

# Mediation Through Recontextualization: The European Union and The Dialogue Between Kosovo and Serbia

Krenar GASHI<sup>\*</sup>, Vjosa MUSLIU<sup>\*\*</sup> & Jan ORBIE<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

*The EU-facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina has been hailed as a major achievement for the European Union's (EU) foreign policy as well as for the 'European future' of Kosovo and Serbia, since it started in 2011. Looking at EU discourse – speeches, statements and press releases – this article problematizes the logic of the dialogue, its aims in the process and its outcomes. Using the framework of 'recontextualization', developed by Van Leeuwen and Wodak, we explore how the EU is substituting elements of the dialogue and adding elements that are not intrinsic to the process, which then create ambiguities which we problematize. We argue that ambiguities are not limited merely to the outputs of the dialogue, such as agreements, but they also obscure the very meaning of the dialogue for the EU, for Kosovo and Serbia, as well as for EU's relations with both countries.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Belgrade-Pristina dialogue facilitated by the European Union (EU) has been hailed as a major achievement for the EU's foreign policy as well as for the 'European future' of Kosovo and Serbia. Former High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP) Catherine Ashton, as well as her successor Federica Mogherini, have personally lead the EU's 'facilitation' of this dialogue, at which the political representatives of the Kosovo and Serbia met for the first time. The process of the dialogue, which is usually referred to as the dialogue on 'normalization of relations' between Kosovo and Serbia, has been high on the EU's foreign policy agenda since it started in 2011.<sup>1</sup> The 'First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations' reached

---

\* Doctoral Fellow at the Centre for EU Studies, Department of Political Science, Ghent University. Email: [krenar.gashi@ugent.be](mailto:krenar.gashi@ugent.be).

\*\* Postdoctoral Researcher, Free University Brussels. Email: [vjosa.musliu@vub.ac.be](mailto:vjosa.musliu@vub.ac.be).

\*\*\* Professor at the Department of Political Science and director of Centre for EU Studies, Ghent University. Email: [jan.orbie@ugent.be](mailto:jan.orbie@ugent.be).

<sup>1</sup> Hereafter referred to as 'the dialogue'.



denominator of these accounts is that the dialogue has been marred by ambiguities, be that in the substance of what has been achieved or the process as a whole. For the EU to deliver Kosovo and Serbia's agreement on a single document, it meant that a lot of 'constructive ambiguity' had to be put in its language.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, these ambiguities have served to strengthen the position of the EU vis-à-vis the parties. Julian Bergmann and Arne Niemann argue that the EU's success as a mediator of the talks was not only based on its leverage towards the parties, but also on a strategy of 'manipulation of formulation' that draws from this leverage. Ambiguities, however, have their side effects. As Florian Bieber clearly shows, whilst ambiguities have yielded some results, they also contain risks since they leave room for divergent and conflicting interpretation by the parties.<sup>11</sup> This has put to into question both the sustainability and the irreversibility of the process.

In this article, using a critical discourse analysis approach, we attempt to take the literature one step further by elaborating more on what ambiguities are present in EU's discourse and by explicitly problematizing how these ambiguities are performed with regard to the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue. Notwithstanding that both academic and policy literature are unequivocal on the ambiguity of the dialogue, few of them investigate in detail how this ambiguity is performed in the EU's discursive practices. Unlike the literature consulted above, we intervene more directly in the tropes and meanings that the EU attaches to the dialogue to therefore problematize on its aims, goals, and outcomes. Our corpus of data includes over one hundred texts – statements, speeches, press releases – representing virtually all the EU's communication on the dialogue in the course of three years between April 2013 and April 2016.

The EU's discourse is analysed through the *recontextualization* concept, as developed by Theo Van Leeuwen and Ruth Wodak, who argue that each representation always involves recontextualization, as actors do not represent participants, processes and settings by giving a clear account of events, but rather through a process that contains deletions, substitutions and additions.<sup>12</sup> Through recontextualization, meanings are changed to the point where 'something stands for something else'.<sup>13</sup> We identify and problematize elements that the EU has recontextualized in the dialogue, by altering their meanings. The article begins

<sup>10</sup> A. Ernst, *The April Agreement – A Step Towards Normalization Between Belgrade and Pristina?*, 1(1) *Contemp. Southeastern Eur.* 122–126 (2014).

<sup>11</sup> F. Bieber, *The Serbia-Kosovo Agreements: An Success Story?*, 40(3/4) *Rev. Central & East Eur. L.* 285–319 (2015).

<sup>12</sup> T. Van Leeuwen & R. Wodak, *Legitimizing Immigration Control: A Discourse-Historical Analysis*, 1 *Discourse Stud.* 87–118 (1999).

<sup>13</sup> T. Van Leeuwen, *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis* (Oxford University Press 2008).

with an overview of the dialogue process, followed by a contextualization of the current setup of the dialogue and then analyse it through *recontextualization*.

## 2 THE ROAD TO DIALOGUE

Relations between Kosovo and Serbia are historically charged and complex. In socialist Yugoslavia, Kosovo and Serbia were both units of the federation, but they were not equal. Whilst Serbia was one of the six ‘republics’ within the Yugoslav federation, Kosovo enjoyed the status of an autonomous province, which was arguably similar but not equal to other republics. Following the rise to power of nationalists led by Slobodan Milošević, Kosovo’s autonomy was revoked in 1990 and its territory was put under direct control of Belgrade. Throughout the Yugoslav conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia, Kosovo Albanians who constituted over 90% of the Kosovo population and were deprived of basic rights, organized peaceful resistance to Milošević’s regime. The situation escalated in the late 1990s when Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) initiated a series of guerrilla attacks on Serbian forces. The violence escalated in to wide conflict in 1998–1999, during which time thousands lost their lives and nearly one million Kosovo Albanians were expelled from the country. Violence ended only after a long and intensive NATO air campaign, after which Milošević’s forces withdrew from Kosovo, opening the way for an United Nations (UN) administration to be installed.<sup>14</sup> During the time of the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Kosovo built its state-like institutions.<sup>15</sup>

Between late 2005 and 2007, the UN initiated and mediated a series of negotiations between representatives of Kosovo institutions and Serbia’s government, aiming to find a permanent solution for Kosovo’s political status. By early 2007, the negotiations were failing; Kosovo demanded independence whereas Serbia demanded a special autonomy within its jurisdiction. The UN Secretary General tasked the former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari, who served as the mediator for the talks between Kosovo and Serbia, to draft a proposal regarding Kosovo’s final status. In a detailed plan, Ahtisaari laid out a comprehensive proposal recommending to the UN that the final status of Kosovo should be independence, supervised by the international community.<sup>16</sup> Serbia rejected the plan as did its

<sup>14</sup> UN Security Council, *Resolution 1244* (1999), <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N99/172/89/PDF/N9917289.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> A Yannis, *The UN as Government in Kosovo*, 10 *Global Governance* 67–81 (2004); See also UNMIK, *Constitutional Framework for Provisional Self-Government in Kosovo* (2001), [http://www.assembly-kosova.org/common/docs/FrameworkPocket\\_ENG\\_Dec2002.pdf](http://www.assembly-kosova.org/common/docs/FrameworkPocket_ENG_Dec2002.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> M. Ahtisaari, *Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement* (New York 2007).

traditional ally, Russia. As a result, the Ahtisaari Plan was never put to a vote in the UN Security Council.<sup>17</sup>

The EU was actively involved in Kosovo throughout this time. It was in charge of the so-called ‘pillar four’ of UNMIK, economic development. The EU also supported the Ahtisaari process.<sup>18</sup> By the time it became obvious that the plan would not be approved by the UN Security Council, the EU found itself internally divided. Most of the large Member States were keen to recognize a unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo but some were fiercely opposing the idea. In spite of failing to reach a unified position on Kosovo’s independence, the EU managed to find a way to remain involved, and established its rule of law mission in Kosovo – EULEX – on the eve of Kosovo’s declaration of independence.<sup>19</sup> Backed by the United States and most of the EU Member States, Kosovo declared independence from Serbia on 17 February 2008. Within days, Britain, France, Germany and Italy announced they recognized the new state. Serbia continued to oppose Kosovo’s statehood by asking the International Court of Justice (ICJ), through the General Assembly of the UN, for an advisory opinion on the legality of Kosovo’s independence. After February 2008 Serbia continued to maintain control over northern Kosovo, which is populated by Serbs, organizing elections and maintaining local administration and security services.<sup>20</sup> In July 2010, the ICJ stated that ‘Declaration of independence of 17 February 2008 did not violate general international law’.<sup>21</sup> This opinion, however, did not change much regarding Kosovo’s relations with Serbia, nor to the EU’s relations with Kosovo. Indeed, the ‘abnormality’ of the relations between Kosovo and Serbia reached its peak, with one part of the Serbian government, especially its President, seeking fresh talks with Kosovo, and another, especially the foreign ministry, lobbying hard to prevent consolidation of Kosovo’s statehood abroad.<sup>22</sup>

After a failed attempt to contest Kosovo’s statehood at the UN General Assembly, Serbia joined the then twenty-seven EU Member States in sponsoring a resolution that opened the way for the EU-mediated talks with Kosovo. The Resolution, which was approved with a consensus by the General Assembly, ‘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,

---

<sup>17</sup> H. Perrit Jr., *The Road to Independence for Kosovo: A Chronicle of the Ahtisaari Plan* (Cambridge University Press 2010).

<sup>18</sup> J. Ker-Lindsay, *Kosovo: The Path to Contested Statehood in the Balkans* (Tauris 2009).

<sup>19</sup> S. Economides & J. Ker-Lindsay, *Forging EU Foreign Policy Unity from Diversity: The ‘Unique Case’ of the Kosovo Status Talks*, 15(4) *Eur. For. Aff. Rev.* 495–510 (2010).

<sup>20</sup> K. Gashi, *Kosovo*, in *Nations in Transit 2013* (Freedom House 2013).

<sup>21</sup> ICJ, *Accordance with International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Respect of Kosovo*, I.C.J. J. Rep 403 (2010).

<sup>22</sup> Bieber, *supra* n. 11.

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'.<sup>23</sup>

In 2011, the first meeting between Kosovo and Serbia were held at the so-called 'technical level' where, within two years, agreements were reached on issues of freedom of movement, civil registry books, cadastral records, customs stamps, mutual acceptance of education diplomas, integrated border management, regional representation, telecommunications and energy. Based on neo-functional logic, Visoka and Joyce rightly argue that most of these 'technical' issues had political connotations, thus, gradually, the dialogue 'spilled-over' to a political level.<sup>24</sup>

### 3 THE BRUSSELS AGREEMENT: MAKING SENSE OF AMBIGUITIES

On 19 April 2013, both prime ministers initialled the Brussels Agreement, which consists of fifteen highly ambiguous points that vaguely read that Serbia agrees to 'normalize relations' with Kosovo authorities and to withdraw all of its presence from the Serb-dominated northern Kosovo where ethnic tensions had remained high. Three municipalities in northern Kosovo – still not under full control by Kosovo's authorities – would integrate into the Kosovo system, and, in exchange, Kosovo agreed to extend the level of self-government for Kosovo Serbs, including the establishment of an Association/Community of the Serb Municipalities. The two countries agreed not to block each other in the process of European integration. The 'Brussels Agreement' is seen by all parties involved as the main outcome and culmination of this negotiation process in Brussels.

This 'Brussels Agreement' displays two paradigmatic forms of 'ambiguity' which require explanation before moving on to the *recontextualization* question. The first one pertains to the legal status of the agreement. The 'Brussels Agreement' was not signed by the three parties. In Kosovo it has been ratified as an 'international agreement' by the National Parliament,<sup>25</sup> no signature and/or ratification, however, has taken place at the EU level or in Serbia. The legal ambiguity of the agreement provides flexibility for parties in implementing its provisions. In addition, the ambiguity of its legal status enables all three parties to continuously produce and reproduce the 'Agreement' in different, and at times,

<sup>23</sup> UNGA, *Resolution 64/298* (UN 2010), [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/64/298](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/64/298).

<sup>24</sup> G. Visoka & J. Doyle, *Neo-Functional Peace: The European Union Way of Resolving Conflicts*, 54(4) J. Com. Mkt. Stud. 1–16 (2015).

<sup>25</sup> Kosovo Assembly, *Law No.04/L-199 on Ratification of the First International Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations Between the Republic of Kosovo and the Republic of Serbia* (2013), <http://www.kuvendikosoves.org/common/docs/ligjet/Law%20on%20ratification%20of%20agreement%20-normalization%20of%20relations%20between%20Kosovo%20and%20Serbia.pdf>.

contradictory ways. For instance, the ratification of the Agreement by the National Parliament in Kosovo enables the local elite to justify the process to their local constituents, while at the EU level it sends the message of Kosovo's full commitment to the process of 'normalization of relations' with Serbia.

The second 'ambiguity' speaks to the content of the agreement. Most of the fifteen provisions of the Brussels Agreement are vague and unclear in terms of wording and implementation. For instance, the Association/Community of Serb Municipalities is referred to with both words – 'Association' and 'Community' – the former used in Kosovo in order to discursively minimize the powers of such an institution, and the latter used in Serbia to do exactly the opposite. In EU discourse, the Brussels Agreement is portrayed as having a significant importance in both countries as well as in the EU. Local observers in Kosovo and Serbia have problematized that dialogue was carried on in a non-transparent fashion and that implementation has largely been lacking.<sup>26</sup> Given these ambiguities, both countries have continuously tried to communicate the Agreement as their own victory when communicating the dialogue to their respective publics.<sup>27</sup> Such interpretations have often resulted with parties creating a confusion and the need to sit down again in Brussels and agree once again on what they initially agreed. To date policy analysts have called the dialogue and the Brussels Agreement 'unfinished' business,<sup>28</sup> while early academic accounts have warned on the sustainability and irreversibility of the process.<sup>29</sup>

#### 4 RECONTEXTUALIZING THE 'HISTORIC' DIALOGUE

This section provides a more in-depth and theoretically informed problematization of this discourse by drawing on the work of Van Leeuwen and Wodak. Embedded within critical discourse analysis, these authors have put forward the concept of recontextualization. Recontextualization is reproduced through *deletions*, *substitutions* and *additions*. Having analysed the corpus of our data, we have established that in the case of the EU-facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina every deletion has involved some kind of substitution. Thus, what follows is our exploration and problematization of substitutions and additions.

<sup>26</sup> V. Hopkins, *Big Deal: Civilised Monotony?* (BIRN 2014); V. Hopkins, *Big Deal: Lost in Stagnation* (BIRN 2015).

<sup>27</sup> V. Todoric & L. Malazogu, *Belgrade – Prishtina Dialogue: Transformation of Self-Interest Required* (Prishtina 2011); K. Bassuener & B. Weber, *Not Yet a Done Deal: Kosovo and the Prishtina-Belgrade Agreement* (The New Century 2013); Hopkins, *supra* n. 26.

<sup>28</sup> Bassuener & Weber, *supra* n. 27.

<sup>29</sup> Bieber, *supra* n. 11.

#### 4.1 SUBSTITUTIONS

According to Van Leeuwen, substitution is the most fundamental transformation of a practice that can happen through discourse.<sup>30</sup> During representation, elements of practice are substituted by signs, where meanings are altered to the extent that ‘something stands for something else’.<sup>31</sup> The complex natures regarding actors, actions and practice are substituted by generalizations or abstractions, or the other way around. When such a substitution happens, ‘new meanings are added, though in some cases more drastically than in others’.<sup>32</sup> Our analysis below shows that substitution is used ‘by default’ by the EU when communicating on the Belgrade–Pristina dialogue.

The first substitution is vivid in the very name of the dialogue and is rather a drastic one. Instead of calling it a dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, the EU has chosen to reduce the name into a dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. This substitution to call a political process between two countries with the names of their respective capitals retains the EU position as neutral to the status of Kosovo.<sup>33</sup> This neutrality is further constructed by arranging the names of the capitals in an alphabetical order, in order to avoid any kind of perception of bias. What is discursively substituted is the ‘statehood’ of both parties, albeit a contested statehood in the case of Kosovo. In the discourse of the EU, Kosovo and Serbia are only ‘parties’ whose function is reduced to ‘normalization of relations’ with each other.

What is evident in this form of substitution is the backgrounding and even the reduction of statehood for both parties, where both Kosovo and Serbia do not appear as state agents. Their sovereignty, be it contested or fully-fledged, is muted. However, what is foregrounded in this case is their aspirations to join the EU – by being part of this dialogue – notwithstanding that in both cases aspirations to join the EU are very different and fragmented. Unlike Serbia, one of the reasons Kosovo seeks EU integration is to obtain confirmation of its statehood. Unlike Kosovo which has an overwhelming political and societal support for EU membership, public opinion in Serbia shows a much lesser positive sentiment for the EU<sup>34</sup> and its political elite is fragmented with regard to Serbia’s EU path. What is produced here is, on the one hand, the alleged equality of Belgrade and Pristina as capitals and parties, and on the other hand, the production of Belgrade and Pristina as cohesive and linear in their quest for EU membership. This discursive

<sup>30</sup> Van Leeuwen, *supra* n. 13.

<sup>31</sup> Van Leeuwen & Wodak, *supra* n. 12.

<sup>32</sup> Van Leeuwen, *supra* n. 13.

<sup>33</sup> See Bieber, *supra* n. 11.

<sup>34</sup> European Western Balkans, *48% of Serbian Citizens in Favour of Joining the EU* (2016), <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2016/02/01/48-of-serbian-citizens-in-favor-of-joining-the-eu/>



performance is problematic primarily because it simulates the premise that it is not the agency of a state, or the lack of it that is important in settling disputes, even when these disputes are essentially inter-state like disputes.

The second substitution is no less problematic as it relates to the ‘awkwardness’ of the EU vis-à-vis ‘the parties’: the division between the Member States on Kosovo’s statehood is substituted with a superficial and marginalized unity. In this substitution, the strategy of representing actors is oriented towards the Member States, whose role is passivized, through which, a kind of European unity regarding the dialogue is further simulated. Although it is not to be expected that the EU institutions would continuously mention it, references to a kind of Member State ‘unity’ regarding the dialogue show tendencies of simulation:

‘Since October 2012 the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/ Vice-President of the Commission Catherine Ashton is personally facilitating the high-level dialogue and is backed in her work by all Member States’.<sup>35</sup>

‘All our Member States are united in commending you for your work and expressing their appreciation through this decision. Kosovo has worked hard to meet the EU’s expectations. You delivered, and so did the EU’.<sup>36</sup>

‘At the foreign ministers meeting this week, the EU Member States recognised yet again efforts made by the leadership of Serbia and Kosovo in normalisation of their relations’.<sup>37</sup>

It is not clear though whether this simulation is to merely reflect a unity among the EU Member States, or whether being involved in a country which’s independence does not recognize ‘en block’, the EU seeks to reclaim its credibility in the region.<sup>38</sup>

The third substitution concerns the fact that problems with implementation of the agreements are usually absent from the EU’s discourse. In some cases, however, they are substituted with references to additional negotiations on implementation, as the following statements of the HR/VP show:

‘I welcome the decision of both sides to adopt the implementation plan which translates into practice the provisions of the April Agreement. I would like once again to commend Prime Minister Dačić and Prime Minister Thaçi for their leadership and determination. Their personal engagement will continue to be essential in view of a swift implementation of the plan’.<sup>39</sup>

An additional element that is ‘added’ in the EU’s discourse is its drawing attention to and praising the leadership of the two parties. Kosovo’s Hashim Thaçi, former

<sup>35</sup> CFSP, *supra* n. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Š. Fiile, *Remarks Following the Meeting with Hashim Thaçi, Prime Minister of Kosovo* (Pristina, 2013), [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-13-704\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-13-704_en.htm).

<sup>37</sup> European Commission, *Additional Funding to Support the Normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia* (2013), [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-13-1302\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-1302_en.htm).

<sup>38</sup> Economides & Ker-Lindsay, *supra* n. 19.

<sup>39</sup> C. Ashton, *Statement by HR/VP on the Implementation Plan for the April Agreement* (Brussels, 2013), [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/137291.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/137291.pdf).

political leader of the guerrilla movement KLA, who fought back against Milosevic's troops in 1999; and Serbia's Ivica Dacic, former politician in Milosevic's apparatus, constitute symbolic representations of the process. They are the two exponents of the military attacks during the 1999 conflict but are now under the EU's facilitation signing agreements for the 'normalization of relations'.

'Work on implementation will continue in the coming weeks with the same intensity so that we maintain the good momentum achieved so far'.<sup>40</sup>

'I met Prime Minister Dačić and Prime Minister Thaçi in Brussels today to continue discussions on the implementation of the April Agreement'.<sup>41</sup>

This substitution of encountered problems in the implementation phase is present in most of the communication on the dialogue. The discursive strategy applied is the one of intensification and mitigation.<sup>42</sup> On the one hand, the EU is mitigating the obstacles to the implementation by discursive minimization, pointing to the continuing negotiations on implementation, whilst on the other hand, it robustly intensifies the positive elements regarding implementation, by repetitive usage of words of praise such as 'I am pleased' and 'I welcome', to the extent where an 'almost progress' is considered as 'progress', like in the statement below:

'We continued the work on the issues related to the implementation of the April Agreement. In this context **I am pleased** that the two parties have **almost concluded** their discussions on justice'.<sup>43</sup>

The latter insert is a very representative example of the point raised by Van Leeuwen and Wodak that through recontextualization meanings are changed to the point where 'something stands for something else'.<sup>44</sup> It illustrates not only that the details of the obstacles in the implementation of agreements are generalized, but also that they are positivized through selective intensification and mitigation, that the whole meaning of this element is changed through discourse.

Neither the HR/VP, nor the Commission, nor the Council, ever mentioned the implementation problems in their communication. Instead, the implementation process is always referred to with either a positive tone, in terms of 'progress

<sup>40</sup> C. Ashton, *Statement by HR/VP on the Framework of the EU-Facilitated Dialogue* (Brussels 2013), [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/138377.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/138377.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> C. Ashton, *Statement by HR/VP in the Framework of the EU-Facilitated Dialogue* (Brussels, 2013), [http://www.eas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/130908\\_02\\_en.pdf](http://www.eas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/130908_02_en.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> For discursive strategies, see M. Reisigl & R. Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism* (Routledge 2001).

<sup>43</sup> C. Ashton, *Statement by HR/VP in the Framework of the EU-Facilitated Dialogue* (Brussels, 2014), [http://www.eas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2014/140331\\_03\\_en.pdf](http://www.eas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2014/140331_03_en.pdf). Emphasis added.

<sup>44</sup> Van Leeuwen & Wodak, *supra* n. 12.

being achieved’, or a hortative one, in terms of reminding the parties of their obligations to implement the reached agreements:

‘I am looking forward to continue my discussion with the leadership of Serbia and Kosovo in order to move forward with the dialogue and the implementation of the agreements reached so far’.<sup>45</sup>

‘At the meeting the two sides took stock of the progress in the implementation of the agreements reached in the dialogue, in particular the implementation of the Justice Agreement and the beginning of implementation of the Civil Protection arrangements’.<sup>46</sup>

‘The implementation of the Agreement of 19 April is vital to the normalisation of Kosovo-Serbia relations and to the EU prospects of both’.<sup>47</sup>

‘To succeed, Kosovo needs a government, which is not only reform oriented, but which will also support the dialogue with Serbia and the implementation of the agreements reached to date not only for the sake of Kosovo and Serbia, but of the whole Western Balkans region’.<sup>48</sup>

It is interesting to note that whereas the discourse that points to the dialogue and the agreement mentions ‘Belgrade and Pristina’ as subjects, the EU uses ‘Kosovo and Serbia’ instead when talking about broader dimensions such as: normalization of relations, settling of disputes and EU integration among others. At first sight, this looks like a discursive inconsistency. However, it is essential to note that ‘Kosovo and Serbia’ as agents for the most part appear in the EU’s Annual Reports on Kosovo. The EU has published Progress Reports for Kosovo since 2005, which is long before the country declared its independence from Serbia, while it was still being administered by the UN. In the EU’s Progress Reports, Kosovo appears as Kosovo\* (This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence) indicating the EU’s neutral stance. Whereas in the previous example, we saw the EU creating the simulation and the real for Belgrade and Pristina/Serbia and Kosovo, in this case the EU is playing with its own alteration of meanings. At times Kosovo is unequivocally downgraded to its (contested) capital (the discourse on dialogue), and at times it appears as a (contested) state (the discourse in Progress Reports).

An obvious and problematic substitution is the one of Kosovo Serbs, who are largely missing from the EU’s discourse. As Bieber rightly notes, the implementation of essential parts of the Brussels Agreement as well as other ‘technical

<sup>45</sup> CFSP, *Catherine Ashton to Travel to Serbia and Kosovo* (2013), [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/137792.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/137792.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> F. Mogherini, *Statement in the Framework of the EU-Facilitated Dialogue* (2015), [http://www.eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2015/150421\\_09\\_en.htm](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2015/150421_09_en.htm).

<sup>47</sup> European Commission, *supra* n. 37.

<sup>48</sup> European Commission, *Progress Report for Kosovo* (2013).

agreements' relied not only on the authorities in Kosovo and Serbia but also on Kosovo Serbs.<sup>49</sup> Over the course of three years there is no single direct reference to the Kosovo Serbs in the EU's discourse on the dialogue. The absence of Kosovo Serbs is highly problematic. Locally, amongst Kosovo Serbs and more broadly in Kosovo, it is interpreted as a denial of ownership of the Serb community to the 'normalisation' process.<sup>50</sup> Whereas most Kosovo Serbs, particularly those in the north, look towards the Belgrade government and continue to reject Kosovo's independence as well as its institutions, they also increasingly see their role as the bridge between the two governments.<sup>51</sup> To date many Kosovo Serbs feel they have not been represented in the dialogue by either the Kosovo government or by that of Serbia.<sup>52</sup> The importance of Kosovo Serbs in the process is quintessentially linked with any project seeking 'normalization of relations' between the two sides.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, it puts into question arguments made by mainstream scholarship that the EU is carrying out the dialogue in a neo-functional spirit, 'situated between international facilitation and local ownership'.<sup>54</sup>

The continuing disputes and 'abnormal' conduct of Kosovo and Serbia, such as statements by politicians that are in direct conflict with the aim of the dialogue, are also deleted from the EU's discourse. By and large, they are substituted by politicians' statements in support of the dialogue as the process. This has allowed some politicians in Kosovo and Serbia to continue with their discourse of hostility and hatred. In Serbia, officials continue to use terms such as 'extremists', 'fundamentalists' and even 'terrorists' to describe their Kosovo counterparts.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, Serbia strongly engaged in preventing Kosovo from joining UNESCO, which in the eyes of Kosovo representatives was against the spirit of the 'Brussels Agreement'.<sup>56</sup> When the dialogue hit a stalemate, many politicians in Serbia also shifted to the discourse of partition, an idea to divide Kosovo along ethnic lines that has been extensively dismissed by all parties (including Serbia and Russia)<sup>57</sup> throughout the Kosovo status resolution process. This statement by Serbia's Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić is an example of this:

<sup>49</sup> Bieber, *supra* n. 11.

<sup>50</sup> Anonymous interviews with three Kosovo Serb Civil Society activists (Mitrovica 2016).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> V. Musliu & J. Orbie, *MetaKosovo: Local and International Narratives*, 18(1) *British J. Pol. & Int'l Rel.* 179–195 (2016).

<sup>54</sup> Visoka & Doyle, *supra* n. 24.

<sup>55</sup> M. Đurić, *Edita Tahiri Rejected to Shake Hands with Me*, Blic (13 July 2014), <http://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/djuric-edita-tahiri-je-odbila-da-se-u-briselu-sa-mnom-i-rukuje/fpcrgzw>.

<sup>56</sup> *Kosovo, Serbia, lobby hard before UNESCO vote*, Balkan Insight (2 Nov. 2015), <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-serbia-lobby-high-ahead-of-unesco-final-vote-11-02-2015>.

<sup>57</sup> Economides & Ker-Lindsay, *supra* n. 19.

‘Government in Serbia is broken, it made a compromise. They don’t allow me to even talk of partition any more, not even redrawing of borders, although I still believe that this is the best and the only solution, that is the only acceptable solution for Serbs and Albanians’.<sup>58</sup>

Kosovo officials, on the other hand, continued to claim that Serbia was recognizing Kosovo’s independence with each agreement that was reached.<sup>59</sup> Even Kosovo’s first Liaison Officer to Serbia, a position which was enabled by the dialogue, stated that ‘normalization of relations’ would only happen when Serbia recognizes Kosovo’s independence, a statement which led to his dismissal and harsh reactions from the Serbian side.<sup>60</sup> Other politicians, particularly those in opposition in both countries, have further fostered the discourses of hatred and hostility, thus putting into question whether socialization through the EU-facilitated dialogue had brought any changes to their attitudes towards each other. In Serbia’s case, it is argued that this process brought superficial changes – a ‘pre-accession Europeanization’.<sup>61</sup> Whilst no such research has been conducted in Kosovo, a glance at politicians’ discourse reveals a difference between their remarks in Brussels, characterized by a tone of tolerance and cooperation, and those made for the home audience, which are characterized by negativity and hostility.

#### 4.2 ADDITIONS

In addition to deletion of certain elements and substitution of others, recontextualization also involves adding elements to the represented practices. Van Leeuwen and Wodak identify three main types of additions: legitimations, purposes and reactions.<sup>62</sup> In a more elaborated work, Van Leeuwen identifies additional types of additions, namely repetitions, reactions, purposes, legitimations and evaluations.<sup>63</sup> In this article, we have identified three main types of additions in the discourse of the EU – purposes, legitimations and evaluations. Purposes are additions that are not intrinsic part of a process that is being recontextualized, at least not in ways that can be known explicitly.<sup>64</sup> Legitimations are added to provide some answers to the question why this particular process, or any segments of it, must be the way it is.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>58</sup> I Dačić, *Za Podjelu Kosova, Dijalog U Krizi* [On Partition of Kosovo, Dialogue in Crisis], Aljazeera Balkans (2014), <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/dacic-za-podjelu-kosova-dijalog-u-krizi>.

<sup>59</sup> E. Tahiri, *With These Two Agreements Serbia Has Recognized Kosovo’s Independence* (2013), <http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/?page=2,9,3741>.

<sup>60</sup> *Kosovo Liaison to Serbia Resigns over Dispute with PM*, AFP, EUBusiness (2013).

<sup>61</sup> Economides & Ker-Lindsay, *supra* n. 19.

<sup>62</sup> Van Leeuwen & Wodak, *supra* n. 12.

<sup>63</sup> Van Leeuwen, *supra* n. 13.

<sup>64</sup> Van Leeuwen & Wodak, *supra* n. 12.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

Similarly to purposes, they are added through discourse, but unlike purposes they are never intrinsic. The last type of discursive additions are evaluations, defined as judgments which are not legitimations in themselves and may appear without being further legitimized, although 'they are ultimately always connected with legitimations'.<sup>66</sup> It is important to point out that the nature of these additions is often transcendental due to their overlapping features.

Although the aim of the dialogue is the 'normalization of relations' between Kosovo and Serbia, it remains unclear as to what the 'normal' is in this context. If concepts exist as a result of their 'opposites', it is imperative to ask whether the relations between the Serbia and Kosovo thus far have been abnormal, and if so, what this abnormality has consisted of. No such reference is ever made in any of the documents or statements by the EU. Elements pertaining to 'abnormalities' in relations between Balkan countries have largely been elaborated in Todorova's work.<sup>67</sup> The persistence in EU discourse to regard Kosovo and Serbia (and more generally the Balkans) as being entangled in deep seated animosities is also an indication that every effort for the dialogue is seen as being the exact opposite of the ascribed image that is given to both countries.<sup>68</sup> This is perhaps best illustrated by the following statement of former HR/VP Catherine Ashton, when she was praising prime ministers of Kosovo and Serbia for courage and maturity, by saying that:

'These negotiations have been concluded. The text has been initialled by both Prime Ministers. I want to congratulate them for their determination over these months and for the courage that they have. It is very important that now what we are seeing is a step away from the past and, for both of them, a step closer to Europe'.<sup>69</sup>

The intensified discourse of Serbia and Kosovo as 'foes' enhanced further the importance of the dialogue and made the role of the EU as a mediator quintessential. Based on Ashton's declaration, the agreement is not (only) important for what it entails with regard to the relations between the two parties. Rather, by signing the agreement, the two parties were moving 'closer to Europe' and stepping away from their allegedly 'European path', however ambiguously that is in and of itself. This dimension adds yet another layer to the 'ambiguity'. Not only the terms and the specific points in the agreement are ambiguous, but also the very 'end result' (i.e. closer to Europe) is highly ambiguous.

<sup>66</sup> Van Leeuwen, *supra* n. 13.

<sup>67</sup> M. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford University Press 2009).

<sup>68</sup> V. Musliu & J. Orbie, *The International Missions in Kosovo: What is in a Name?*, 19(3) *Eur. For. Aff. Rev.* 411-428 (2014).

<sup>69</sup> C. Ashton, *Remarks by HR/VP on the EU-Facilitated Dialogue* (2013), [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/136875.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/136875.pdf).

The trajectory of ‘normalization of relations’ is on the same line and/or is essentially the same with the countries’ path to ‘Europe’. At times, it appears that the dialogue is not (only) important for its actual relevance – that both countries will agree on pending matters – but most importantly because the dialogue is first and foremost a ‘European spirit’.<sup>70</sup> Ultimately, very often the progress achieved throughout the dialogue is used as a synonym for progress for the ‘European path’ of both Kosovo and Serbia.<sup>71</sup> In this way, ‘Europe’, ‘the European path’, ‘the path to Europe’ becomes a hegemonic trajectory.

In both the EU’s communication and that of the parties in the dialogue, it is not clear what the understanding of the normal is, based on what should the process of setting a norm be assessed accordingly, for whom should it be normal and by what means can this normality be reached? The only reference of the ‘normality’ in this case is provided through the second, non-immediate but rather gradual purpose of European integration, which is at the same time an added legitimation, as it legitimizes not only the aim of the process – normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia – but also the peculiarities of this normalization and the conduct of the parties involved. At the same time, integration is also added as an end-purpose of the process of dialogue.

In this way, leaving aside Kosovo’s independence and statehood – what could be considered as the ‘abnormal’ element in relations between Kosovo and Serbia and thus core to the normalization of these relations – the dialogue is justified and legitimized in the spirit of integration. What could go against the claim of integration not being intrinsic part of the dialogue is the fact that integration of both countries is now closely linked to the dialogue by all EU institutions. The very first announcement of the EU following the April 2013 Agreement reads:

‘At stake was whether to open negotiations on Serbia becoming a possible EU member and a possible Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) between Kosovo and the EU. An agreement and normalisation of relations between Belgrade and Pristina would open a European integration future for both. Failure to agree would set this back and freeze the process. After the EU brokered agreement on Friday, at the General Affairs Council on Monday morning the European Commission formally recommended to EU Member States that EU accession negotiations with Serbia and negotiations on an SAA with Kosovo be opened’.<sup>72</sup>

Furthermore, progress to EU integration is conditioned by the Commission with progress in dialogue. This is evident from the Progress Reports for both Kosovo

<sup>70</sup> J. Barroso, *Statement Following the Meeting with the Prime Minister of Serbia, Mr Ivica Dačić* (2013), [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_SPEECH-13-577\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-13-577_en.htm).

<sup>71</sup> CFSP, *Statement by the Spokesperson of EU HR/VP* (2013), [http://www.eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/130925\\_02\\_en.pdf](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/130925_02_en.pdf).

<sup>72</sup> CFSP, *supra* n. 5.

and Serbia and also from the overall communication, be that of institutions to the public or inter-institutional ones.

‘With my interlocutors so far, we have reviewed Kosovo’s progress on EU reforms. Our discussions focused on three key issues on the EU-Kosovo agenda for this year: 1. the need to continue the normalisation process with Serbia; 2. the conduct of the general elections (which as I was told are expected to be called soon); 3. the need to continue work on the rule of law and other key areas of reform identified in our Feasibility Study and also in the last Progress Report’.<sup>73</sup>

In spite of these references, we can still question whether the dialogue is about European integration, especially as the representatives of Kosovo and Serbia have never negotiated with each other about their respective European integration during this dialogue. EU integration is rather the overarching ideal that serves as an end-purpose thus motivating the parties to actively take part in the dialogue and simply talk to each other, and, at the same time, a legitimation for the EU to keep ‘facilitating’ these talks in the current manner, despite the dubious effectiveness of such talks in resolving the main issue of abnormal relations between Kosovo and Serbia.

The last set of added elements to the EU’s discourse are evaluations, which we can categorize in two groups. The first group consists of evaluations made under the framework of European integration, that is evaluations that are connected to the end-purpose of integration that is legitimized. These additions vary from direct and narrow evaluation of the conduct of Kosovo and Serbia in the process of dialogue, by linking it to their respective integration processes, to general evaluations about the ‘European perspective’ for the countries:

‘I am confident that the agreement reached between the two sides will pave the way for the Council to take decisions on the next steps on the European path of Serbia and Kosovo. [...] Both leaderships had to find compromises which by definition were never going to be ideal for either side. This consensual approach will help both countries on their paths towards the European Union’.<sup>74</sup>

‘The Council reiterated that continued visible and sustainable progress in the normalisation of relations, including the implementation of agreements reached so far, remains essential so that Kosovo and Serbia can continue on their respective European paths, while avoiding that either can block the other in these efforts and with the prospect of both being able to fully exercise their rights and fulfil their responsibilities’.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Š. Füle, *Statement Following the Meeting with Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi* (2014), [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_STATEMENT-14-150\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-14-150_en.htm).

<sup>74</sup> J. Barroso, *On the Agreement in the EU-Facilitated Dialogue Between Serbia and Kosovo* (2013), [http://www.eas.europa.eu/top\\_stories/2013/190413\\_eu-facilitated\\_dialogue\\_en.htm](http://www.eas.europa.eu/top_stories/2013/190413_eu-facilitated_dialogue_en.htm).

<sup>75</sup> Council of EU, *Main Results of the Council Meeting 25 June 2013* (2013) [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/genaff/137614.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/genaff/137614.pdf).



It is clear that in the EU's discourse, the dialogue and its achievements are promoted and advertised, but also discursively foregrounded. In this way, being the last conflict in the Western Balkans, merely after reaching an ambiguous agreement, Kosovo and Serbia are promoted as best examples of regional co-operation, as this speech of Enlargement Commissioner Štefan Füle to representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina illustrates:

‘In the case of Serbia and Kosovo, Prime Ministers Dačić and Taçi found compromises, that, while not ideal for either side, helped them find a way to normalise their relations and move ahead on their European path’.<sup>76</sup>

The second set consists of evaluations of the process of the dialogue and the self-evaluation of the role of the EU in this process. These evaluations are characterized by usage of terms such as ‘outstanding’, ‘incredible’, ‘absolute’, ‘pleased’, ‘truly delighted’, ‘impressive’, to evaluate the conduct and performance of the parties in the dialogue, as well as ‘applaud’, ‘tireless’, and ‘personal investment and perseverance’ to commend the role of the HR/VP. Most importantly, they are characterized by evaluating the 2013 Agreement as ‘ground-breaking’ and ‘historic’. The following inserts are just a few illustrations of such discourse:

‘The agreement today is historic and marks an important moment in the relationship between Serbia and Kosovo as well as in their relations with the European Union’.<sup>77</sup>

‘I applaud the breakthrough by Serbia and Kosovo in their EU-facilitated dialogue. This is a historic agreement, which must now be implemented quickly ‘This is an historic day for Serbia-Kosovo relations, for the entire Western Balkans region and for the European Union’.<sup>78</sup>

These added evaluations complete the process of recontextualization by highlighting purposes and intensifying legitimations, as well as by discursively legitimizing deletions and substitutions.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

The on-going EU-facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina brings to the fore a number of problems with regard to the EU's role in the process, the premise of ‘normalization’ of relations between the two parties, the mutation of sovereignty of both parties, and/or the implicit recognition of Kosovo's sovereignty. First and foremost, the EU appears entangled in its role as a mere mediator or as a subject

<sup>76</sup> Š. Füle, *We Want to See Bosnia and Herzegovina Succeed*, European Parliament (2013), [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_SPEECH-13-618\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-13-618_en.htm).

<sup>77</sup> H. Van Rompuy, *On the Occasion of the Agreement Within the Facilitated Dialogue on the Normalisation of Relations Between Serbia and Kosovo* (2013), [http://www.eeas.europa.eu/top\\_stories/2013/190413\\_\\_eu-facilitated\\_dialogue\\_en.htm](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/top_stories/2013/190413__eu-facilitated_dialogue_en.htm).

<sup>78</sup> Barroso, *supra* n. 4.

that sets the agenda and the parameters of the dialogue. Second, focusing on the symbolism of the two leaders negotiating, the ‘historicity’ of the agreement is the mere *act* not the *process* or the *outcome* of the negotiations. Given the volatile political context in which the dialogue is taking place (EU’s neutral stance towards Kosovo), it becomes clear EU’s insistence of capitalizing on *acts* rather than *outcomes*. Nonetheless, this symbolism of representation becomes the representation itself. This pattern brings forward the question whether the dialogue itself along with its historicity is such for the EU itself and not for Pristina and Belgrade as subjects of this process. It is important to unpack how Serbia and Kosovo fit in EU discourse of the historical agreement.

In addition to the ‘state level’, even more problematic in this respect, is the absence of Kosovo Serbs in the discourse. If the mantra of the dialogue is ‘normalization of relations’ between Serbia and Kosovo, while ‘silencing’ the Kosovo Serbs, it is essential to ask ‘whom is this dialogue intended for?’ What is the role of the local constituents (i.e. the Albanians, the Serbs) in the project? How are their inner disputes reflected informing the agenda of the dialogue? And while the answer to these questions do not lend themselves to obvious answers, it is important to keep them in mind while we contextualize the way the EU sets out the importance of the dialogue.

Finally, what the EU’s discourse reveals with regard to the mediated dialogue is indeed an overemphasis of the dialogue of former foes, facilitated and promoted by the EU. Yet, there is not much emphasis on the actual role both countries exercise, except for when it is mentioned in relation to their ‘courage’ and ‘political maturity’ of agreeing to sit with one another. The power dimension reveals Serbia’s and Kosovo’s lack of agency and subjectivity in the negotiation process. Both of them appear to be subordinate to the greater project of the EU for ‘historic achievements’ of the dialogue.

To conclude, the dialogue is not ambiguous merely in its content and in the way the parties communicate its content and its results. There is a paradigmatic ambiguity on the very question of what the dialogue means for the EU, for Kosovo and Serbia, and altogether for the EU’s relations with both countries. The EU makes rampant reference to the dialogue being ‘historic’, even though it is not clear what exactly is historic about it and for whom this would be. The dialogue and its value thereafter are downgraded to a mere symbolic representation of ‘reconciliation’, to the fact that leaders of both countries have sat down together and held discussions.