EEAS](#)

“... an agreement is urgent and crucial for the stability of the entire region. Both sides should also avoid actions that undermine stability and rhetoric that is not conducive to dialogue.” [28:12 p 3 in 04.05.23 OSCE Permanent Council No. 1421 Vienna, 4 May 2023 EEAS](#)

6.4.2 Legal justification

In line with the EU's justification of its role in the Dialogue, the legal aspect of the Dialogue introduces a power dynamic too. The power of the Dialogue also lies in the EU's emphasis on legal legitimacy. The implementation of agreements is binding and the parties have committed themselves to it. This maintains the legitimacy of the Dialogue. A "legally binding comprehensive agreement" is what the Dialogue is working towards. This justifies the EU's role and marks its power over these two countries and the process. The parties have made legal obligations and have to implement these, like facilitating the Association/Community of Serb Municipalities. The EU is the one who has the leverage and the task to find a legally binding agreement, making it irrevocable and a result of EU efforts, confirming its power on the international stage:

"And we, at the European Union, we will forcefully demand the Parties to fulfil their obligations because now they are part, or they will be part of their EU Paths. And not fulfilling [them] will come with consequences." [184:38 p 3 in 19.03.23 Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue Press remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell after the Ohrid Meeting with President Vučić and Prime Minister Kurti EEAS](#)

6.4.3 Dependency

So while the EU portrays itself as a mere facilitator, in reality it still exploits its power over the countries: "EU cannot impose certain decisions to Kosovo, but it can condition Kosovo's path towards European integration." [123:11 p 2 in 15.07.16 Žbogar Confidence between Serbs and Albanians is a precondition for ASM EEAS](#) This clearly stresses the power the EU has over the countries and their future.

The EU has power over the countries because the EU has something both countries want: EU-membership. The perspective on a European future is used as enticement to commit both countries to the Dialogue. It could be interpreted that the only way forward is European and therefore commitment to the Dialogue is guaranteed.

"We are acting as facilitator of this dialogue. But at the same time we know that we are the only one who has the capacity of leveraging this process, because the European perspective is something that has to be granted by the European Union." [96:20 p 6 in 12.10.20 Foreign Affairs Council Remarks by the High Representative Vice-President Josep Borrell at the press conference EEAS](#)

The path of the EU-facilitated Dialogue is the only way forward. And it assures the EU that it has a strong power dynamic 'over' Kosovo/Serbia, a dynamic called dependency.

"... it is in the interest of the European citizens, both inside and outside of the European Union. In the Balkans, it is today very clear that the European Union is the point of reference. And let me say to all those that fear other powers being more and more present in the region: whenever we are present in the region, there is no space for others." [20:6 p 4 in 03.09.18 Speech by HR VP Mogherini at the annual EU Ambassadors Conference 2018 EEAS](#)

The EU is the only possible way forward and Kosovo and Serbia can count on the EU to guarantee a bright future for both countries. There is no other choice for Kosovo and Serbia than to commit to the Dialogue. The Dialogue brings them into the EU and that is what is at stake:

“They are at a crossroads now. They have to decide which way they want to go: towards the European Union or towards the past.” [118:41 p 5 in 14.11.22 Foreign Affairs Council Press remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell after the meeting EEAS](#)

“The European Union expects Serbia and Kosovo to swiftly deliver on their commitment to the Dialogue given the direct link between comprehensive normalisation of relations between them and the concrete prospects for their EU aspirations.” [65:1 p 1 in 08.11.18 Federica Mogherini hosted a meeting of the High Level Dialogue with President Thaçi of Kosovo and President Vučić of Serbia EEAS](#)

6.4.4 EU dominance

The successes of the Dialogue are all thrown into the lap of the EU. It seems that without the EU, there would be no progress. Mogherini sets out the capacity and power of the EU:

“[it is] the power of the European Union, to create dialogue, peace, understanding where we had confrontation or difficulties.” [27:4 p 2 in 04.03.17 Remarks by the High Representative Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the Mitrovica Bridge EEAS](#)

Other initiatives that help the Dialogue forward are welcome but the EU is very clear about who is responsible for peace and the already reached progress. Efforts by the United States are welcomed, but when it comes down to it, the EU is the one and only:

“We know very well that there is only one dialogue that is led by us - by the European Union. We welcome all initiatives and support to the European Union-facilitated dialogue. We welcome the United States as an important partner. But the facilitator and the one who is taking care of the process is the European Union.” [96:23 p 6 in 12.10.20 Foreign Affairs Council Remarks by the High Representative Vice-President Josep Borrell at the press conference EEAS](#)

6.4.5 Kosovo/Serbia’s responsibility

Since the Dialogue ‘belongs to the parties’, the EU can only urge them to commit to the Dialogue, including its implementation. But the EU manages to put it in such a way that there is really no other option but to heed this recurring suggestion, at least that is how the EU tries to come across.

“The EU calls on both sides to fully implement all new obligations and past commitments, constructively engage in the negotiations and make additional substantial efforts, with the aim of reaching a comprehensive legally-binding normalisation agreement.” [28:3 p 3 in 04.05.23 OSCE Permanent Council No. 1421 Vienna, 4 May 2023 EEAS](#)

On the basis of this quote, it all seems very simple. Agreements have been and are being reached. Implementing them should be a logical next step, as should a continued commitment to the Dialogue in order to reach a ‘comprehensive agreement’, an agreement that is essential for both countries as was shown earlier.

Commitment by Kosovo and Serbia is often urged by the EU. “We urge both parties” to take action/commit to/show commitment. “We expect” is also commonly used to describe how both parties are responsible for the success of the Dialogue, not the EU. The EU is a mere facilitator, the concessions have to be made by the parties. So despite the EU’s power and its influence over the Dialogue, Kosovo and Serbia do have power and responsibility as well.

6.5 Process

Throughout the preceding paragraphs, it has already become clear that the process of the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue is strongly influenced by the specific role of the EU, mostly by using its power over the countries and endlessly justifying its role. This paragraph will elaborate on the aspects that have been alluded to and set out the characteristics of the process.

6.5.1 Fair process

Kosovo and Serbia do have a mutual interest in peace and stability. Not only because this makes their respective EU path possible, but also because it is in the interest of the region and its citizens to have stability after all these decades of turmoil. Implementation can only take place if both parties feel that the process is fair and even.

“Both need to have the guarantees that their actions are rewarded with counter-actions by the other Party. This is the way we look for a balance point in a negotiation.” [113:50 p 2 in 14.09.23 Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue Press remarks by High Representative Vice-President Josep Borrell after the High-Level meeting with Prime Minister Kurti and President Vučić](#) [EEAS](#)

6.5.2 Urgency

The aforementioned sense of urgency puts pressure on the Dialogue and puts it in a time frame. The Dialogue must be conducted with care to ensure success, but the EU acknowledges time is also an important factor given geopolitical developments and the amount of time the conflict already has been simmering. All these years the region has been held back from full development and integration.

The urgency and unsatisfied achievements so far, calls for intensification of efforts:

“There needs to be rapid progress in the normalisation process: in terms of implementation of past agreements and moving ahead with the legally binding comprehensive agreement.” [241:1 p 2 in 25.01.22 EU-Serbia Remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell after the Stabilisation and Association Council](#) [EEAS](#)

“The European Union commends the parties for this achievement and urges them to accelerate progress on all other outstanding Agreements implementation work ...” [291:18 p 1 in 30.11.16 EU-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue Implementation of the Justice Agreement](#) [EEAS](#)

As the quote above shows, progress is being made and the process is successful, but not as successful as desired. Therefore, efforts must be intensified and commitment strengthened. Real progress and a comprehensive settlement can only be achieved if the process keeps pace and the parties remain committed.

6.5.3 High-level

The Dialogue-process takes place predominantly at the highest possible level. Only ‘high-level meetings’ are announced. The leaders of the countries – president and prime-minister – meet, often in Brussels, under the auspices of the EU High Representative or Special Representative.

“... we hosted the leaders of Kosovo [Prime Minister, Albin Kurti] and Serbia [President Aleksandar Vučić] for another High-level Dialogue meeting.” [113:40 p 1 in 14.09.23 Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue Press remarks by High Representative Vice-President Josep Borrell after the High-Level meeting with Prime Minister Kurti and President Vučić EEAS](#)

All parties show their commitment to the Dialogue and their faith in the process by sending their highest officials. In the case of Serbia it is the president, for Kosovo the prime-minister, and for the EU either the *High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP)*, and/or the *EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues*. The last function has been called to life in 2020 to intensify the EU’s efforts towards the region.

6.5.4 Link Dialogue-EU path

The process of the Dialogue is completely justified because “there is no way around it”. The Dialogue is coupled with the EU path of both countries:

“...the path for both Kosovo and Serbia go through the Dialogue. There is no way around it. There is not another solution. Without normalisation, there will not be a European future for either Kosovo or Serbia.” [113:59 p 4 in 14.09.23 Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue Press remarks by High Representative Vice-President Josep Borrell after the High-Level meeting with Prime Minister Kurti and President Vučić EEAS](#)

Normalisation is mandatory and the Dialogue has proven to be successful in providing this normalisation, according to the EU. The Dialogue process is therefore unquestionable and the EU’s role is credible. A successful Dialogue is a prerequisite for Kosovo and Serbia to continue on their EU path. Without normalisation, there will be no integration.

The successes of the Dialogue are achieved despite the difficulties the Dialogue usually brings. There is enough commitment and hope to make the Dialogue process a success. With this, the EU shows the strength of the process and the potential for a comprehensive agreement that all parties have been and still are working towards for years.

“Dialogue and peace is never an easy exercise, but it is always a worthwhile exercise.” [27:19 p 2 in 04.03.17 Remarks by the High Representative Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the Mitrovica Bridge EEAS](#)

“A comprehensive, legally binding agreement is crucial for Serbia and Kosovo to advance on their respective European paths.” [64:14 p 5 in 08.10.20 Speech by Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi at the Kosovo Assembly EEAS](#)

Calling for a 'legally binding' agreement, seals the process as legitimate and fundamental. It is not just an agreement the process seeks, the process seeks to come up with an agreement that is long-lasting and can be uphold legally, forcing the parties to abide by it in the future. In combination with making it a condition for EU integration, the process serves a clear purpose.

7. Analysis

In this chapter, a critical approach is applied to the empirical results of the previous chapter. In a CDA, interpretation of results is a significant part of the research. Therefore, a more thorough analysis of the results is relevant.

7.1 Discourse

In essence, the dominant discourse set out by the EU is that the EU-facilitated Dialogue is the sole viable path for progress in the relationship between Kosovo and Serbia. The importance of reaching a solution is paramount. It is therefore beneficial that the Dialogue is progressing well and that all parties are committed to the ultimate goal of normalising relations. This immediately removes any doubts about the EU's role as mediator and confirms that its role in this matter is legitimate. Justification for the role the EU takes and the way it manages the Dialogue is a critical point in the EU's discourse. For Kosovo and Serbia, to not engage in the Dialogue is tantamount to denying one's own future path, which is undeniably linked to the EU.

The EU acts as if it has no role in the Dialogue, or at least an impartial role. It just facilitates the Dialogue and it is up to the parties to lead the process because it is in their interest to do so. At the same time, the EU is well aware that both want to join the EU. The EU makes normalisation of relations, in other words a good and complete outcome of the Dialogue, a requirement for EU membership. This is not concealed but is repeated again and again. With this, the EU does play a role in the Dialogue; it makes a hard demand on the parties to commit to the Dialogue. If the parties do not normalise then there is no future for them. It is not entirely under false pretences that Kosovo and Serbia are being lured in the Dialogue, they know that the EU is playing this game deliberately and they know they have no other choice really. A European future for them is only possible if they let each other be, and in the eyes of the EU that is called 'normalisation of relations'.

The Dialogue is not only in the interest of Kosovo and Serbia – because a good relationship with your neighbour is always better than a bad one, and because by now it knows it is a necessity because of their EU aspirations – the Dialogue is also in the EU's interest. Because if the Dialogue does not succeed, the EU's image on the international stage will be tarnished and it will lose two EU candidates in the Western Balkans, a region that the EU considers to be at the heart of Europe.

That is why the Dialogue must succeed, according to the EU. The countries are praised for their commitment, but at the same time there is a lack of implementation and the EU acknowledges this. The EU not only commends the parties, but also expresses its displeasure at moments of insufficient commitment. The EU is selling two truths at once. On the one hand the Dialogue is an amazing success, on the other hand too little is happening and there are no breakthroughs.

By linking the Dialogue to the countries' European path, the EU leaves them no choice but to engage in the Dialogue. Progress in the Dialogue (i.e. normalisation) is "a prerequisite for progress on the EU path". The EU enters the dialogue as a facilitator, but it does more than that. Ultimately, it has to raise questions about more difficult issues in order to make EU integration possible for both sides. So the EU is not just a facilitator of the Dialogue, it is an integral part of it and therefore plays a major role in the process and its outcomes.

The dominant discourse makes this a very unusual mediation process. Yes, the EU is neutral in that it does not take sides, but it has a very present self-interest. This in itself is not new, as any mediator brings its own interests to a mediation process. What is remarkable, however, is that the EU is acting as a facilitator, but it is actually doing more than that by making the process a requirement. So Kosovo and Serbia have to go along with what the EU wants, otherwise there is no European future for them. The "requirement" of the Dialogue makes this process out of line with the definition of mediation, which is that it is a voluntary process, and establishes a dependency on the mediator.

7.2 Discourse vs. reality

What the EU should focus on is creating a narrative that works. A narrative that shows how good relations between the two are not just desirable because of their EU path, but inevitable. Regional cooperation is not possible if historical feuds continue to exist. Both countries realise that a strong Europe, led by a strong European Union is the way forward to prosper as a region. Blocking each other's future by delaying the Dialogue is in no one's interest. The countries' mutual interest lies in the EU and getting there is only possible if the countries normalise their relationship. Granting each other a better future will, in the long run, make the old feuds almost irrelevant.

What this discourse essentially means is that the long-term goal set out by both countries – EU accession – is far from within reach. Despite the EU's emphasis on the success of the Dialogue, the reality is that progress is slow and implementation of the agreements falls far short. Pretending that the Dialogue is an incredible success is tantamount to creating a false reality. The people are promised that the Dialogue is the way to this shared and successful future. But the EU knows, thanks in part to insufficient commitment from Kosovo and Serbia, that the Dialogue is not going that fast. Both claim to be committed to the process, but in reality they barely move an inch and allow the Dialogue only to muddle through.

Full implementation is what is urged, and what is conventional since both parties have agreed on those points written down. However, the Dialogue has not proved to be very effective in ensuring this implementation. Impediment can be seen as the norm. Ten years have passed for the next serious agreement (in 2023) to have been reached. Implementation of the first agreement has been negligent, and in the coming years the most recent agreement will also encounter difficulties when it comes to implementation. One of the points in the agreement is that "*Both Parties confirm their obligation to implement all past Dialogue agreements, which remain valid and binding*" ([255:6 p 3 in 27.02.23 Agreement on the path to normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia 27.02.2023 EEAS](#)). The fact that after ten years it is still necessary to repeat that the parties have an obligation to implement the agreements, is indicative of the level of effectiveness of the Dialogue. So, as long as full implementation, and hence full normalisation, is not achieved, the process of the Dialogue will continue and the EU will continue to play its role as mediator.

The EU is rarely critical of itself. As soon as the Dialogue does not go as hoped, for example when there is an escalation on the border, the EU immediately distances itself and puts the full responsibility for this failure on Kosovo and Serbia. On the other hand, when there are successes to celebrate, however minimal, the EU is at the forefront of proclaiming how well the Dialogue is working, thanks to Kosovo and Serbia, but certainly also because of the EU's facilitating role. The EU proclaims the Dialogue as it sees fit.

Linking the Dialogue with the countries' European futures was supposed to strengthen the mediation process, but implementation is lagging behind, making this tactic less effective than the EU would hope. The most worrying thing is that the EU is presenting the Dialogue in a somewhat idealised manner. It indicates through the discourse that all is well, when they know full well that this is not the case. The EU allows itself to be deceived by Kosovo and Serbia who keep pointing at each other and at the EU. What would help the EU, and indirectly the Dialogue as well, is honesty. Honesty and sincerity about the Dialogue and portraying the process properly. This avoids creating false hopes in either party.

7.3 The future of the Dialogue

Normalisation is now linked to the EU path because the EU does not want any internal disputes within the Union. However, history has shown that countries can also join the EU while there is still internal turmoil. Cyprus has been a full member of the EU since 2004, despite being a divided country. So why is so much put at stake by putting all our faith in the Dialogue? One could argue that Kosovo and Serbia should be given the same chance as Cyprus. A resolution of the conflict through the Dialogue is still awaited, while the countries have long been in the waiting room to become EU members. It is not entirely fair to Kosovo and Serbia, and in particular to their citizens, especially if their neighbouring countries are admitted in the coming years while they are left behind because the EU applies a double standard.

It could be argued that the EU is playing a game of blackmail. By linking the Dialogue to the countries' EU path, they have no choice but to engage in the EU-facilitated Dialogue. If the European path were not linked to normalisation, normalisation might never happen because there would be less interest in pursuing it. There is enormous resentment and talking to each other has already been a huge step. All for the sake of their EU path, but if that dot on the horizon would not be there, what is the incentive to engage in dialogue with each other? As Bieber (2015) mentioned, "Without bringing EU accession into the equation, the talks likely would not have led to results".

Overall, Kosovo and Serbia do show commitment to the EU-facilitated Dialogue. This might be perceived as a justification for this dialogue, but I would argue that both countries would have shown the same level of commitment if the Dialogue was facilitated by another party, say the US. Because, both Kosovo and Serbia do show commitment, but implementation is lagging behind and both hold off the boat when it comes to really serious matters. Neither wants to get involved in situations where it might lose face. It is no coincidence that the Dialogue has gone on for so long without any major breakthroughs; both countries show just enough commitment to keep the Dialogue alive, but are not willing to commit any more. A stalemate has brought them to this dialogue phase, but the Dialogue finds itself in another stalemate that may last for another decade. It seems that Kosovo and Serbia are not that committed to the Dialogue and their European future after all, contrary to what Bieber argues.

Excluding Kosovo's status as a point of negotiation, neglects its importance as part of the EU path, to which the Dialogue is dedicated. The Dialogue is therefore incomplete. The goal is normalisation, to be able to join the EU. But for this ultimate goal to become a reality, at some point the status of Kosovo has to be discussed. Without this – undoubtedly complex – discussion, genuine European integration is not yet possible, even if relations may be 'normalised' eventually. As long as agreements fail to address mutual recognition, no real progress will be made. Neither in a serious normalisation of relations, nor in their respective European path.

The EU will do its best to maintain the balance of power as described in the discourse; dependence of Kosovo and Serbia on the EU. The question is to what extent and for how long this view will hold. New global powers such as China are welcome guests in Serbia, and as part of their foreign policy they might interfere in the conflict discourse in the region, to pursue their own interests. According to Zweers, Shopov, Van der Putten, Petkova & Lemstra (2020), China's stance is already "inconducive" to resolving the dispute. Its economic interest combined with its supportive position toward Serbia, strengthens China's leverage. If Serbia turns more to China, the chances of resolving the dispute with Kosovo will diminish, as China is supportive of the Serbian position (Zweers et al, 2020). With this development, it remains to be seen whether the EU will be able to maintain its discourse of bringing conflict and dialogue to a for the EU desired outcome, or whether alternative discourses will become more prominent in the (near) future. It is therefore in the EU's interest to keep these countries on board and to continue to encourage the Dialogue. A sustained presence is important for the EU to prevent its sphere of influence from shrinking and to keep EU enlargement alive. This would be in line with the EU's ideal of securing its role as an important international actor in peace mediation and peacebuilding efforts.

7.4 Evaluation conceptual model

Going back to the assumed conceptual model, it can be learned from the analysis that the relationships assumed by the model are correct.

We have seen how the dominant discourse of the EU, sets the lines of the process – how it is conducted. The discursive framing of the issues and actors in a certain way determines how the mediation process – the Dialogue – is perceived by the public, but also by the states and their representatives themselves. By framing Kosovo and Serbia as being in need of the EU's help and its Dialogue, there is no choice left but to accept the EU's process without question. Because of this dependency that is created by the EU, the mediation process no longer meets the usual requirements of a mediation process – voluntariness.

That EU discourse comes about by the EU's power over the parties and the Dialogue, and is affected by the EU's background. The EU's position in this question is undoubtedly influenced by the history of the EU and its relationship with these two countries and the wider region. The ideal of the 'European project' makes the EU feel a certain responsibility. This responsibility therefore makes the EU's intervention in this way - making the countries' European future dependent on their relationship with each other - entirely legitimate, in the EU's view as well as in all alternative views thanks to the consistent discourse provided by the EU.

Its history and relationship with the countries, gives the EU power over them. Power over the future of the countries and power over what discourse is created. The EU is the 'promised land' for the Western Balkan countries. Their future is in the hands of the alliance they hope to join someday. The discourse, in turn, gives the EU power again, as the EU determines how the situation is perceived. The reality of the Dialogue and the social context in which it takes place, is determined by the language used by the dominant actor.

8. Conclusion and discussion

8.1 Conclusion

This thesis sought to answer the main research question of *how a mediator's discourse influences international mediation processes*. In the case of the EU-facilitated Dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, the EU's entanglement with the countries through the intertwining of 'normalisation' and their 'European path', legitimises but also influences the EU's role in the mediation process and thus the mediation process itself. Making a successful Dialogue a prerequisite for both countries to continue on their EU path, creates a power dependency of Kosovo and Serbia on the EU. The discourse of the Dialogue shapes the mediation process and what is perceived as its goals and capabilities. This conclusion supports the theory described by Smith (1997) and Chiluya (2021), that the mediator's discourse influences and shapes the process of conflict resolution. Justification of the mediation process as it is conducted by the EU as mediator is a central argument in the discourse and thus the mediator's discourse influences the mediation process in that it succeeds in portraying the Dialogue as legitimate.

The main research question could be answered by addressing the four sub-questions, separately answered below:

This thesis has shown that a mediator can be very successful in creating a dominant discourse on the mediation process. This is carried out by the usual processes of framing issues, utilising authority and, at the most basic level, use of language.

In issue framing, the EU points out common interests and mutual benefits if the mediation process succeeds. By emphasising these common future prospects of peace, stability and prosperity, the conflicting parties can focus on the future rather than on past grievances.

The mediator propagates its expertise and authority to support the dominant discourse. Its role as mediator is justified and the legitimacy of the mediation process is established. An informed mediator who builds trust is given the opportunity to create a dominant discourse that, in the case of the EU, supports the role it plays in the mediation process.

The language used by the mediator is the most prominent way in which a dominant discourse is created. The narrative of the Dialogue is specific to what the mediator expresses in speech and text. The focus is put on the future of the conflicting parties, a European future. Through repetition and consistency in stressing the importance of the Dialogue, a discourse that confirms the value of the Dialogue is established.

In terms of the EU's dominant discourse, it can be noticed that this discourse is strongly kept alive. The mediation process (the Dialogue) is presented as 'the only way forward'. Since both countries want to join the EU and the EU does not want internal conflicts within the Union, a resolution of the conflict is a prerequisite for the European future of both countries to be possible at all. 'Normalisation of relations' is what the Dialogue is all about and should lead to both countries being able to continue on their path towards the EU. This link between the Dialogue and the (European) future of Kosovo and Serbia is continuously drawn.

This also means that both countries are seen as dependent on the EU. However, responsibility for the Dialogue and its potential success lies with the conflicting parties. Kosovo and Serbia are portrayed as committed and open to dialogue and the process is depicted as quite successful.

The EU's background and its close relationship with both countries, confirms that the way the process is being conducted is the only right one. Because the EU is the guardian of these countries and can give them a prosperous future, it is difficult to question its role. Because of

the idea that the countries already have the same norms and values as the mediator on whose side they eventually want to be, the EU believes that this mediation process need not be so difficult. The common interest between the EU and the conflicting parties makes a successful completion of the mediation process easier. In other words, the EU has the same interest as Kosovo and Serbia. Namely, resolution of the dispute, regional stability, and a prosperous European Union which includes the countries of the Western Balkans.

The dominant discourse justifies the EU's role and the Dialogue process as it is conducted. The most significant part of the discourse is the linking up of the Dialogue with the EU path of both countries. Since the future of the countries is in the hands of the Dialogue and thus in the hands of the EU as the facilitator of this Dialogue, the EU has leverage over the process and the countries. The mediation process and outcome are therefore under EU guidance. The EU is their partner and Kosovo and Serbia are dependent on the EU's position for their future. There is a dependency on the EU and the Dialogue, a power dynamic that the EU uses to justify its mediator role. The successful justification as major part of the discourse, establishes the power dynamics between the mediator and the conflicting parties.

8.2 Discussion

Some limitations of this research and recommendations for further research will be provided in this closing paragraph.

Firstly, this study was limited to the data made available by the responsible European body, the EEAS. Other EU websites may have held additional data, but the collection of data used is what the EEAS wants to present and is transparent about.

Due to the fact that in the early years of the Dialogue there was only limited registration on the EEAS website, the ratio of the data over time is disproportionate. The dominant discourse in the first few years including the period around the first ever official agreement, is less prominent. Examining how the discourse has evolved over time could contribute to an even clearer picture of the EU's discourse on the Dialogue. This could put the current latent situation of the Dialogue in a new, more historic perspective.

In addition, this research has focused mainly on the what and the how, but only to a limited extent on the why. Talking to the people behind the documents analysed, the EU officials, could lead to interesting insights into the motives behind the discourse and the extent to which this discourse is endorsed by all those responsible on the EU side. In other words, how is the EU's discourse specifically, and the Dialogue more broadly, perceived internally by the EU apparatus? Conducting interviews with the EU negotiation team in Brussels would provide an extra layer to research the mediator's discourse.

Framing the issues in a way that emphasises the mutual interest to pursue a successful Dialogue, should deal with past grievances and put the focus on a common future. However, grievances between Kosovo and Serbia lay so deep that it is uncertain if by simple methods of framing, these grievances can be overcome. It would be beneficial to conduct research into the attitudes of the people of Kosovo and Serbia towards dialogue and reconciliation. This would help to identify any remaining grievances in the region and inform future reconciliation efforts. Because diplomatic reconciliation – which, by the way, are not yet in sight – is not sustainable without reconciliation 'on the ground'. It could also help to find common ground on issues overseen by the government level.

Further research could be conducted to examine the opposing viewpoint of this thesis. What strategies do Kosovo and Serbia employ to shape the discourse around the Dialogue and the process itself? And to what extent does public support play a role in this? Ultimately, it is the citizens who are experiencing the challenges of the current situation and, in a positive sense, also have the greatest interest in a resolution.

To end on a hopeful note, the EU must do all it can to keep the Dialogue alive. Because as long as there is talk, there is no war and there is hope for long-term peace.

Bibliography

- Alharahsheh, H. H., & Pius, A. (2020). A review of key paradigms: Positivism VS interpretivism. *Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(3), 39-43. <https://doi.org/10.36348/gajhss.2020.v02i03.001>
- Astor, H. (2007). Mediator Neutrality: Making Sense of Theory and Practice. *Social & Legal Studies*, 16(2), 221-239. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0964663907076531>
- Bartmański, D. (2017). Social construction and cultural meaning: Reconstructing qualitative sociology. *American Journal Of Cultural Sociology*, 6(3), 563–587. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41290-017-0035-9>
- Beardsley, K. (2008). Agreement without Peace? International Mediation and Time Inconsistency Problems. *American Journal Of Political Science*, 52(4), 723–740. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2008.00339.x>
- Bercovitch, J. (2009). Mediation and Conflict Resolution. In Bercovitch, J., Kremenyuk, V. and Zartman, I.W. (eds) *SAGE Handbook of Conflict Resolution* (London: SAGE).
- Bercovitch, J., Anagnoson, J. T., & Wille, D. L. (1991). Some Conceptual Issues and Empirical Trends in the Study of Successful Mediation in International Relations. *Journal Of Peace Research*, 28(1), 7–17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343391028001003>
- Bergmann, J., Haastrup, T., Niemann, A., & Whitman, R. (2018). Introduction: The EU as International Mediator – Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives. *International Negotiation*, 23(2), 157–176. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-23021158>
- Bergmann, J., & Niemann, A. (2015). Mediating International Conflicts: The European Union as an Effective Peacemaker? *JCMS: Journal Of Common Market Studies*, 53(5), 957–975. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12254>
- Bergmann, J., & Niemann, A. (2013). The European Union as an Effective Mediator in Peace Negotiations? Conceptual Framework and Plausibility Probe. *Mainz Papers On International And European Politics, Paper No. 5*, 1. <https://international.politics.uni-mainz.de/files/2013/12/mpiep05.pdf>
- Beysoylu, C. (2018). Implementing Brussels Agreements: the EU's facilitating strategy and contrasting local perceptions of peace in Kosovo. *Southeast European And Black Sea Studies*, 18(2), 203–218. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2018.1474549>
- Bieber, F. (2015). The Serbia-Kosovo Agreements: An EU Success Story? *Review Of Central And East European Law*, 40(3–4), 285–319. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15730352-04003008>
- Chiluwa, I. (2021). Introduction: Discourse, Conflict and Conflict Resolution. In: Chiluwa, I. (eds) *Discourse and Conflict*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-76485-2_1
- Clifford, N., Cope, M., Gillespie, T., & French, S. (2016). *Key methods in Geography* (Third Edition). London: SAGE.
- Council of the European Union. (2020). *Concept on EU Peace Mediation*. <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/st13951.en20.pdf>

- EEAS. (2023). *Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: Agreement on the path to normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia*. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-agreement-path-normalisation-between-kosovo-and-serbia_en
- Economides, S., & Ker-Lindsay, J. (2010). Forging EU Foreign Policy Unity from Diversity: The 'Unique Case' of the Kosovo Status Talks. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 15(4), 495–510. <https://doi.org/10.54648/eerr2010036>
- Elgström, O., Chaban, N., Knodt, M., Müller, P., & Pardo, S. (2018). Perceptions of the EU's Role in the Ukraine-Russia and the Israel-Palestine Conflicts: A Biased Mediator? *International Negotiation*, 23(2), 299–318. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-23021154>
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. London: Longman.
- Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Vintage.
- Gashi, K. (2020). Simulated Power and the Power of Simulations: The European Union in the Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. *JCMS: Journal Of Common Market Studies*, 59(2), 206–221. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13056>
- Gashi, K., Musliu, V. & Orbie, J. (2017) 'Mediation through Recontextualization: The European Union and the Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia'. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 22, No. 4, pp. 533–550. <https://doi.org/10.54648/eerr2017039>
- Greig, M. J., & Diehl, P. F. (2012). *International mediation*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Gurses, M., Rost, N., & McLeod, P. (2008). Mediating civil war settlements and the duration of peace. *International Interactions* 34(2): 129–155. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050620802043362>
- Kakavá, C. (2005). Discourse and Conflict. In Schiffrin, D. Tannen, D. & Hamilton, H.E. (eds) *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. <https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1002/9780470753460.ch34>
- Kibrik, A. A. (2011). *Reference in discourse*. Oxford Studies in Typology and Linguistic Theory. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199215805.001.0001>
- Maoz, Z., & Terris, L. G. (2006). Credibility and Strategy in International Mediation. *International Interactions*, 32(4), 409–440. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050620601011073>
- Markovic Khaze, N., & Wang, X. (2020). Is China's rising influence in the Western Balkans a threat to European integration? *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 29(2), 234-250. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2020.1823340>
- Mayer, B. S. (1987). The dynamics of power in mediation and negotiation. *Mediation Quarterly*, 1987(16), 75–86. <https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.39019871610>
- Mexhuani, B. (2023). The Role of the EU in Shaping Kosovo's Political Future: A Critical Analysis. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2209983>
- Möller, F., DeRouen, K. R., Bercovitch, J. & Wallenstein, P. (2011). The limits of peace: Third parties in civil wars in Southeast Asia, 1993–2004. *Negotiation Journal*, 23(4), 373–391. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1571-9979.2007.00151.x>

- Sankar, L.V. (2022). Discourse Analysis. In: Islam, M.R., Khan, N.A., Baikady, R. (eds) *Principles of Social Research Methodology*. Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-5441-2_28
- Shapira, O. (2009). Exploring the Concept of Power in Mediation: Mediators' Sources of Power and Influence Tactics. *Ohio State Journal on Dispute Resolution*, 24(3). <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1492632>
- Smith, D. (1997). Language and Discourse in Conflict and Conflict Resolution. *Current Issues in Language & Society*, 4(3), 190-214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13520529709615498>
- Starkey, B., Boyer, M. A., & Wilkenfeld, J. (2016). *International Negotiation in a Complex World* (Fourth Edition). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ru.idm.oclc.org/lib/ubnru-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4722986#>
- Touval S. and Zartman W.I. (2008) *International mediation in Post-Cold war era*. United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Tunison, S. (2023). Content Analysis. In: Okoko, J.M., Tunison, S., Walker, K.D. (eds) *Varieties of Qualitative Research Methods*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-04394-9_14
- UNGA (2010) Resolution 64/298 (New York: UN).
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1997). The Study of Discourse. In: Van Dijk, T. A. (eds) *Discourse as Structure and Process*. SAGE. ISBN: 0803978456
- Visoka, G., & Doyle, J. (2015). Neo-Functional Peace: The European Union Way of Resolving Conflicts. *Journal Of Common Market Studies*, 54(4), 862-877. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12342>
- Vuković, S. (2011). Strategies and Bias in International Mediation. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 46(1), 113-119. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836710396848>
- Vuković, S. (2020). The Many Faces of Power in Diplomatic Negotiations. *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, 40(1), 45-57. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sais.2020.0004>
- Zartman, I.W. and Touval, S. (1985). International Mediation: Conflict Resolution and Power Politics. *Journal of Social Issues*, 41, 27-45. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1985.tb00853.x>
- Zweers, W., Shopov, V., Van Der Putten, F. P., Petkova, M., Lemstra, M. (2020). *China and the EU in the Western Balkans: A zero-sum game?* Clingendael Institute. <https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/china-and-the-eu-in-the-western-balkans.pdf>

Annex

Annex 1: Collected data

The documents used for the analysis can be accessed via the following two hyperlinks:

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/search_en?fulltext=belgrade%20pristina%20dialogue&created=&created_1=&page=0

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/filter-page/archive_en?fulltext=belgrade%20pristina%20dialogue&created_from=&created_to=&page=0

Annex 2: Codebook

CODEBOOK

Code (52)	Comment	Grounded
○ 'Miroslav Lajčák'	mention of official title of the Special Representative	23
○ Ambiguity	use of ambiguous terms, avoiding concreteness	82
○ Association/Community	mention of ASM/CSM, a hot topic in negotiations, by mentioning both association and community EU stays neutral and the discussion stays ambiguous	87
○ Belgrade Pristina Dialogue	"Belgrade Pristina Dialogue" ; "Pristina Belgrade Dialogue" ; "Dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina" ; "Dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade"	289
○ Belgrade-Pristina	mention of 'Belgrade Pristina' or 'Pristina Belgrade', rather than the country names	402
○ Citizens' interest	Normalisation is in the interest of the citizens of Kosovo/Serbia	75
○ Commitment/effort EU	show of commitment/effort to the Dialogue by the EU	146
○ Commitment/effort Kosovo/Serbia	show of commitment/effort to the Dialogue by Kosovo and/or Serbia; commitment to advance talks, to be active in the Dialogue	288
○ Comprehensive agreement	'address all outstanding issues, full normalisation'	87
○ De-escalation	De-escalation, or refrain from harmful behaviour	72
○ Dialogue for normalisation of relations between Belgrade and Pristina		13
○ Difficulty	Difficulty of the process	73
○ EU dominance	EU dominating the dialogue, "we work so hard", the Dialogue being about the EU as well	24
○ EU facilitation	"EU facilitation"	125
○ EU global power	showcasing global power / EU as global power	9
○ EU power	showcasing EU's power, and power of the dialogue	110
○ EU unity	EU claiming unity in dialogue, "on behalf of the Union"; EU claiming unity in external policy towards region	22
○ EU-facilitated dialogue	mention of "EU facilitated dialogue"	161

○ EU-facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina		47
○ EU-facilitated dialogue on normalisation of relations between Belgrade and Pristina		12
○ European history	emphasising common history (Balkans = Europe)	6
○ European integration	emphasising the European path of both countries, as the only possible future	163
○ European values / identity	Shared values and identity; Balkans = Europe	8
○ Gratitude towards Kosovo/Serbia	Welcoming engagement by the parties, being thankful thereof	48
○ High level	indicating the importance of the dialogue, as well as the dialogue being a priority for the EU	134
○ Impediment / delay	Lack of progress/commitment. Leading to escalation/tension	35
○ Implementation	mention of really implementing agreements and the importance of it	203
○ Importance	Importance of the dialogue / of implementation ; essentiality, key, "only way forward"	121
○ In Brussels	mentioning the location of negotiations	93
○ Intensification	Call for intensification/ acceleration in dialogue and implementation. more flexibility. advance efforts. call to act	50
○ Justification	justification of EU intervention, because of leverage	43
○ Kosovo Serbs	mention of Kosovo Serbs, a hot but often forgotten people/ topic in negotiations	47
○ Kosovo status	deliberate mention of 'Kosovo' by the EU as recognised entity, rather than Pristina	17
○ Kosovo-Serbia	mention of 'Kosovo and Serbia' or 'Serbia and Kosovo', rather than the capital names	246
○ Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue	"Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia"	10
○ Kosovo-Serbia power / responsibility	Kosovo-Serbia power/ownership in the dialogue (owning the content); responsibility of the countries to deliver and adhere to the dialogue, because of obligations and promises, no behaviour that slows process/implementation	82
○ Legal legitimacy	emphasising the legal bindness of agreements and thus EU efforts	68
○ Link dialogue-EU path	linking up the EU-facilitated Dialogue and the countries' European path as mutually exclusive. Normalisation is condition of EU integration, no way around it, solution is necessary for EU path	89
○ Mutual interest EU-Balkan	Mutual interest between EU and region because common future	40
○ Mutual interest Kosovo/Serbia	Mutual/common interest between Kosovo Serbia, to invest in dialogue and improve relationship, because better future of their own people, in interest of citizens, "spirit of compromise and pragmatism"	101
○ Negative	all the times EU speaks negative of the dialogue and/or the parties, often because lack of commitment	54
○ Neutrality	emphasising the impartial role the EU says it has, role of 'facilitator' and nothing more	34
○ non-transparency	confidentiality of negotiation's content	9
○ Normalisation	mentioning of the word normalisation / process of normalisation	300

○ Obligations / promises	Obligations / promises made by Kosovo and Serbia to the dialogue. "implementation of already agreed text and measures"	58
○ Positive	positive mentions of the dialogue/process, (often depicting progress and success, or hope for this)	194
○ Progress / success	mentioning of progress and success in the dialogue/process, or the potentiality of it	179
○ Regional importance	importance of normalisation cross-border, for the whole Western Balkans region.	75
○ Serious/clear aim	seriousness of the dialogue and clear aims. Clear framework; "not crisis management but structural solutions"	23
○ Stability / peace / security	mentioning of the importance of stability and peace	58
○ Trust Kosovo-Serbia	Mutual trust between Kosovo and Serbia	13
○ Urgency	Urgency of situation, urgency of the dialogue; pressure of time included; "no more delays or preconditions"	114

Figure 4: Codebook used in Atlas.ti