

# THE PEACE & SECURITY MONITOR

South East Europe &  
Black Sea Region

Issue 19 | March 2026



PLATFORM  
FOR PEACE AND HUMANITY

## **Editor**

Sophie Bowd

## **Authors**

Megi Benia

Lilly Riedel

Maria Eduarda Senadiniz

## **Creative Designer**

Gilson Njunga

## **All rights reserved**

© Platform for Peace and Humanity, 2025  
Cover Photo: Oleksandr Ryzhkov on Freepik  
ISSN: 2989-3046

# Table of Contents

Securing Black Sea Undersea Cables: A Resilience-Based Approach to European Security <i>Megi Benia</i>	<b>02</b>
North Kosovo: An Analysis of Ethnic Representation as A Contested Issue (2021-2025) <i>Lilly Riedel</i>	<b>16</b>
Bulgaria's Energy Transition: Between Resilience and Historical Dependence <i>Maria Eduarda Senadiniz</i>	<b>29</b>

# Foreword

Southeastern Europe and the Black Sea region (SEEBSR) remains one of the most strategically consequential regions on the European continent – a space where questions of sovereignty, energy independence, and digital security intersect with broader geopolitical competition. The three articles gathered in the nineteenth edition of the SEEBSR Peace and Security Monitor address distinct but deeply interconnected dimensions of that challenge, offering rigorous analysis of issues that will shape the region’s trajectory in the years ahead.

In the first article, Lilly Riedel examines the protracted crisis in North Kosovo, tracing its evolution from the licence plate dispute of 2021 through to the swearing-in of Serb mayors in December 2025. The analysis reveals that recurring flashpoints are not isolated incidents but symptoms of an unresolved sovereignty contest between Belgrade and Pristina. Structural impediments – including Serbia’s parallel administrative structures, the absence of a functional Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities, and the subordination of Kosovo Serb political representation to Belgrade’s agenda – remain firmly in place. Riedel cautions that international actors risk rewarding surface-level stability while the conditions for renewed escalation continue to mature.

The second article, by Megi Benia, turns to the security of undersea cables in the Black Sea – a domain that has received considerably less policy attention than equivalent infrastructure in northern European waters. Benia contends that the region’s subsea cable network constitutes a critical component of European connectivity linking the continent to the South Caucasus and wider Eurasian networks, and that hybrid threats – including sabotage, cyber-physical interference, and strategic signalling – pose significant and underappreciated risks to this infrastructure. The article advocates for a resilience-based approach encompassing route redundancy, enhanced maritime domain awareness, protection of cable landing stations, and closer EU-NATO coordination, arguing that the Black Sea should no longer be treated as peripheral within European infrastructure protection strategies.

In the third article, Maria Eduarda Senadiniz charts Bulgaria’s accelerating departure from its historic dependence on Russian energy. Beginning with Gazprom’s unilateral suspension of supplies in April 2022, Senadiniz traces Bulgaria’s transformation from Europe’s most vulnerable energy dependent into an emerging regional hub – through the Greece-Bulgaria Interconnector, a stake in the Alexandroupolis LNG terminal, new Balkan interconnectors, and the adoption of Westinghouse AP1000 nuclear technology. At the heart of this transition lies a defining paradox: Bulgaria simultaneously accelerates its “Westernisation” while remaining caretaker of Balkan Stream, the last entry point for Russian pipeline gas into the EU. Prime Minister Zhelyazkov’s commitment to terminate that transit by 2027–2028, alongside Bulgaria’s adoption of the euro in January 2026, mark the final stages of a structural break with Soviet-era dependence – though the challenge of decarbonising one of the EU’s most energy-intensive economies by 2038 remains formidable.

Read together, the work of Riedel, Benia, and Senadiniz illuminates the multiple vectors through which European security is being contested in Southeast Europe and the Black Sea region. The governance of minority representation, the integrity of digital infrastructure, and the diversification of energy supply may appear as separate policy domains, but they are bound by a common logic: each represents an arena in which state and non-state actors are actively seeking to exploit dependencies, entrench vulnerabilities, or advance strategic positions. Addressing these challenges demands sustained analytical attention and coordinated policy responses – precisely the contribution this issue of the Peace and Security Monitor seeks to provide.

# Securing Black Sea Undersea Cables: A Resilience-Based Approach to European Security

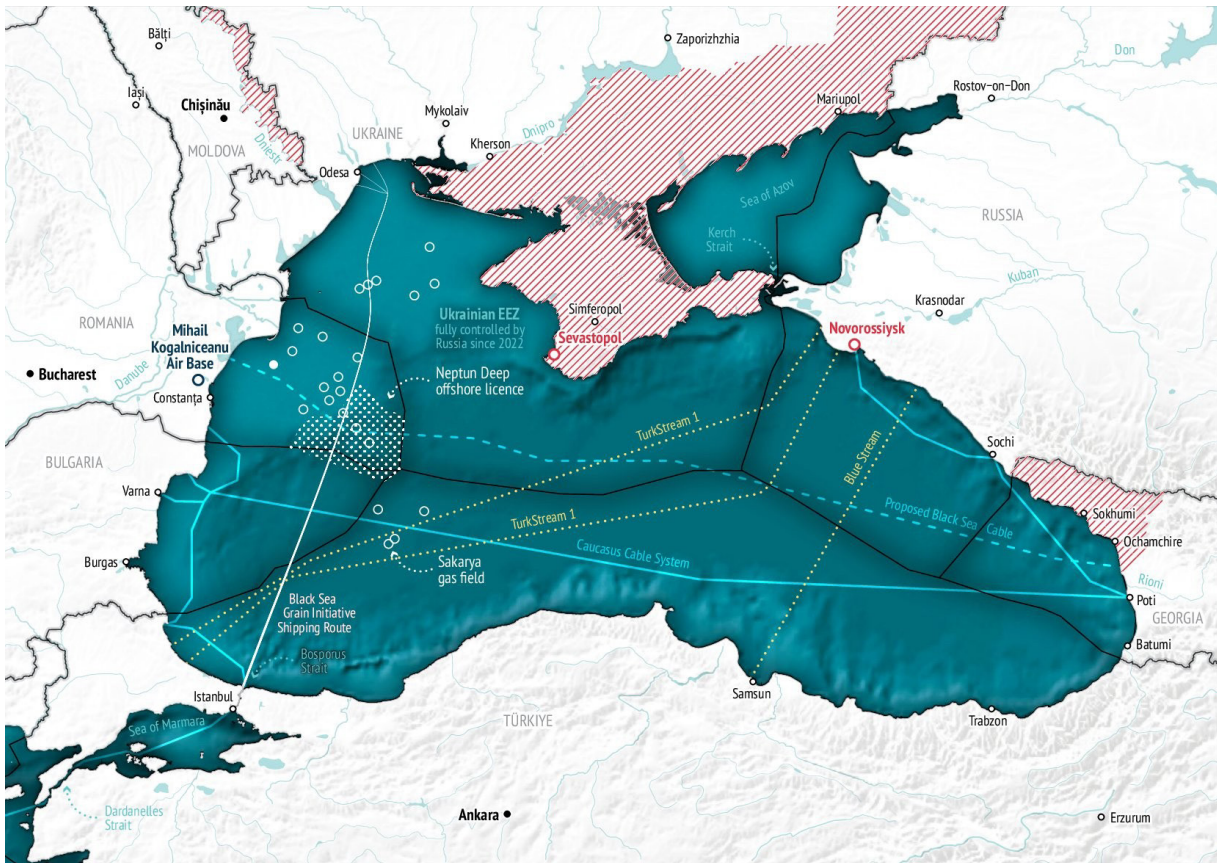
Megi Benia

## Key Takeaways

- Undersea cables are critical strategic infrastructure, carrying most global data flows and enabling financial markets, government communications, military coordination, and essential public services.
- The Black Sea is an increasingly important connectivity corridor linking Europe with the South Caucasus and wider Eurasian networks, yet its subsea infrastructure remains comparatively underexamined within European security policy.
- Hybrid threats, such as sabotage, reconnaissance of cable routes, cyber-physical interference, and political signalling, create significant vulnerabilities for undersea infrastructure in the region.
- Strengthening resilience requires a comprehensive approach that includes infrastructure redundancy, enhanced monitoring and maritime awareness, protection of landing stations, rapid repair capabilities, and stronger EU-NATO coordination.

## Introduction

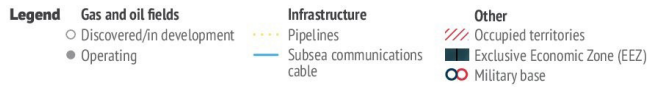
Europe's security environment has undergone a profound transformation during the past decade. The return of interstate war, the persistence of hybrid conflict, and the intensification of strategic competition have forced policymakers to reassess the vulnerability of critical infrastructure across the continent. Increasingly, security threats are no longer confined to conventional military domains but extend into the technological and infrastructural systems that sustain modern societies. Among the most important yet frequently overlooked components of this infrastructure are undersea communication cables.



### A complex seascape

Key infrastructure and flows in the Black Sea

Data: Natural Earth, 2024; European Commission, GISCO, 2024; Global Energy Monitor, 2024; Flanders Marine Institute, 'Marine Regions', 2024



Black Sea Critical Infrastructure. Source: EUISS Report, July 2024.

Submarine fibre-optic cables constitute the backbone of the global digital economy. More than ninety-five percent of international data traffic, including financial transactions, government communications, military coordination, and cloud computing, travels through subsea cable networks rather than satellites<sup>1</sup>. These cables connect continents, integrate financial markets, enable intelligence sharing, and support the functioning of modern societies. As a result, the security of undersea cables has become inseparable from the security of the states and alliances that depend on them. Despite their importance, undersea cables remain structurally vulnerable. Stretching across thousands of kilometres of seabed, they are difficult to monitor and physically protect. While accidental damage caused by fishing activity or anchoring vessels has historically been the primary risk, the geopolitical environment has changed dramatically. Strategic competitors increasingly recognise that disrupting digital infrastructure can generate significant economic, political, and military consequences without triggering a conventional military response<sup>2</sup>.

In recent years, incidents involving damage to pipelines and communication cables in northern European waters have demonstrated the vulnerability of seabed infrastructure to sabotage and hybrid operations<sup>3</sup>. These events triggered a substantial policy response and led to increased attention to critical undersea infrastructure protection within transatlantic institutions. However, this attention has largely focused on northern maritime regions that are now strongly integrated into NATO's security architecture. In contrast, the Black Sea despite its strategic importance and growing infrastructure connectivity remains

comparatively underexamined within European security debates.

The Black Sea occupies a pivotal position within the broader European connectivity landscape. It serves as a gateway linking Europe with the South Caucasus and Central Asia, functions as a corridor for digital and energy infrastructure, and constitutes a maritime space where geopolitical competition between NATO and Russia intersects with regional conflicts and hybrid activity. Subsea cable infrastructure within the Black Sea therefore plays a critical role in maintaining Europe's connectivity with surrounding regions and sustaining the flow of digital traffic across the wider Eurasian space.

This paper argues that the security of Black Sea undersea cables is directly linked to European strategic stability. First, subsea cable networks in the region function as strategic enablers of European economic, digital, and military power. Second, the current security environment in the Black Sea creates significant vulnerabilities that could be exploited through hybrid operations, including sabotage and cyber-physical interference. Third, addressing these risks requires a resilience-based approach that integrates infrastructure redundancy, operational preparedness, institutional coordination, and legal frameworks for deterrence and response.

The central claim of this paper is that the Black Sea should not be viewed as a peripheral maritime space disconnected from European security. On the contrary, its undersea infrastructure constitutes a critical component of the continent's connectivity architecture. Ensuring the resilience of these systems is therefore essential for maintaining European economic stability, alliance cohesion, and strategic deterrence.

## **Undersea Cables as Strategic Enablers of European Power**

Undersea cables represent the physical infrastructure that enables the modern digital economy. While satellite systems provide supplementary communication capabilities, they cannot match the bandwidth capacity, speed, and reliability of fibre-optic cables. Most of the global internet traffic, financial data flows, and intergovernmental communications depend on subsea cable networks<sup>4</sup>.

For Europe, these cables support multiple layers of strategic activity. Financial markets rely on continuous high-speed connectivity for cross-border trading and banking transactions<sup>5</sup>. Supply chain management systems coordinate logistics across continents through real-time digital platforms<sup>6</sup>. Government institutions exchange diplomatic communications, intelligence data, and policy coordination through secure digital networks<sup>7</sup>. Military organisations rely on the same infrastructure for command-and-control systems, situational awareness, and operational planning<sup>8</sup>.

Moreover, the strategic significance of subsea cables becomes particularly apparent during crises. Military coordination between allied forces depends on reliable communications infrastructure capable of transmitting large volumes of data rapidly and securely. Intelligence sharing, operational planning, and real-time monitoring of military activity all rely on uninterrupted connectivity<sup>9</sup>. On the other hand, economic stability is equally dependent on cable infrastructure. Digital financial markets operate on millisecond transaction speeds, meaning even temporary disruptions to connectivity can produce immediate market volatility and economic losses<sup>10</sup>. Modern societies also rely on stable digital networks to maintain essential services, including healthcare systems, transportation management, energy distribution, and emergency response coordination<sup>11</sup>.

Because these cables underpin so many aspects of modern governance and economic activity, their disruption can generate cascading systemic effects. What might initially

appear as a technical telecommunications problem can quickly evolve into a broader security challenge affecting financial markets, political decision-making, and military coordination. Understanding subsea cables as strategic infrastructure therefore requires a shift in perspective. Rather than being viewed solely as commercial telecommunications assets, they must be recognised as critical components of national and collective security architectures.

## **Undersea Cable Infrastructure in the Black Sea**

The Black Sea hosts a network of submarine fibre-optic cables that connect digital infrastructure across the wider European and Eurasian connectivity space. Although the density of subsea telecommunications infrastructure in the region remains lower than in the Atlantic or Mediterranean basins, the cables operating in the Black Sea nevertheless serve as critical connectivity corridors linking regional telecommunications networks with broader European and global data transmission routes. These systems enable international internet traffic, financial data exchange, and cross-border digital services that underpin both economic activity and government communications across the wider region<sup>12</sup>.

One of the principal systems in the western Black Sea is the **KAFOS (Karadeniz Fiber Optik Sistem)** cable<sup>13</sup>, a submarine telecommunications system linking Türkiye, Bulgaria, and Romania. Operational since the late 1990s, KAFOS provides high-capacity connectivity across the western Black Sea and integrates regional networks with European terrestrial fibre infrastructure.

Another major telecommunications system in the region is the **ITUR (Italy-Istanbul-Ukraine-Russia)** cable<sup>14</sup>, which connects telecommunications networks across the northern Black Sea basin and forms part of the wider Eurasian fibre-optic network linking European and regional communications infrastructure.

The **Black Sea Fiber Optic Cable System (BSFOCS)**<sup>15</sup> which has been operational since 2001, was developed to support growing demand for international telecommunications capacity across the region. Operated by a consortium of regional telecommunications companies, the system interconnects with other cable systems including KAFOS and ITUR while extending through terrestrial fibre routes toward Greece, Cyprus, and broader global telecommunications networks. Through these interconnections, BSFOCS contributes to regional integration within the wider Eurasian data transmission architecture.

The **Caucasus Cable System**<sup>16</sup> represents another important element of the digital infrastructure in the region. Running approximately 1,180 kilometres between Poti in Georgia and Balchik in Bulgaria, the cable directly links the South Caucasus with European internet exchange points through terrestrial fibre routes extending toward major European digital hubs.

In addition to existing telecommunications infrastructure, the Black Sea region is also witnessing the development of new strategic connectivity projects. One of the most significant initiatives is the **Black Sea Submarine Cable Project**<sup>17</sup>, linking Georgia and Romania across the Black Sea. The project envisages the construction of a submarine cable stretching roughly 1,150–1,200 kilometres between Anaklia on Georgia's Black Sea coast and Constanța in Romania. The system is designed to transmit renewable electricity generated in the South Caucasus, particularly from Azerbaijan to European energy markets while also incorporating fibre-optic communication infrastructure within the same corridor. Developed through a strategic partnership between Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania, and Hungary with support from the European Union, the project forms part of a broader initiative to strengthen connectivity between the South Caucasus and the European Union

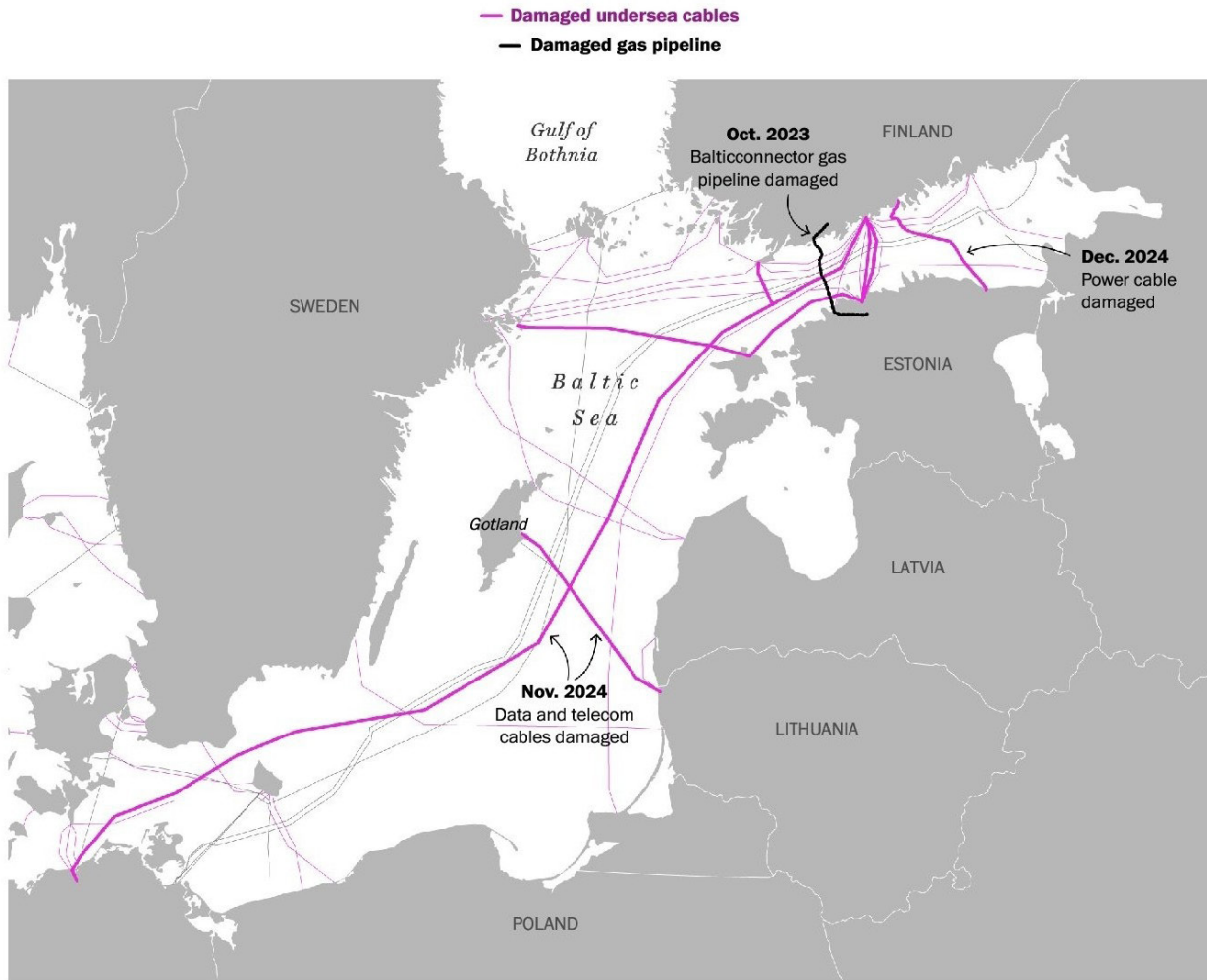
and diversify regional energy and digital infrastructure corridors. If implemented, the cable would represent one of the longest subsea energy interconnectors in the world and would significantly increase cross-regional connectivity across the Black Sea basin.

Despite their strategic importance, subsea cables in the Black Sea likely remain concentrated within relatively narrow seabed corridors. Although detailed routing information for many systems remains limited, the natural constraints of the Black Sea seabed suggest that multiple cables may pass through similar pathways<sup>18</sup>. Damage to a single geographic segment could therefore potentially disrupt several cable systems simultaneously. This geographic concentration significantly increases systemic vulnerability and complicates efforts to ensure infrastructure resilience. As digital traffic continues to expand and new connectivity corridors emerge, the strategic significance of Black Sea subsea infrastructure is likely to increase further. Telecommunications cables, together with emerging energy and digital interconnectors currently under development, are gradually transforming the region into an increasingly important node within Europe's broader digital and infrastructure connectivity architecture.

### **Russian Hybrid Threats to Undersea Infrastructure**

The evolving security environment in the Black Sea has significantly increased the vulnerability of subsea infrastructure. Russia's military presence and hybrid warfare capabilities create a complex threat environment in which undersea cables may become potential targets during periods of heightened geopolitical tension<sup>19</sup>. Russia's hybrid threat strategies often focus on exploiting vulnerabilities in critical infrastructure systems<sup>20</sup>. These operations are designed to impose economic and political costs while remaining below the threshold that would trigger a conventional military response. Undersea cables represent an attractive target within this strategy because their disruption can produce widespread effects while remaining difficult to attribute conclusively<sup>21</sup>.

### Undersea cables damaged in ship incidents in the Baltic Sea since late 2023



Sources: TeleGeography, Global Energy Monitor, OpenStreetMap

Undersea cables damaged in ship incidents in the Baltic Sea since late 2023. Source: Washington Post, January 19, 2025.

Several potential threat vectors exist. The most direct form of attack involves physical sabotage of cable infrastructure. Submarines, specialised underwater vehicles, or modified civilian vessels could potentially damage cables through cutting or interference<sup>22</sup>. Even relatively minor damage can significantly degrade network capacity and disrupt data transmission. Another potential threat involves reconnaissance and mapping of cable routes<sup>23</sup>. By identifying the precise locations of cable infrastructure, adversaries can prepare potential disruption operations during peacetime. This reconnaissance activity may involve research vessels, underwater drones, or other maritime platforms capable of surveying the seabed.

Cyber-physical operations represent an additional risk. While fibre-optic cables themselves are difficult to manipulate directly, the associated infrastructure, particularly landing stations and network management systems, may be vulnerable to cyber intrusion<sup>24</sup>. Compromising these systems could disrupt communications without physically damaging cable infrastructure. Psychological and political signalling is another important dimension of infrastructure vulnerability<sup>25</sup>. Demonstrating the capability to interfere with critical infrastructure can serve as a coercive signal to governments and populations. Even limited

disruptions can undermine public confidence in infrastructure resilience and create political pressure during crises.

Recent incidents involving damage to subsea infrastructure in northern European waters illustrate how such vulnerabilities can be exploited<sup>26</sup>. These events have highlighted the difficulty of attributing underwater sabotage and the challenges associated with responding to hybrid attacks against critical infrastructure. The strategic environment in the Black Sea shares several characteristics with the conditions observed in northern European maritime regions prior to these incidents. However, unlike northern waters that are now heavily integrated into NATO's maritime security architecture, the Black Sea remains comparatively underdeveloped in terms of collective infrastructure protection mechanisms.

## Implications for European Security

The vulnerability of Black Sea subsea infrastructure has implications that extend far beyond the region itself. Because these cables form part of broader European digital networks, disruptions could produce cascading effects across the continent:

1. Damage to regional cable systems could disrupt data flows linking Europe with neighbouring connectivity corridors. Such disruptions could affect financial transactions, digital services, and communication networks that rely on stable international connectivity.
2. Infrastructure disruptions could affect military coordination and intelligence sharing among allied partners. Secure and reliable communication networks are essential for command-and-control systems, operational planning, and situational awareness. Any disruption to these networks could complicate crisis response and reduce operational effectiveness.
3. The perception of infrastructure vulnerability could undermine deterrence. If adversaries believe they can disrupt digital connectivity without triggering significant consequences, they may be more willing to engage in coercive hybrid operations.
4. Infrastructure disruptions can generate political and societal effects. Interruptions to digital services may undermine public confidence in government institutions and create pressure on policymakers during periods of crisis.

For these reasons, the security of Black Sea subsea infrastructure should be considered an integral component of broader European resilience and deterrence strategies.

## Regulatory and Institutional Frameworks

The growing recognition of the strategic importance of critical infrastructure has led both the European Union and NATO to develop policy frameworks addressing the protection of undersea cables and other seabed assets. These frameworks reflect a broader shift in European security thinking, acknowledging that digital infrastructure resilience is inseparable from economic stability, military effectiveness, and societal resilience.

Within the European Union, the protection of critical infrastructure has become an increasingly central policy priority. A key development in this regard is **the Critical Entities Resilience (CER) Directive**, adopted in 2022<sup>27</sup>. The directive expands the scope of European infrastructure protection policy by requiring member states to identify critical entities across a range of sectors and implement risk management measures designed to ensure operational continuity during crises. Telecommunications infrastructure, including submarine cable systems, falls within the broader framework of the Directive for safeguarding essential services. The CER Directive obliges states to conduct risk

assessments, strengthen resilience planning, and establish mechanisms for coordination between public authorities and private infrastructure operators.

1/4

## The EU's strategic approach to the Black Sea

Forging closer cooperation & connectivity with **Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Türkiye, Armenia & Azerbaijan**



The EU's Strategic Approach to the Black Sea. Source: European Commission, May 28, 2025.

Building on this regulatory foundation, the European Commission adopted the **Recommendation on the Security and Resilience of Submarine Cable Infrastructure** in February 2024<sup>28</sup>. This recommendation specifically addresses the growing strategic risks facing subsea communication networks. It calls for improved monitoring of cable routes, enhanced information sharing among governments and infrastructure operators, stronger protection of cable landing stations, and the development of contingency planning for large-scale disruptions. The recommendation also emphasises the need for closer cooperation between the EU and NATO in monitoring and protecting critical seabed infrastructure.

The Black Sea region also features in the EU's broader regional strategy. **The EU Black Sea Strategy**<sup>29</sup>, which aims to promote stability, connectivity, and economic development across the region, recognises the importance of infrastructure corridors linking Europe with neighbouring regions. While the strategy has traditionally focused on energy and transport connectivity, the rapid expansion of digital infrastructure and the strategic importance

of undersea cables suggest that digital connectivity and infrastructure resilience must become a central component of the Black Sea strategic agenda.

At the transatlantic level, NATO has increasingly acknowledged **the strategic significance of the Black Sea within the broader security posture of the Alliance**<sup>30</sup>. The region is recognised as an area of heightened strategic competition where military, economic, and hybrid threats intersect. NATO strategic documents and summit declarations have repeatedly emphasised the need to strengthen security and stability in the Black Sea region as part of the alliance's wider deterrence and defence strategy.

The protection of critical undersea infrastructure has become a particularly prominent issue following high-profile incidents involving sabotage of seabed pipelines and communication cables in European waters. In response, NATO has expanded its activities related to seabed infrastructure protection, including the establishment of the **Maritime Centre for the Security of Critical Undersea Infrastructure**<sup>31</sup>. This initiative aims to improve situational awareness, enhance information sharing among allies, and coordinate monitoring of vulnerable seabed infrastructure across European maritime domains.



Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 visits Georgian port of Poti. Source: NATO Maritime Command, April 2019.

Despite these developments, existing institutional frameworks remain unevenly implemented across the Black Sea maritime space. Much of the policy attention surrounding undersea infrastructure protection has been concentrated on northern maritime regions following recent incidents involving cable and pipeline sabotage. As a result, the Black Sea continues to receive comparatively limited attention within European infrastructure resilience planning, despite hosting critical digital connectivity routes linking Europe with surrounding regions. This imbalance creates a strategic vulnerability. While the regulatory and institutional foundations for infrastructure protection exist, their operational integration into the Black Sea security environment remains incomplete. Addressing this gap will require stronger coordination between European institutions, transatlantic security structures, and infrastructure operators to ensure that subsea infrastructure in the region receives the same level of strategic attention as other European maritime domains.

## Conclusion

The protection of undersea communication cables has become a critical dimension of European security. As the infrastructure that carries most global data traffic, submarine cable networks underpin financial systems, government communications, intelligence sharing, and military coordination. Their uninterrupted functioning is therefore essential not only for economic activity but also for the operational effectiveness of security institutions and the resilience of modern societies. Within this broader infrastructure architecture, the Black Sea occupies a strategically important yet often underestimated position. The region hosts several submarine cable systems that connect European digital networks with wider connectivity corridors across Eurasia. These systems enable large-scale data flows that sustain economic exchange, digital services, and strategic communication networks. Consequently, the resilience of Black Sea subsea infrastructure has direct implications for the stability of Europe's digital ecosystem.

At the same time, the Black Sea has become one of the most contested maritime environments in the European security landscape. Intensifying geopolitical competition, persistent hybrid activity, and the militarisation of maritime domains create conditions in which critical seabed infrastructure may become a target for disruption. Recent incidents affecting undersea infrastructure in northern European waters have already demonstrated the vulnerability of such systems and prompted stronger regulatory and security responses within European and transatlantic institutions.

Yet these responses have largely focused on northern maritime regions, leaving the Black Sea comparatively underrepresented in broader infrastructure protection strategies. This imbalance reflects a lingering perception of the region as peripheral to European security. In reality, the cables that cross the Black Sea form an integral part of Europe's digital connectivity architecture, and disruptions affecting them would have consequences that extend well beyond the regional maritime space. Addressing this vulnerability requires integrating Black Sea infrastructure into wider European resilience frameworks. Strengthening maritime awareness, improving redundancy in cable networks, protecting landing stations, and enhancing rapid repair capabilities are essential steps. Ensuring that these measures are incorporated into broader EU and NATO infrastructure protection initiatives will be critical for safeguarding Europe's digital connectivity and reinforcing strategic resilience in an era of hybrid competition.

### **Policy Recommendations: Strengthening the Security and Resilience of Black Sea Undersea Infrastructure**

Strengthening the resilience of undersea cable infrastructure in the Black Sea requires a comprehensive approach that integrates technological, operational, institutional, and strategic measures. The objective should not only be to prevent attacks but also to ensure that disruptions can be rapidly detected, contained, and repaired without generating broader systemic consequences for European security.

#### **Recognise Black Sea Subsea Infrastructure as Strategic European Critical Infrastructure**

The first step toward improving infrastructure security is a conceptual shift in how Black Sea cable networks are viewed within European policy frameworks. Undersea cables in the region should be formally recognised as strategic European infrastructure rather than regional telecommunications assets. This recognition would ensure that Black Sea infrastructure is integrated into EU-wide resilience planning, threat assessments, and

infrastructure protection initiatives. Integrating Black Sea cable systems into European critical infrastructure frameworks would also facilitate stronger coordination between European institutions, telecommunications operators, and security agencies responsible for monitoring and protecting these networks.

### **Expand Maritime Domain Awareness and Seabed Monitoring**

Improving maritime domain awareness is essential for detecting potential threats to subsea infrastructure. Surveillance capabilities in the Black Sea should therefore be strengthened through a combination of technological and institutional measures. These measures may include expanding seabed monitoring systems capable of detecting suspicious underwater activity near cable routes, increasing maritime patrol operations in areas where cables are concentrated, and improving information sharing between civilian maritime authorities and security institutions responsible for monitoring potential hybrid threats. Enhanced situational awareness would significantly reduce the likelihood that sabotage operations could be conducted undetected and would improve the ability of authorities to respond rapidly to incidents involving critical infrastructure.

### **Increase Redundancy and Diversification of Cable Routes**

A key vulnerability of Black Sea cable infrastructure lies in the concentration of multiple cables along similar seabed corridors. This geographic clustering increases the risk that damage to a single area could disrupt multiple communication systems simultaneously. Strengthening resilience therefore requires the diversification of cable routes and the development of additional connectivity corridors linking Europe with neighbouring regions. Increasing the number of independent cable routes would ensure that disruptions affecting one system do not automatically cascade into broader connectivity failures. Infrastructure diversification should also include the development of complementary terrestrial data routes capable of maintaining essential connectivity in the event of subsea cable disruptions.

### **Strengthen Protection of Cable Landing Stations**

Cable landing stations represent critical nodes within the broader telecommunications infrastructure. These facilities connect subsea cables with terrestrial networks and often house network management systems responsible for routing digital traffic. Because disruptions at these facilities can affect multiple cable systems simultaneously, their protection must be treated as a central component of infrastructure resilience planning. Security measures should include both physical protection mechanisms and cybersecurity safeguards designed to protect network management systems from intrusion or sabotage. Integrating landing stations into national and European critical infrastructure protection frameworks would significantly reduce the vulnerability of these strategic nodes.

### **Develop Rapid Repair and Recovery Capabilities**

Even the most robust infrastructure protection measures cannot fully eliminate the possibility of cable damage. Consequently, rapid repair and recovery capabilities are essential for limiting the strategic impact of infrastructure disruptions. Improving recovery capacity requires ensuring that specialised cable repair vessels and technical equipment are readily available to respond to incidents in the region. Pre-arranged repair coordination mechanisms and emergency response procedures should also be developed to minimise delays when infrastructure damage occurs. Regular exercises simulating cable disruption scenarios could further improve the readiness of infrastructure operators and government authorities to respond effectively to potential incidents.

### **Integrate Black Sea Infrastructure into NATO–EU Coordination Mechanisms**

Given the dual civilian and military importance of undersea cable infrastructure, effective protection requires coordination between civilian regulatory frameworks and military situational awareness capabilities. Closer cooperation between NATO and the European Union would enable the integration of maritime surveillance capabilities with regulatory and financial instruments designed to support infrastructure resilience. Joint monitoring initiatives, shared threat assessments, and coordinated contingency planning could significantly strengthen the security of subsea infrastructure in the region. Ensuring that Black Sea infrastructure is fully integrated into these cooperative frameworks will be essential for closing existing security gaps.

### **Incorporate Subsea Infrastructure Protection into Deterrence Planning**

Finally, the protection of undersea cable infrastructure should be integrated into broader deterrence strategies addressing hybrid threats. Potential adversaries must recognise that sabotage of critical infrastructure will generate political, economic, and strategic consequences. Clarifying the potential responses to infrastructure attacks, including diplomatic, economic, and security measures, would help strengthen deterrence by signalling that such actions will not remain without consequences. Integrating subsea infrastructure protection into broader hybrid defence strategies would therefore reduce the likelihood that these systems become attractive targets during periods of geopolitical tension.

# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> International Cable Protection Committee, Submarine Cables and the Oceans: Connecting the World, 2017, p. 6–7 [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwjMtMLfnaKTaxVIBdsEHTe-JAFQQFnoECAwQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.iscpc.org%2Fdocuments%2F%3Fid%3D132&usg=AOvVaw3NvqQm1NOjMM7GYEIPr\\_q3&opi=89978449](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwjMtMLfnaKTaxVIBdsEHTe-JAFQQFnoECAwQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.iscpc.org%2Fdocuments%2F%3Fid%3D132&usg=AOvVaw3NvqQm1NOjMM7GYEIPr_q3&opi=89978449)
- <sup>2</sup> Center for Strategic and International Studies, The Strategic Future of Subsea Cables: A Guidebook for the Next Two Administrations. <https://www.csis.org/programs/project-prosperity-and-development/projects/strategic-future-subsea-cables-guidebook-next>
- <sup>3</sup> Reuters, Recent suspected underwater sabotage incidents in the Baltic Sea, 6 January, 2026. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/recent-suspected-underwater-sabotage-incidents-baltic-sea-2024-12-03/>
- <sup>4</sup> Nicole Starosielski, The Undersea Network, 2015, p.1-4. [https://syllabus.pirate.care/library/Nicole%20Starosielski/The%20Undersea%20Network%20\(397\)/The%20Undersea%20Network%20-%20Nicole%20Starosielski.pdf](https://syllabus.pirate.care/library/Nicole%20Starosielski/The%20Undersea%20Network%20(397)/The%20Undersea%20Network%20-%20Nicole%20Starosielski.pdf)
- <sup>5</sup> European Central Bank, Cyber Resilience Oversight Expectations for Financial Market Infrastructures, 2018, p.3-4. [https://www.ecb.europa.eu/paym/pdf/cons/cyberresilience/Cyber\\_resilience\\_oversight\\_expectations\\_for\\_financial\\_market\\_infrastructures.pdf](https://www.ecb.europa.eu/paym/pdf/cons/cyberresilience/Cyber_resilience_oversight_expectations_for_financial_market_infrastructures.pdf)
- <sup>6</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Global value and supply chains. <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/policy-issues/global-value-and-supply-chains.html>
- <sup>7</sup> European Union Agency for Cybersecurity, ENISA Threat Landscape 2023, p.45-48 <https://www.enisa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/ENISA%20Threat%20Landscape%202023.pdf>
- <sup>8</sup> NATO, NATO Strategic Concept 2022, para 23-24. <https://www.act.nato.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/290622-strategic-concept.pdf>
- <sup>9</sup> Christy Monaco, The Vital Role of Undersea Cable Infrastructure and the Importance of Geospatial Standards, 15 May 2025. <https://www.ogc.org/blog-article/the-vital-role-of-undersea-cable-infrastructure-and-the-importance-of-geospatial-standards/>
- <sup>10</sup> International Telecommunication Union, Global Connectivity Report 2025, 27 November 2025, p.20-24. [https://www.itu.int/dms\\_pub/itu-d/opb/ind/D-IND-ICT\\_MDD.GCR-2025-4-PDF-E.pdf](https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-d/opb/ind/D-IND-ICT_MDD.GCR-2025-4-PDF-E.pdf)
- <sup>11</sup> International Telecommunication Union, Global Connectivity Report 2025, 27 November 2025, p.20-24. [https://www.itu.int/dms\\_pub/itu-d/opb/ind/D-IND-ICT\\_MDD.GCR-2025-4-PDF-E.pdf](https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-d/opb/ind/D-IND-ICT_MDD.GCR-2025-4-PDF-E.pdf)
- <sup>12</sup> TeleGeography, Submarine Cable Map, 2025. <https://submarine-cable-map-2025.telegeography.com>
- <sup>13</sup> Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Karadeniz Ekonomik İşbirliği (KEİ) – Örgütünün Dünü, Bugünü ve Geleceği. [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/karadeniz-ekonomik-isbirlici-\\_kei\\_---orgutunun-dunu\\_-bugunu-ve-gelececi.tr.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/karadeniz-ekonomik-isbirlici-_kei_---orgutunun-dunu_-bugunu-ve-gelececi.tr.mfa)
- <sup>14</sup> Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Karadeniz Ekonomik İşbirliği (KEİ) – Örgütünün Dünü, Bugünü ve Geleceği. [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/karadeniz-ekonomik-isbirlici-\\_kei\\_---orgutunun-dunu\\_-bugunu-ve-gelececi.tr.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/karadeniz-ekonomik-isbirlici-_kei_---orgutunun-dunu_-bugunu-ve-gelececi.tr.mfa)
- <sup>15</sup> Black Sea Fiber Optic Cable System Consortium, Black Sea Fiber Optic Cable System. <https://web.archive.org/web/20070404060028/http://www.bsfoocs.com/>
- <sup>16</sup> SubCom, Caucasus Online and SubCom to Upgrade Caucasus Undersea Fiber Optic Cable System. <https://web.archive.org/web/20141017031325/http://www.subcom.com/company/view.asp?id=333&type=Press>
- <sup>17</sup> Vato Bzhalava, The Black Sea Submarine Cable Project: A Strategic Opportunity for Georgia and Europe’s Energy Future, 3 October 2024. <https://gffsis.org/en/the-black-sea-submarine-cable-project-a-strategic-opportunity-for-georgia-and-europes-energy-future/>
- <sup>18</sup> Dan C. Jipa, Nicolae Panin, Cornel Olariu and Cornel Pop, Black Sea Submarine Valleys – Patterns, Systems, Networks, 2020. [https://geocomar.ro/beta/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/02\\_OLARIU\\_c1\\_2020.pdf](https://geocomar.ro/beta/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/02_OLARIU_c1_2020.pdf)
- <sup>19</sup> Victor Jack, Lucia Mackenzie and Sam Clark, Europe’s New War with Russia: Deep Sea Sabotage, 30 January 2025. <https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-sabotage-undersea-cables-baltic-sea-europe-war/>
- <sup>20</sup> Henrik Praks, Russia’s Hybrid Threat Tactics Against the Baltic Sea Region: From Disinformation to Sabotage, Hybrid CoE Working Paper 32, 2023. <https://www.hybridcoe.fi/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/20240530-Hybrid-CoE-Working-Paper-32-Russias-hybrid-threat-tactics-WEB.pdf>
- <sup>21</sup> Haley Ott and Joanne Stocker, As Russia Is Accused of Hybrid Warfare Against the West, Vital Undersea Cables Show Their Vulnerability, 20 November 2025. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/russia-alleged-hybrid-warfare-undersea-cables/>
- <sup>22</sup> Aurel Sari, Protecting Maritime Infrastructure from Hybrid Threats: Legal Options, Hybrid CoE Research Report 14, 2025. <https://www.hybridcoe.fi/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/20250306-Hybrid-CoE-Research-Report-14-web.pdf>
- <sup>23</sup> Aurel Sari, Protecting Maritime Infrastructure from Hybrid Threats: Legal Options, Hybrid CoE Research Report 14, 2025. <https://www.hybridcoe.fi/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/20250306-Hybrid-CoE-Research-Report-14-web.pdf>
- <sup>24</sup> Daniel F. Runde, Erin L. Murphy and Thomas Bryja, Safeguarding Subsea Cables: Protecting Cyber Infrastructure amid Great Power Competition, 16 August 2024. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/safeguarding-subsea-cables-protecting-cyber-infra>

structure-amid-great-power-competition

<sup>25</sup> Christian Bueger and Tobias Liebetrau, Protecting Hidden Infrastructure: The Security Politics of the Global Submarine Data Cable Network, *Contemporary Security Policy*, 2021. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13523260.2021.1907129>

<sup>26</sup> Victor Jack, Lucia Mackenzie and Sam Clark, Europe's New War with Russia: Deep Sea Sabotage, 30 January 2025. <https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-sabotage-undersea-cables-baltic-sea-europe-war/>

<sup>27</sup> Critical Entities Resilience Directive, Critical Entities Resilience Directive (CER). <https://www.critical-entities-resilience-directive.com>

<sup>28</sup> European Commission, Recommendation on the Security and Resilience of Submarine Cable Infrastructures, 21 February 2024. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/recommendation-security-and-resilience-submarine-cable-infrastructures>

<sup>29</sup> European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: The European Union's Strategic Approach to the Black Sea Region, 28 May 2025. [https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/170d9b3a-d45f-4169-80fa-9adb753c0921\\_en?filename=EU%20Strategic%20Approach%20Black%20Sea%20Strategy.pdf](https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/170d9b3a-d45f-4169-80fa-9adb753c0921_en?filename=EU%20Strategic%20Approach%20Black%20Sea%20Strategy.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> NATO, NATO Strategic Concept 2022, para 45. <https://www.act.nato.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/290622-strategic-concept.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> NATO Allied Maritime Command, NATO Officially Launches New Maritime Centre for Security of Critical Undersea Infrastructure, 28 May 2024. <https://mc.nato.int/media-centre/news/2024/nato-officially-launches-new-nmcscui>

# North Kosovo: An Analysis of Ethnic Representation as A Contested Issue (2021–2025)

Lilly Riedel

## Key Takeaways

- **The crisis in North Kosovo is rooted in an unresolved sovereignty dispute, not merely in local tensions.** Since Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, Serbia has maintained parallel administrative structures in the north, using the region to contest Kosovo's statehood and project political influence. Every flashpoint since 2021 – from licence plates to the dinar ban – has been a proxy for this deeper conflict.
- **Serb representation exists on paper but is fragmented in practice.** Kosovo's constitution and laws formally guarantee Serb participation at every level of government. In practice, Kosovo Serbs are forced to navigate two competing state systems simultaneously, which has led to an absence of formal representation in the past.
- **Kosovo Serbs lack genuine political autonomy.** The dominant Serb political party, Srpska Lista, is effectively controlled by Belgrade, which selects its leaders and sets its agenda. Opposition voices face intimidation. As a result, Kosovo Serb political representation serves Serbia's strategic interests rather than the community's own.
- **Both Kosovo and Serbia have consistently prioritised sovereignty over compromise.** Neither side has implemented the 2023 normalisation agreement, and the proposed Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities – the most concrete path to a settlement – remains unestablished.
- **International actors have rewarded short-term de-escalation without resolving the underlying problem.** The reinstatement of Serb mayors in December 2025 prompted the EU to lift its sanctions and drew international praise, yet none of the structural issues – the Association, Serbian parallel institutions, or mutual recognition – were addressed. Without progress on these, the conditions for the next cycle of escalation remain fully intact.

## Introduction

In December 2025, several Kosovo Serbs were sworn in as mayors in North Kosovo<sup>1</sup>. What could be interpreted as a routine part of the democratic process, in the context of North Kosovo, this was remarkable, as Serb representatives from all government institutions in Serb-majority municipalities in the region had resigned in November 2022 and had not returned to public office<sup>2</sup>. This article, taking the recent swearing-in as a point of departure, analyses the role of the issue of Serb representation in the crisis that began with a dispute over licence plates in 2021<sup>3</sup>.



A Kosovo's ethnic Serb carries a dried oak branch, symbolising the Yule log, and a Serbian flag, during Orthodox Christmas Eve celebrations in Gracanica, Kosovo, January 6, 2026. Source: REUTERS/Valdrin Xhemaj

## North Kosovo as An Arena for Disputes Over Statehood

The escalation of the recent crisis has developed against the backdrop of a longstanding history of conflict over Kosovo's territory<sup>4</sup>. From 1945 onward, Kosovo was part of Yugoslavia, from 1963 on as an autonomous province with increased internal autonomy<sup>5</sup>. In 1989, the Serbian People's Assembly revoked Kosovo's autonomy, which triggered the breakdown of Yugoslavia<sup>6</sup>. Following large-scale human rights violations against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, NATO initiated air attacks in 1999<sup>7</sup>. Already that same year, following NATO's intervention, Serbia lost control over Kosovo's territory, with Kosovo becoming an international protectorate<sup>8</sup>. In Kosovo's north, where Kosovo Serbs make up the majority of the population<sup>9</sup>, however, Serbia has continued running parallel structures<sup>10</sup>, even after Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008<sup>11</sup>. While Serbia denies Kosovo's independence and sovereignty as a whole<sup>12</sup>, North Kosovo has been a focal point for Serbia to both exercise political power as well as present itself as a protector of the Serb minority within Kosovo<sup>13</sup>. For Kosovo, Serbia's claims to the region pose a threat to its territorial integrity<sup>14</sup>. Issues on a larger scale than local minority representation are thus connected to Kosovo's north for both Kosovo and Serbia, making any dispute in the region more likely to be treated as a high-stakes conflict.

## Development Of the Crisis Since 2021

The recent crisis began when the Kosovar government rejected the renewal of an agreement with Serbia on licence plates, which it announced in September 2021<sup>15</sup>. Per the agreement, Kosovo accepted the use of both licence plates issued in Kosovo and those issued in Serbia<sup>16</sup>. In contrast, Serbia only accepted drivers with Serbian licence plates to enter the country, while Kosovo-issued licence plates had to be changed at the border<sup>17</sup>. The discontinuation of the agreement meant that from September 2021 on, only Kosovo's licence plates would be acceptable within Kosovo, while drivers with Serbian licence plates had to change their licence plates at the border<sup>18</sup> – a move interpreted as a tit-for-tat by

Kosovo's prime minister Albin Kurti in light of Serbia's non-acceptance of Kosovo's licence plates<sup>19</sup>. The announcement of the agreement's discontinuation was followed by protests in North Kosovo<sup>20</sup>. Kosovo Serbs put up barricades, which the Kosovar government reacted to by sending special police units to the north<sup>21</sup>. By the end of September 2021, the crisis seemed to have resolved; vehicles with either licence plates were accepted by Kosovo and Serbia to enter their respective territory, the Kosovar government removed its special police units, and Kosovo Serbs removed the barricades<sup>22</sup>. Already in October 2021, however, an anti-smuggling campaign by the Kosovo police turned into a violent encounter in North Mitrovica, ending with more than a dozen injured, including both Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo police officers<sup>23</sup>. Kosovo police furthermore carried out raids and started blocking unofficial roads at the border where smugglers had been transporting supplies from Serbia<sup>24</sup>. In July 2022, five Kosovo police officers were wounded in an exchange of gunshots with smugglers in North Kosovo<sup>25</sup>. The Kosovar government also stopped letting Kosovo Serbs who had Serbian citizenship vote in Kosovo in Serbian elections, which had been common practice beforehand<sup>26</sup>.



Kosovo special police forces guard the municipal offices in Zvecan after Serb protestors prevent a newly elected ethnic Albanian mayor from entering the office in Zvecan, Kosovo, May 27, 2023. Source: REUTERS/Ognjen Teofilovski

The crisis continued with Kosovo implementing additional policies limiting the use of Serbian IDs in June 2022 – again a reciprocal act responding to Serbia not recognizing personal documents issued by Kosovo<sup>27</sup> – followed by Kosovo Serbs constructing barricades at Kosovo-Serbia border crossings<sup>28</sup>. Serbia, in turn, sent troops lacking visible identifiers into Kosovo that were armed with heavy weaponry, which led the Kosovo police to retreat<sup>29</sup>. The Kosovar government established seven special police bases in North Kosovo<sup>30</sup>. A meeting between Albin Kurti and Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić with EU and US diplomats

in August 2022<sup>31</sup> to resolve the conflict did not yield any viable solution<sup>32</sup>. Instead, further escalation ensued. In November 2022, the Serb Kosovo Police commander for North Kosovo, Nenad Djurić, was suspended after he refused to follow new orders regarding sanctions on the use of Serbian licence plates<sup>33</sup>. His suspension triggered a mass resignation of Kosovo Serbs from all Kosovo state institutions in the country's north<sup>34</sup>. The officials who had resigned were reintegrated into the Serbian administrations that were promptly installed in North Kosovo<sup>35</sup>. In December 2022, polling offices installed by Kosovo's authorities for the election of new mayors in North Kosovo, following the mass resignation, were subject to multiple violent attacks, which Kosovo reacted to by expanding the number of police officers in North Kosovo<sup>36</sup>. The increased police presence was met with threats to send security personnel into North Kosovo by Serbia<sup>37</sup>. Again, road barricades were erected by Kosovo Serbs<sup>38</sup>. Serbia and Kosovo attempted another round of negotiations mediated by the EU, which resulted in an end to the street blockages in North Kosovo streets on December 28<sup>39</sup>.

The planned extraordinary elections that had triggered violent attacks in December 2022, however, were eventually held – in April 2023, polls were opened, but Kosovo Serbs living in North Kosovo boycotted the elections<sup>40</sup>. Due to the boycott of the election by the Serb population, exclusively non-Serb mayors took office in the four predominantly Serb-inhabited municipalities, which provoked protests from Kosovo Serbs in the region<sup>41</sup>. Despite major resistance from the Kosovo Serb population, Kosovo's authorities handed over municipal buildings to the newly elected mayors in May 2023, evicting Serb employees<sup>42</sup>.

Protests escalated, resulting in violent clashes between protesters and KFOR (NATO peacekeepers in Kosovo), with more than 60 injured<sup>43</sup>. Over the following months, the Kosovar government took additional measures against Serbian influence in the region, including bans on imports from Serbia and multiple inspections to verify whether businesses were registered in Kosovo<sup>44</sup>. In September 2023, violence broke out once more between the Kosovo special police and heavily armed Kosovo Serbs in a North Kosovo village, an incident after which a clandestine stockpile of arms valued at about 5 million dollars was found<sup>45</sup>. Some of both small and heavy arms were traced back to Serbia by investigative reporters of the Balkan Investigative Research Network, having been produced there, but how these weapons came into possession of the group of Serb fighters in North Kosovo could not be determined by the journalists<sup>46</sup>.

In December 2023, Kosovo decided to accept only the euro for transactions within Kosovo, making life in North Kosovo with Serbian schools and hospitals relying on Serbian dinars difficult<sup>47</sup>. After the policy took effect in February, Kosovo authorities seized documents and computers from municipal offices in multiple Serbia-run municipalities and confiscated the dinars found in a bank and a post office in one of the municipalities<sup>48</sup>. In 2024, Kosovo started closing Serbia-run institutions in North Kosovo, causing protests from the Kosovo Serb community and criticism from the UN, US, and EU<sup>49</sup>. By January 2025, Kosovo officials declared that it had closed all Serbia-run parallel institutions in Kosovo<sup>50</sup>. Eventually, after elections in late 2025, Serb mayors returned to office in the four Serb-dominated municipalities in North Kosovo<sup>51</sup>.

## **Current Status Quo of Serb Representation in North Kosovo**

### **Legal Background**

Minority rights in Kosovo, in general, are protected through international as well as domestic law<sup>52</sup>. At the governmental level, Serb representation is secured by a set of rules laid out in the country's constitution<sup>53</sup>. At least 10 of 120 Assembly seats, for example, are

reserved for Serb Assembly members<sup>54</sup>, and at least one of twelve ministers has to be Serb<sup>55</sup>. Furthermore, Kosovo has laws guaranteeing the representation of minorities in the judiciary, in municipal personnel, and prescribes a Community Consultative Council<sup>56</sup>. The Council's task is to enable communication between the respective communities and the Kosovar government<sup>57</sup>. Serb-majority municipalities have additional powers, regarding, for example, the official use of the Serbian language<sup>58</sup>. Moreover, the Law on Local Self-Government (LLSG) prescribes minority representation within all kinds of local administration<sup>59</sup>. Additionally, Committees for Communities, comprising community representatives and present in every municipality, are meant to protect these community rights<sup>60</sup>. In practice, representation- especially at the municipal level- is, however, highly contingent on current political events, as the recent crisis has proven. Even though Kosovo regards its north as a part over which it maintains authority<sup>61</sup>, Serbia de-facto exercises executive power in the region, too:

“In some fields, like municipal government, both countries have systems in place. Each municipality has two official websites, one for each system. Residents can get both Kosovo and Serbian personal documents; they can also register births, marriages and deaths, and apply for grants or jobs in either or both systems. The Kosovo and Serbia municipal governments share buildings everywhere outside North Mitrovica, the area's main city, where they are separated. In some cases, staff from both systems sit side by side in the same office.”<sup>62</sup>

Education and health care are heavily dominated by Serbian institutions; the judicial system and the police, however, are under Kosovo's authority<sup>63</sup>. Therefore, in practice, for a majority of Kosovo Serbs, registration with both systems is a necessity for daily life<sup>64</sup>.

Regarding political representation, it is important to note that Serbia's government party Srpska Lista is the one in power in North Kosovo's Serbian institutions and can even be described as “[holding] a monopoly on the political representation of Kosovo Serbs”<sup>65</sup>. The leaders of North Kosovo's Srpska Lista have been picked by Serbia's government<sup>66</sup> and are thus not unconditionally appreciated by Kosovo Serbs and do not represent them<sup>67</sup>. Kosovo Serb opposition faces serious security risks<sup>68</sup> and intimidation, as reported by the EU's election observation mission in Kosovo<sup>69</sup>.

### **The Issue of The Kosovo-Serb Association**

According to the “Agreement on the Path to Normalisation of Relations” that both Kosovo and Serbia accepted verbally (but have not signed)<sup>70</sup>, Kosovo should “ensure an appropriate level of self-management for the Serbian community in Kosovo and ability for service provision in specific areas, including the possibility for financial support by Serbia and a direct communication channel for the Serbian community to the Government of Kosovo”<sup>71</sup>. Neither Serbia has implemented its promises laid out in this agreement - among them accepting Kosovo's independence-, nor Kosovo<sup>72</sup>. The implicit establishment of a Kosovo-Serb Association to enable self-management of the Kosovo-Serb population has been interpreted as the main obstacle to following through with the agreement<sup>73</sup>. Serbia interprets the installation of an Association as a step towards great autonomy of North Kosovo, while Kosovo regards the region's possible autonomy as unconstitutional<sup>74</sup> and would like the Association to solely fulfil an organisational role<sup>75</sup>.

### **How Relevant Political Actors Treat the Issue of Serb Representation**

Kosovo hesitates to grant Kosovo Serbs additional self-governing authority as it fears similar Serbian influence in North Kosovo as in Bosnia's Republika Srpska<sup>76</sup>. Kurti has stated that the establishment of such an Association would pose a threat to Kosovo's sovereignty<sup>77</sup>.

Additionally, as Seebass (2022)<sup>78</sup> assessed, Albin Kurti's administration is particularly centralist and inflexible regarding Kosovo-Serb autonomy. Kosovo, as deducible from its policies in the North in recent years, demands uncontested authority in the region<sup>79</sup>.

Serbia, on the other hand, does not accept Kosovo's independence<sup>80</sup>, Kosovo's main concern regarding granting greater Kosovo Serb autonomy. Serbia has, however, consented to the integration of North Kosovo into Kosovo's administrative structures in 2013<sup>81</sup>. There would have to be major benefits for Serbia for it to agree to recognise Kosovo's independence, such as financial support or advantages regarding EU accession<sup>82</sup>.



Political map of Kosovo with details on Serb-minority areas. Source: Centre for Strategic & International Studies

## Reactions from International Actors

Kosovo has faced pressure from a range of international actors in response to its actions in North Kosovo in recent years but has regained international support following the recent inauguration of Serb mayors in North Kosovo.

UNMIK, the UN's mission to Kosovo, published a press release in September 2025 related to the situation in North Kosovo. UNMIK, on the one hand, criticizes the closure of Serbian-run institutions, highlighting the negative effects on the daily lives of Kosovo Serbs living in North Kosovo, such as "restrict[ed] access to healthcare and other essential services"<sup>83</sup>. Furthermore, UNMIK stresses the obstacles minority communities encounter in acquiring Kosovo identification documents. On the other hand, in October 2025, UNMIK's Deputy

Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Officer-in-Charge Milbert Dongjoon Shin- while reiterating the earlier criticism of the closure of institutions under the Serbian system- commended the “peaceful and inclusive atmosphere of the local elections” that month and encouraged the continued participation of Serbia and Kosovo in EU dialogue meetings<sup>84</sup>. Furthermore, Caroline Ziadeh, Head of UNMIK, commended the idea of setting up a “community of Serb-majority municipalities”<sup>85</sup>.



A woman walks in front of the municipal building at the Serb-majority municipality of Leposavic, in Leposavic, Kosovo December 8, 2023. Source: REUTERS/Valdrin Xhemaj

The EU has played an important role as a facilitator of the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia; however, multiple authors have criticised the EU’s approach to the dialogue process as being too ambiguous, urging it to take a clearer stance on expectations towards Kosovo and Serbia<sup>86</sup>. In September 2023, the EU published a statement demanding the establishment of the Kosovo-Serb Association mentioned above, “without any further delay or pre-condition”<sup>87</sup>- i.e., countering Kosovo’s stated requirement for creating such an Association to be officially recognised as a state by Serbia. A range of European leaders put out a statement a month later asking Kosovo to enable the creation of the “Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities” and for Serbia to “deliver on de-facto recognition”<sup>88</sup>. In response to Kosovo’s escalation in its north, the EU also sanctioned Kosovo by cutting its funding<sup>89</sup>. In an Op-Ed published in December 2025, Aivo Orav, the EU’s Ambassador in Kosovo, neither mentioned the Kosovo-Serb Association nor a possible recognition of Kosovo’s independence by Serbia, but lauded Kosovo for holding local elections and the transition of power in north Kosovo to the newly elected Serb mayors<sup>90</sup>. Following the local elections, the EU furthermore lifted its sanctions on Kosovo in December 2025, rewarding the inauguration of the Serb mayors in North Kosovo<sup>91</sup>.

US officials criticized Kosovo for forcibly taking over municipal buildings in North Kosovo following the 2023 elections<sup>92</sup>, stating that the newly elected mayors could have worked from other office buildings to avoid escalation<sup>93</sup>. In May 2023, the US sanctioned Kosovo by ceasing its support for Kosovo to be internationally recognised and join international

organizations, and excluding Kosovo from a large-scale NATO exercise, “Defender 23”<sup>94</sup>.

## Conclusion

The analysis presented in this article points to three interlocking conclusions about the nature of Serb representation in North Kosovo, each of which helps explain why the reinstatement of Serb mayors in December 2025, while a welcome development, does not mark a genuine resolution of the crisis.

Firstly, Serb representation in North Kosovo is not absent but fragmented. Kosovo’s constitutional and legislative framework formally guarantees minority representation at every level of government – from reserved Assembly seats and ministerial posts to municipal Committees for Communities and the Law on Local Self-Government. Yet in practice, Kosovo Serbs have been compelled to navigate two overlapping administrative systems simultaneously. Dual websites, dual personal documents, and dual municipal offices are not a sign of robust representation; they are a sign of a community whose political participation is structurally split between two competing state authorities. The mass resignation of 2022 and subsequent reintegration of Kosovo Serb officials into Serbian-run parallel structures illustrate how easily formal representation can collapse under political pressure, leaving Kosovo Serbs institutionally suspended rather than genuinely included.

Secondly, representation is not autonomous but externally influenced. The political party through which Kosovo Serbs exercise their institutional voice – Srpska Lista – holds a monopoly on Serb political representation while its leadership is selected in Belgrade rather than by the Kosovo Serb community itself. Opposition voices face documented intimidation and security risks. The result is that Kosovo Serb political agency has been systematically subordinated to Serbia’s strategic interests in the region, interests that centre on contesting Kosovo’s sovereignty rather than improving the daily lives of Serbs in the north. As long as Kosovo Serbs lack the conditions for genuine political pluralism – conditions that would require Serbia to relinquish its control over their political representation – any formal representation they hold will remain a proxy for Belgrade’s agenda rather than an expression of their own.

Finally, the current arrangement is not stabilising but conflict-reproducing. Each episode in the crisis since 2021 – from the licence plate dispute to the dinar ban and the closure of Serbian-run parallel institutions – has followed the same pattern: a policy measure by Pristina provokes a representational rupture in the north, which in turn triggers escalation, external pressure, partial concession, and an uneasy return to a status quo that leaves the underlying dispute unresolved. The reinstatement of Serb mayors fits this pattern. It has been welcomed by international actors and prompted the EU to lift its sanctions, yet it has not been accompanied by any movement on the questions of the Kosovo-Serb Association, the recognition of Kosovo’s independence, or the dismantling of Serbian parallel structures in a manner that protects Kosovo Serbs’ access to services.

Without progress on these issues, the conditions that generated the crisis remain in place, and future triggers for escalation remain abundant. Taken together, these three dimensions reveal a common root cause: representation in North Kosovo has been consistently subordinated to the unresolved dispute over sovereignty. Kosovo treats any expansion of Kosovo Serb self-governance as a threat to its territorial integrity, while Serbia instrumentalises Serb representation to maintain leverage over a territory whose independence it refuses to recognise. Kosovo Serbs are thus caught not between two neutral administrative systems, but between two incompatible sovereignty claims, each of which treats their representation as a means to a larger end. Until that foundational dispute is addressed – through a negotiated settlement that clarifies the status of the

Kosovo–Serb Association, secures Serbia’s de-facto recognition of Kosovo, and enables genuine political pluralism within the Kosovo Serb community – cycles of escalation and partial de-escalation are likely to persist. The crisis in North Kosovo is not, at its core, a crisis of representation. It is a crisis of statehood in which representation has become the primary battleground.

## **Policy Recommendations**

### **To The Kosovar Government:**

As has been suggested by Rrahmani and Bushi<sup>95</sup> and the International Crisis Group<sup>96</sup>, Kosovo should support the establishment of the Association of Kosovo Serb municipalities.

### **To The Serbian Government:**

As mentioned above, Kosovo Serb party leaders are being selected in Belgrade, which has been criticized by the International Crisis Group, calling for Serbia to let Kosovo Serbs select their own political representatives and to allow for the development of diverse political parties<sup>97</sup>. Serbia allowing Kosovo Serbs to do so is crucial for Kosovo Serbs to have true political agency, independent from Serbian control.

Serbia should furthermore recognise Kosovo’s independence and facilitate the establishment of the Association for Serb-majority municipalities in collaboration with Kosovo. In line with that recommendation, Lopez Domenèch has also suggested that Serbia should remove its institutions from North Kosovo to enable the integration of Kosovo Serbs into the Kosovo system, thereby easing Kosovo’s fears that Serbia would use its influence to establish an autonomous region similar to Republika Srpska in Bosnia<sup>98</sup>. However, as mentioned above, the Kosovo Serb population is still dependent on those institutions, so their dismantling should be done in cooperation with Kosovo Serbs and the Kosovo administration to ensure the functioning of daily life for Kosovo Serbs.

### **To International Actors:**

International actors should support the agency of Kosovo Serbs by facilitating the creation of the Association of Kosovo–Serb-majority municipalities with greater autonomy, while incentivising Serbia to refrain from interfering with Kosovo Serb political representation. International institutions still operating in Kosovo, namely UNMIK, KFOR, and EULEX, should support the peaceful establishment of such an Association on the ground and continue monitoring the human rights situation. International actors should stay firm in not redrawing borders, as doing so would come with the risk of affecting the whole region’s stability<sup>99</sup>.

The EU specifically should clarify its position of supporting Kosovo’s independence and the right of the Kosovo Serb community to participate politically. In its role as a dialogue facilitator, the EU could furthermore help to “ensure a smooth transition from the Serbian parallel institutions”<sup>100</sup> into an integrated system of an Association for Kosovo Serb-majority municipalities within the Kosovo state.

Lastly, the EU has the opportunity to incentivise Serbia to accept Kosovo’s independence by leveraging the possibility of EU accession, as suggested by the International Crisis Group<sup>101</sup>.

# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Xhorxhina Bami, "Serb Mayors 'Retake' Power in North Kosovo," *BIRN* (Pristina), December 5, 2025, <https://balkaninsight.com/2025/12/05/serb-mayors-retake-power-in-north-kosovo/>.
- <sup>2</sup> Xhorxhina Bami and Milica Stojanovic, "Serbs Stage Mass Resignation from Kosovo State Institutions," *BIRN* (Belgrade, Pristina), November 5, 2022, <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/11/05/serbs-stage-mass-resignation-from-kosovo-state-institutions/>; Bami, "Serb Mayors 'Retake' Power in North Kosovo."
- <sup>3</sup> Xhorxhina Bami, "Kosovo to Abandon License Plates Agreement with Serbia," *BIRN* (Pristina), September 9, 2021, <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/09/09/kosovo-to-abandon-license-plates-agreement-with-serbia/>; Frauke M. Seebass, "Licence Plates to Kill?," *Contemporary Southeastern Europe* 9 (2022): 81, <https://doi.org/10.25364/02.9:2022.2.6>.
- <sup>4</sup> Frank Dietrich, "The Status of Kosovo – Reflections on the Legitimacy of Secession," *Ethics & Global Politics* 3, no. 2 (2010): 124, <https://doi.org/10.3402/egp.v3i2.1983>.
- <sup>5</sup> Anton Bebler, "The Serbia-Kosovo Conflict," in *"Frozen Conflicts" in Europe* (Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2015), 154–55, <https://doi.org/10.3224/84740133>.
- <sup>6</sup> Bebler, "The Serbia-Kosovo Conflict," 156.
- <sup>7</sup> Bebler, "The Serbia-Kosovo Conflict," 157.
- <sup>8</sup> Bebler, "The Serbia-Kosovo Conflict," 158.
- <sup>9</sup> Minority Rights Group, "Serbs in Kosovo," March 2018, <https://minorityrights.org/communities/serbs-3/>.
- <sup>10</sup> OSCE Mission to Kosovo, "Parallel Structures in Kosovo," October 2003, 5, <https://cdn.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/9/1/42584.pdf>.
- <sup>11</sup> Bebler, "The Serbia-Kosovo Conflict," 161.
- <sup>12</sup> Reuters, *Serbia Wants to Normalise Ties with Kosovo but Will Not Sign Any Agreement*, March 19, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/serbia-wants-normalise-ties-with-kosovo-will-not-sign-any-agreement-2023-03-19/>.
- <sup>13</sup> Krenare Cerkini and Thora Tenbrink, "Discursive Polarization in the Construction of Contested Statehood: Positive Self and Negative Other in the Kosovo–Serbia Conflict," *Frontiers in Communication* 11 (February 2026): 4, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2026.1706096>.using keyword frequency analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis within van Dijk's socio-cognitive framework (text-cognition-society
- <sup>14</sup> Lopez Domènech, "The Association of Serb Majority Municipalities: The Crux of Tensions in Northern Kosovo."
- <sup>15</sup> Bami, "Kosovo to Abandon License Plates Agreement with Serbia"; International Crisis Group, *Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties*, Europe Report no. 269 (Brussels, Belgium, 2024), 4, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/269-northern-kosovo-sovereignty.pdf>.
- <sup>16</sup> International Crisis Group, *Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties*, 4.
- <sup>17</sup> International Crisis Group, *Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties*, 4.
- <sup>18</sup> Bami, "Kosovo to Abandon License Plates Agreement with Serbia."
- <sup>19</sup> Seebass, "Licence Plates to Kill?," 81.
- <sup>20</sup> Seebass, "Licence Plates to Kill?," 81.
- <sup>21</sup> International Crisis Group, *Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties*, 5.
- <sup>22</sup> International Crisis Group, *Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties*, 5.
- <sup>23</sup> International Crisis Group, *Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties*, 5.
- <sup>24</sup> International Crisis Group, *Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties*, 5.Belgium";title:"Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties";URL:"https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/269-northern-kosovo-sovereignty.pdf";author":{"family":"InternationalCrisisGroup","given":""},"accessed":{"date-parts":[["2026",2,16]]},"issued":{"date-parts":[["2024",4,2]]},"locator":"5"},"schema":"https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"
- <sup>25</sup> International Crisis Group, *Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties*, 5.
- <sup>26</sup> International Crisis Group, *Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties*, 5.
- <sup>27</sup> International Crisis Group, *Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties*, 6.
- <sup>28</sup> Perparim Isufi and Xhorxhina Bami, "Serb Barricades Still up in North Kosovo Despite Govt Climbdown," *BIRN* (Leopoldov, North Mitrovica, Pristina), August 1, 2022, <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/08/01/serb-barricades-still-up-in-north-kosovo-despite-govt-climbdown/>.
- <sup>29</sup> International Crisis Group, *Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties*, 6.
- <sup>30</sup> International Crisis Group, *Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties*, 6.
- <sup>31</sup> Milica Stojanovic and Perparim Isufi, "Serbia, Kosovo Officials to Meet in Brussels After Tensions," *BIRN* (Belgrade, Pristina), August 3, 2022, <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/08/03/serbia-kosovo-officials-to-meet-in-brussels-after-tensions/>.
- <sup>32</sup> Sasa Dragojlo, "Serbia's Vucic: 'No Agreement Yet' over Kosovo Licence Plate Dispute," *BIRN* (Belgrade), August 26, 2022, <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/08/26/serbias-vucic-no-agreement-yet-over-kosovo-licence-plate-dispute/>.
- <sup>33</sup> International Crisis Group, *Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties*, 6.
- <sup>34</sup> Bami and Stojanovic, "Serbs Stage Mass Resig-



guage": "en", "license": "http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0", "page": "82", "source": "DOI.org (Crossref)

<sup>59</sup> Alidemaj and Maliqi, "Enhancing Minority Rights in Kosovo and the Balkans," 97., "container-title": "Hasanuddin Law Review", "DOI": "10.20956/halrev.viii.5911", "ISSN": "2442-9899, 2442-9880", "issue": "1", "journalAbbreviation": "Hasanuddin Law Rev.", "language": "en", "license": "http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0", "page": "82", "source": "DOI.org (Crossref)

<sup>60</sup> Alidemaj and Maliqi, "Enhancing Minority Rights in Kosovo and the Balkans," 99., "container-title": "Hasanuddin Law Review", "DOI": "10.20956/halrev.viii.5911", "ISSN": "2442-9899, 2442-9880", "issue": "1", "journalAbbreviation": "Hasanuddin Law Rev.", "language": "en", "license": "http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0", "page": "82", "source": "DOI.org (Crossref)

<sup>61</sup> International Crisis Group, *Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties*, 1.

<sup>62</sup> International Crisis Group, *Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties*, 3.

<sup>63</sup> International Crisis Group, *Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties*, 3.

<sup>64</sup> International Crisis Group, *Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties*, 4.

<sup>65</sup> Berta Lopez Domènech, "The Association of Serb Majority Municipalities: The Crux of Tensions in Northern Kosovo," *European Policy Centre*, June 14, 2023, <https://www.epc.eu/publication/The-Association-of-Serb-Majority-Municipalities-The-crux-of-tensions-517b60/>.

<sup>66</sup> International Crisis Group, *Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties*, 15.

<sup>67</sup> Seebass, "Licence Plates to Kill?," 86.

<sup>68</sup> Seebass, "Licence Plates to Kill?," 86.

<sup>69</sup> European Union Election Observation Mission, "Preliminary Statement," Kosovo, October 6, 2019, 2, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ps\\_final\\_version.pdf](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ps_final_version.pdf).

<sup>70</sup> Ramadan Ilazi et al., "Ethnopolitical Radicalisation in Kosovo," in *Vulnerability and Resilience to Violent Extremism*, 1st ed., by Juline Beaujoutan et al. (Routledge, 2023), 149, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003424901-12>.

<sup>71</sup> "Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: Agreement on the Path to Normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia," February 27, 2023, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-agreement-path-normalisation-between-kosovo-and-serbia\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-agreement-path-normalisation-between-kosovo-and-serbia_en).

<sup>72</sup> Doga Eralp, "Agonistic Democracy," in *Functional Coexistence in Socio-Political Conflict*, 1st ed., by Tatsushi Arai and Margarita Tadevosyan (Routledge, 2025), 124, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781032702605-9>; International Crisis Group, *Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties*, 19.

<sup>73</sup> Lopez Domènech, "The Association of Serb Majority Municipalities: The Crux of Tensions in Northern Kosovo."

<sup>74</sup> Seebass, "Licence Plates to Kill?," 88; Lopez Domènech, "The Association of Serb Majority Municipalities: The Crux of Tensions in Northern Kosovo."

<sup>75</sup> International Crisis Group, *Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties*, 18.

<sup>76</sup> Lopez Domènech, "The Association of Serb Majority Municipalities: The Crux of Tensions in Northern Kosovo."

<sup>77</sup> Marina Vulović, "The Normalisation of Relations between Kosovo and Serbia - How the EU Can Secure the Implementation of the 'European Proposal,'" *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*, March 15, 2023, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2023C17/>.

<sup>78</sup> Seebass, "Licence Plates to Kill?," 88.

<sup>79</sup> International Crisis Group, *Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties*, 13.

<sup>80</sup> Reuters, *Serbia Wants to Normalise Ties with Kosovo but Will Not Sign Any Agreement*, March 19, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/serbia-wants-normalise-ties-with-kosovo-will-not-sign-any-agreement-2023-03-19/>.

<sup>81</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, "BTI 2024 Country Report - Kosovo," Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024, 9.

<sup>82</sup> International Crisis Group, *Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties*, 22.

<sup>83</sup> UNMIK, "Statement on Closure of Serbia-Run Institutions in Northern Kosovo | UNMIK," September 14, 2025, <https://unmik.unmissions.org/statement-closure-serbia-run-institutions-northern-kosovo>.

<sup>84</sup> UNMIK, "DSRSG / OIC OF UNMIK Milbert Dongjoon Shin Security Council Briefing On UNMIK," October 21, 2025, <https://unmik.unmissions.org/dsrsg-oic-unmik-milbert-dongjoon-shin-security-council-briefing-unmik>.

<sup>85</sup> United Nations, *Amidst Recent Tensions, Establishing Community of Serb-Majority Municipalities Could Advance Normalization, Kosovo Mission Head Tells Security Council | UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases*, UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases SC/15673 (2024), <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15673.doc.htm>.

<sup>86</sup> Ilazi et al., "Ethnopolitical Radicalisation in Kosovo," 156; Bashkim Rrahmani and Petrit Bushi, "Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue: From Brussels to Ohrid," *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs, Institute for Research and European Studies - Bitola* 9, no. 3 (2023): 406, <https://doi.org/10.47305/JLIA2393476r>.

<sup>87</sup> Press and information team of the EU Office/EU Special Representative in Kosovo, "Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: Statement by the High Representative on Behalf of the European Union on Expectations from Serbia and Kosovo\*," European Union Office in Kosovo European Union Special Representative in Kosovo, Brussels, September 19, 2023, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/kosovo/belgrade-pristi>

na-dialogue-statement-high-representative-be-half-european-union-expectations-serbia\_en.

<sup>88</sup> “Joint Statement by the President of the French Republic, the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and the President of the Council of Ministers of the Italian Republic on the EU-Facilitated Dialogue on Normalisation of Relations between Kosovo and Serbia,” Ambassade De France En Serbie, October 28, 2023, <https://rs.ambafrance.org/Joint-statement-by-the-President-of-the-French-Republic-the-Chancellor-of-the>.

<sup>89</sup> International Crisis Group, “Watch List 2025 – Autumn Update,” October 16, 2025, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/euw/global/watch-list-2025-autumn-update>.

<sup>90</sup> Aivo Orav, “No More Time to Lose: 2026 Must Deliver Functioning Institutions and Real Progress for Kosovo,” European Union Office in Kosovo European Union Special Representative in Kosovo, Press and information team of the EU Office/EU Special Representative in Kosovo, December 29, 2025, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/kosovo/no-more-time-lose-2026-must-deliver-functioning-institutions-and-real-progress-kosovo\\_en?s=321](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/kosovo/no-more-time-lose-2026-must-deliver-functioning-institutions-and-real-progress-kosovo_en?s=321).

<sup>91</sup> Reuters, *EU to Lift Sanctions on Kosovo and Release Financial Aid, von Der Leyen Says*, December 18, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/eu-lift-sanctions-kosovo-release-financial-aid-von-der-leyen-says-2025-12-18/>.

<sup>92</sup> Antony J. Blinken, “Condemning Unilateral Actions by the Government of Kosovo – United States Department of State,” U.S. Department of State, May 26, 2023, <https://2021-2025.state.gov/condemning-unilateral-actions-by-the-government-of-kosovo/>.

<sup>93</sup> Jeta Xharra, “US Embassy Confirms Sanctions Against Kosovo Follow the Tensions in the North – Prishtina Insight,” *Prishtina Insight*, May 30, 2023, <https://prishtinainsight.com/us-sanctions-against-kosovo-follow-after-the-tensions-kosovo-excluded-from-defender-23/>.

<sup>94</sup> Xharra, “US Embassy Confirms Sanctions Against Kosovo Follow the Tensions in the North – Prishtina Insight”; Marko Prelec, “Behind the Renewed Troubles in Northern Kosovo I,” International Crisis Group, June 7, 2023, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/qna/behind-renewed-troubles-europe-balkans-northern-kosovo>.

<sup>95</sup> Rrahmani and Bushi, “KOSOVO-SERBIA DIALOGUE,” 409.

<sup>96</sup> International Crisis Group, *Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties*, 22.

<sup>97</sup> International Crisis Group, *Northern Kosovo: Asserting Sovereignty amid Divided Loyalties*, 25.

<sup>98</sup> Lopez Domènech, “The Association of Serb Majority Municipalities: The Crux of Tensions in Northern Kosovo.”

<sup>99</sup> Iztok Prezelj and Kristopher Ramsay, “The Risk of Domino Secessions: Interdependent Secessions and

Lessons from the Western Balkans,” *European Security* 33, no. 1 (2024): 144, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2023.2201880>.

<sup>100</sup> Lopez Domènech, “The Association of Serb Majority Municipalities: The Crux of Tensions in Northern Kosovo.”

<sup>101</sup> International Crisis Group, “Watch List 2025 – Autumn Update.”

# Bulgaria's Energy Transition: Between Resilience and Historical Dependence

Maria Eduarda Senadiniz

## Key Takeaways

- **From 94% Russian gas dependency to zero in under three years.** Following Gazprom's unilateral suspension of supplies in April 2022, Bulgaria rebuilt its gas supply through Azerbaijani imports and LNG via Greece. This rapid transformation—achieved under acute economic and political pressure—underpins Bulgaria's reputation as Europe's foremost example of dynamic energy resilience.
- **A defining geopolitical paradox.** Whilst accelerating its decoupling from Russia, Bulgaria remains the caretaker of Balkan Stream (the European extension of TurkStream) and the last entry point for Russian pipeline gas into the EU. Prime Minister Zhelyazkov's commitment to end Russian gas transit by 2027/2028 will have significant consequences for still-dependent neighbours such as Hungary and Slovakia.
- **From vulnerable importer to regional energy hub.** Through the Greece-Bulgaria Interconnector (IGB), a 25% stake in the Alexandroupolis LNG terminal, the Bulgaria-Serbia Interconnector (IBS), and reverse-flow capability in the Trans-Balkan Pipeline, Bulgaria now channels non-Russian energy to Serbia, Romania, Moldova, and Ukraine. The adoption of Westinghouse AP1000 nuclear technology completes this shift away from Soviet-era infrastructure dependency.
- **Structural energy inefficiency remains Bulgaria's most persistent economic vulnerability.** The country consumes 3.5 times more energy per unit of GDP than the EU average, amplifying the impact of every price shock—including the 5.12% gas price rise proposed for April 2026. The EU Just Transition Fund (€1.2 billion) and the adoption of the euro in January 2026 provide new financial tools, but decarbonising one of the bloc's most energy-intensive economies by 2038 remains a formidable challenge.

## Introduction

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 acted as the catalyst for a profound and rapid transformation of Bulgaria's energy matrix. Historically classified as Europe's "weak link", the country had been critically dependent on gas supplied by Gazprom—a vulnerability exposed when the Kremlin unilaterally suspended deliveries in April 2022<sup>1</sup>. What began as a supply crisis quickly evolved into a deliberate strategy of sovereignty, driving Bulgaria to seek partnerships with Azerbaijan and the United States, and to consolidate vital infrastructure such as the Greece-Bulgaria Interconnector<sup>2</sup>.

This shift extended well beyond gas supply routes, triggering a systemic "Westernisation" and an unprecedented surge in renewable energy investment<sup>3</sup>. By adopting Westinghouse nuclear standards and expanding solar capacity to over 2,400 MW, Bulgaria has redesigned its geopolitical role in Southeast Europe<sup>4</sup>—transforming from a nation vulnerable to Moscow's pressure into an emerging strategic hub for electricity export and regional connectivity.

## What Is the Importance of Bulgaria’s Energy Stability for the European Union?

Bulgaria’s strategic location has transformed it from a vulnerable link into a central node for energy transit and distribution within Southeast Europe (SEE)<sup>5</sup>. Having broken its 94% dependence on Gazprom, Bulgaria now protects the EU’s “southern flank” against supply disruption, acting as a net exporter of electricity vital to the power grids of Romania, Greece, and North Macedonia<sup>6</sup>.

One of the central axes of this new security architecture is the strategic connectivity with Greece<sup>7</sup>. The partnership between the two countries enabled the Greece-Bulgaria Interconnector (IGB), which allows direct access to gas from Azerbaijan and liquefied natural gas (LNG) from global sources. In addition, Bulgaria holds a 25% stake in the LNG terminal in Alexandroupolis<sup>8</sup>, an infrastructure that positions it as a hub capable of redirecting supplies to all of the Western Balkans. This cooperation is already looking toward the future of decarbonisation, with joint plans for the development of pipelines aimed at transporting green hydrogen.



Ilham Aliyev attended inauguration of Greece-Bulgaria Gas Interconnector in Sofia 08, December 2022.

Source: CC BY 4.0.

Bulgaria also secured access to the Turkish transmission system through an agreement with state-owned BOTAŞ<sup>9</sup>, enabling imports of up to 1.5 bcm of gas per year and reinforcing Turkey’s role as a major regional hub, with Bulgaria as the principal EU gateway. This arrangement provides the bloc with additional redundancy pathways against supply disruptions.

Beyond the EU’s internal market, Bulgarian infrastructure plays a direct humanitarian and strategic role in supporting Ukraine and Moldova. Modernised reverse-flow capability in the Trans-Balkan Pipeline enables the shipment of alternative gas volumes from south to north; combined with the Bulgaria-Serbia Interconnector (IBS), this arrangement strengthens the resilience of the entire European energy network<sup>10</sup>. An isolated, dependent Bulgaria would leave Eastern Europe fragmented and exposed—a structural vulnerability

rooted in decades of Soviet-era integration<sup>11</sup>.

## How Is Bulgaria’s Historical Energy Fragmentation Divided?

Bulgaria’s energy trajectory is a narrative of overcoming challenges, marked by the transition from an agrarian economy to an industrial complex that, for decades, was deeply tied to the Soviet orbit. Before 1944, the country had rudimentary infrastructure, with only 13% of settlements electrified and based on local resources such as firewood and coal.<sup>12</sup> However, the 1947 nationalisation and the communist regime drove heavy industrialisation that required the massive exploitation of lignite—a low-quality coal—and the construction of “megaprojects” such as the Maritsa East complex, which to this day represents the cornerstone of Bulgarian thermal production, contributing more than 40% of national electricity<sup>13</sup>.

This industrialisation was accompanied by technological and resource dependence on the USSR, consolidated in the 1960s. In 1969, the signing of the agreement for the Kozloduy Nuclear Power Plant made the country dependent on Soviet fuel and uranium enrichment, despite Bulgaria possessing its own deposits.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, the transport sector and heavy industry were shaped by the arrival of Russian oil and gas, symbolised by the Burgas refinery, the largest in Southeast Europe. Even after the collapse of communism in 1989, technological inertia maintained these ties, although the fall in GDP and the closure of old reactors at the request of the European Union transformed Bulgaria from a vulnerable importer into a regional electricity exporter due to its excess capacity<sup>15</sup>.



Hearings: Mariya Gabriel (Bulgaria) – innovation and youth.” by European Parliament, September 2019.

Source: CC BY 2.0.

Currently, the Bulgarian energy mix reflects this balance between historical legacy and innovation. Nuclear energy remains vital, providing 35% of the base load through the two active reactors at Kozloduy, while coal is still considered essential for short-term security,

despite the commitment to decommission by 2038. In the renewable sector, which already accounts for about 20% of the mix, biomass for heating and explosive growth in solar energy stand out. Photovoltaic capacity jumped from 100 MW in 2011 to more than 2,400 MW in 2023, reaching peak moments where solar production surpassed traditional sources, generating 31% of the country's electricity.

The invasion of Ukraine in 2022 represented the definitive break with the model of Russian dependence.<sup>16</sup> The unilateral cutting of gas by Gazprom forced Bulgaria to seek immediate alternatives in Azerbaijan and at LNG terminals in Greece, accelerating the “Westernisation” of the nuclear sector with the adoption of Westinghouse AP1000 technology.<sup>17</sup> Today, although it still carries the title of the most energy-intensive economy in the European Union—consuming 3.5 times more energy per unit of GDP than the bloc average—Bulgaria has consolidated its position as a strategic energy hub.<sup>18</sup> The country not only guarantees its own autonomy but also facilitates the transit of non-Russian energy to neighbours such as Serbia, Romania, and Ukraine itself, leading regional resilience; leaving the country, however, constantly trapped between Russian dependence and energy integration<sup>19</sup>.

## **Decoupling Energy from Russian Dependency and EU Integration**

Bulgaria's energy relationship with Russia was never simply technical: it was structural. For decades, national infrastructure was shaped to serve Soviet interests, culminating in Gazprom's control of 94% of Bulgaria's gas supply. The political dimension was equally entrenched—evidenced by Russian ownership of the Lukoil Neftochim refinery in Burgas and Kozloduy's decades-long dependence on Moscow for nuclear fuel and waste management.<sup>20</sup>

Bulgaria's entry into the European Union in 2007 acted as the main driver for the rupture of this inherited model, establishing security standards and environmental goals that directly collided with the old structure<sup>21</sup>. A striking example of this clash was the forced decommissioning of units 1 to 4 of Kozloduy as a condition for joining the bloc. Since then, the EU has become the largest financier of Bulgarian modernisation, allocating 1.2 billion euros to support the “Just Transition” from coal to clean sources by 2038.<sup>22</sup> Under this institutional and financial pressure, the country has demonstrated a surprising capacity for adaptation, reaching its 2020 renewable energy goals eight years ahead of schedule<sup>23</sup>.

Bulgaria is now experiencing what analysts describe as “strategic decoupling”: the replacement of Russian influence with Western technologies, exemplified by the choice of Westinghouse AP1000 reactors<sup>24</sup>, which explicitly excludes Russian companies from future nuclear bids. Combined with the IGB, diversified solar capacity, and Azerbaijani gas, Bulgaria has moved from oscillating between geopolitical poles to positioning itself as a stable regional hub<sup>25</sup>—one whose choices carry implications well beyond its own borders.

## **Why Is Bulgaria the “Perfect Case” For the European Union?**

Bulgaria is often cited as the “perfect case study” for the European energy transition because it compresses—within a relatively small territory—all the geopolitical, economic, and environmental dilemmas of the post-2022 era. Forced to diversify in months what others took decades to plan, Bulgaria demonstrated a “dynamic resilience” that belied its status as the EU's poorest economy. Yet what makes the case truly distinctive is its central paradox: whilst accelerating its “Westernisation”, Bulgaria remains host to Balkan Stream (the European extension of TurkStream)—the last pipeline gas corridor between Russia and the EU.<sup>26</sup>



Protest of Miners and People Employed in the Energy Sector, 12 January 2023. Source: NURPHOTO

The Bulgarian extension of this project, known internally as Balkan Stream, was built specifically to facilitate the transit of Russian gas from Turkey, creating a geographical paradox. While Sofia celebrates the expansion of its solar park—which already exceeds 2,400 MW and supplies up to 31% of the grid at production peaks—the country remains the caretaker of an infrastructure that serves Moscow’s interests in Southeast Europe<sup>27</sup>. This scenario reveals the dilemma between the “dynamic resilience” of the Bulgarian economy and the financial dependence on transit fees generated by the Russian flow, which fund part of the operation of its national infrastructure.

This transformation also exposes the recurring pitfall of poorly planned energy subsidies. Bulgaria has already experienced cost increases and mass protests capable of toppling governments. Today the challenge is to manage rapid solar growth—reaching 31% of electricity at peak moments—whilst maintaining tariff stability and public confidence in the transition.<sup>28</sup>

The Bulgarian metamorphosis also redefines the concept of regional connectivity. The country has ceased to be a “dead end” of Russian infrastructure to become the heart of a strategic hub for Southeast Europe<sup>29</sup>. Projects such as the Greece–Bulgaria Interconnector (IGB) and the Alexandroupolis LNG terminal allowed Sofia to start dictating the flow of non-Russian energy to Serbia, Romania, and even reverse volumes to Moldova and Ukraine.<sup>30</sup> This strategic pivot is accompanied by an irreversible technological shift in the nuclear sector, where the choice of Westinghouse AP1000 reactors marks the end of the VVER Soviet technology era and the beginning of a new phase of alignment with Western safety and supply standards<sup>31</sup>.



Protesters against the negotiations with Russia's Gazprom in Sofia, 30 August 2022. Source: NURPHOTO

However, Bulgaria still faces the Herculean challenge of decarbonisation in an economy that is 3.5 times more energy-intensive than the EU average. Coal (lignite) remains the backbone of national sovereignty, providing nearly half of the country's electricity and guaranteeing thousands of jobs<sup>32</sup>. The resistance to closing these mines before 2038 illustrates the latent conflict between Brussels' climate goals and Bulgarian domestic politics. In short, Bulgaria is the setting where climate security and national security collide most visibly, serving as the ultimate test for Europe's ability to reconcile geopolitical urgency with long-term climate ambition.

## Conclusion: What's On the Horizon?

Bulgaria's journey toward energy autonomy reaches a decisive stage in 2026, consolidating a structural break with the past and facing the volatilities of a global market in transformation. Prime Minister Rosen Zhelyazkov's announcement of the termination of Russian gas transit contracts later this year, with a total exit from this market expected by 2028<sup>33</sup>, marks the final chapter of an era. As the guardian of TurkStream—the last entry point for Russian pipeline gas into the European Union—the Bulgarian decision to eliminate these flows by the end of 2027 resonates far beyond its borders, challenging the energy security of neighbours such as Hungary and Slovakia, which still depend on Moscow for most of their supply<sup>34</sup>.

Internally, Bulgaria's energy transition is matched by an historic monetary shift: the adoption of the euro in January 2026 binds the country more firmly than ever to the EU's financial and regulatory architecture<sup>35</sup>. The Neftochim refinery has permanently ceased processing Russian crude, turning to global suppliers, whilst Bulgaria leads Black Sea exploration through OMV Petrom's participation in the Khan Tervel block and co-ordinates joint regional bids for North American LNG.<sup>36</sup>

The transition is not without near-term economic pain. Bulgargaz's proposed 5.12% gas price increase in April 2026—raising the rate to 34.27 EUR per megawatt-hour<sup>37</sup>—directly reflects the knock-on effects of Middle East conflicts, which pushed oil prices up by more than 40% and lifted prices at international hubs including the TTF and the Balkan Gas Hub. The knock-on pressure on diesel and retail energy prices has drawn warnings from the Fiscal Council about inflation and import costs.<sup>38</sup>

Bulgaria's trajectory since 2022 is, above all, a study in the relationship between crisis and structural change. In under three years, a country once dismissed as Europe's most vulnerable energy dependency has repositioned itself as an indispensable node in the continent's new supply architecture. Yet the path ahead is demanding. The 2027/2028 phase-out of Russian transit gas will test both Bulgarian infrastructure and the political will of neighbouring states. Decarbonising one of the EU's most energy-intensive economies by 2038—whilst managing inflation, political instability, and the social costs of coalfield closure—requires sustained political coherence that Bulgaria has not always been able to deliver. What is clear is that Bulgaria's energy choices are no longer purely national: they shape the security calculus of South-East Europe, and increasingly, the credibility of the EU's own energy transition. The question is not whether Bulgaria can sustain this trajectory, but whether Europe will give it the institutional and financial support to do so.

## Policy Recommendations

- The government should prioritise subsidy policies and tax incentives specifically aimed at modernizing machinery and thermal insulation in heavy industry. Reducing energy intensity is the fastest way to lower production costs and make the country less vulnerable to international price shocks.
- To avoid the political instability that has toppled governments in the past, it is crucial that the €1.2 billion from the EU Just Transition Fund be applied to the direct retraining of workers in lignite regions (such as Maritsa Iztok). The 2038 target will only be met if there is a viable economic alternative for local communities.
- Bulgaria must continue to invest in interconnectivity with Greece and Romania to consolidate the north-south flow. This ensures that when Russian flows definitively cease in 2027/2028, Bulgarian infrastructure does not become an "idle asset," but rather the main global LNG route to Central Europe.
- Given energy inflation and the adoption of the euro in 2026, the energy regulator (EWRC) must implement stricter transparency mechanisms in price formation. This is essential to maintain public support for the energy transition, preventing the perception of "abusive prices" from fuelling populist movements opposed to European integration.

# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Aleksieva, R.; Tcolova, K. Bulgaria. In: Hillebrand, E. *Energy Without Russia: How Europe Has Reacted to the Supply Crisis after the Attack on Ukraine*, 2023.
- <sup>2</sup> Aleksieva, R.; Tcolova, K. Bulgaria. In: Hillebrand, E. *Energy Without Russia: How Europe Has Reacted to the Supply Crisis after the Attack on Ukraine*, 2023.
- <sup>3</sup> Aleksieva, R.; Tcolova, K. Bulgaria. In: Hillebrand, E. *Energy Without Russia: How Europe Has Reacted to the Supply Crisis after the Attack on Ukraine*, 2023.
- <sup>4</sup> Bogoni, A. *The Energy Sector of Bulgaria: Mitigating Historical Dependence on Russia*. Blue Europe: Luxembourg, 2024.
- <sup>5</sup> Rangelova, Kostantsa; Vladimirov, Martin. *The Future of Natural Gas in South-East Europe: Diversification and Phaseout After the Russian Invasion of Ukraine*. Centre for the Study of Democracy, 2023.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Aleksieva, R.; Tcolova, K. Bulgaria. In: Hillebrand, E. *Energy Without Russia: How Europe Has Reacted to the Supply Crisis after the Attack on Ukraine*, 2023.
- <sup>8</sup> Aleksieva, R.; Tcolova, K. Bulgaria. In: Hillebrand, E. *Energy Without Russia: How Europe Has Reacted to the Supply Crisis after the Attack on Ukraine*, 2023.
- <sup>9</sup> TurkStream-Bulgaria gas transit. Available at: <https://altanalyses.org/en/2026/03/11/turkstream-bulgaria-russian-gas/>
- <sup>10</sup> Bogoni, A. *The Energy Sector of Bulgaria: Mitigating Historical Dependence on Russia*. Blue Europe: Luxembourg, 2024.
- <sup>11</sup> Bogoni, A. *The Energy Sector of Bulgaria: Mitigating Historical Dependence on Russia*. Blue Europe: Luxembourg, 2024.
- <sup>12</sup> Tchalakov, Ivan; Mitev, Tihomir. *Energy dependence behind the iron curtain: the Bulgarian experience*. *Energy Policy*, v. 126, p. 47-56, 2019.
- <sup>13</sup> Tchalakov, Ivan; Mitev, Tihomir. *Energy dependence behind the iron curtain: the Bulgarian experience*. *Energy Policy*, v. 126, p. 47-56, 2019.
- <sup>14</sup> Tchalakov, Ivan; Mitev, Tihomir. *Energy dependence behind the iron curtain: the Bulgarian experience*. *Energy Policy*, v. 126, p. 47-56, 2019.
- <sup>15</sup> Tchalakov, Ivan; Mitev, Tihomir. *Energy dependence behind the iron curtain: the Bulgarian experience*. *Energy Policy*, v. 126, p. 47-56, 2019.
- <sup>16</sup> Rangelova, Kostantsa; Vladimirov, Martin. *The Future of Natural Gas in Southeast Europe: Diversification and Phaseout after the Russian Invasion in Ukraine*. Center for the Study of Democracy, 2023.
- <sup>17</sup> Rangelova, Kostantsa; Vladimirov, Martin. *The Future of Natural Gas in Southeast Europe: Diversification and Phaseout after the Russian Invasion in Ukraine*. Center for the Study of Democracy, 2023.
- <sup>18</sup> Rangelova, Kostantsa; Vladimirov, Martin. *The Future of Natural Gas in Southeast Europe: Diversification and Phaseout after the Russian Invasion in Ukraine*. Center for the Study of Democracy, 2023.
- <sup>19</sup> Rangelova, Kostantsa; Vladimirov, Martin. *The Future of Natural Gas in Southeast Europe: Diversification and Phaseout after the Russian Invasion in Ukraine*. Center for the Study of Democracy, 2023.
- <sup>20</sup> Rangelova, Kostantsa; Vladimirov, Martin. *The Future of Natural Gas in Southeast Europe: Diversification and Phaseout after the Russian Invasion in Ukraine*. Center for the Study of Democracy, 2023.
- <sup>21</sup> Tchalakov, Ivan; Mitev, Tihomir. *Energy dependence behind the iron curtain: the Bulgarian experience*. *Energy Policy*, v. 126, p. 47-56, 2019.
- <sup>22</sup> The Kozloduy nuclear power plant in Bulgaria. Available at: [https://nuclearenergy.gr/en/ko-zloduy-nuclear-power-plant/#google\\_vignette](https://nuclearenergy.gr/en/ko-zloduy-nuclear-power-plant/#google_vignette)
- <sup>23</sup> Bogoni, A. *The Energy Sector of Bulgaria: Mitigating Historical Dependence on Russia*. Blue Europe: Luxembourg, 2024.
- <sup>24</sup> Bogoni, A. *The Energy Sector of Bulgaria: Mitigating Historical Dependence on Russia*. Blue Europe: Luxembourg, 2024.
- <sup>25</sup> Bogoni, A. *The Energy Sector of Bulgaria: Mitigating Historical Dependence on Russia*. Blue Europe: Luxembourg, 2024.
- <sup>26</sup> TurkStream-Bulgaria gas transit. Available at: <https://altanalyses.org/en/2026/03/11/turkstream-bulgaria-russian-gas/>
- <sup>27</sup> TurkStream-Bulgaria gas transit. Available at: <https://altanalyses.org/en/2026/03/11/turkstream-bulgaria-russian-gas/>
- <sup>28</sup> Tchalakov, Ivan; Mitev, Tihomir. *Energy dependence behind the iron curtain: the Bulgarian experience*. *Energy Policy*, v. 126, p. 47-56, 2019.
- <sup>29</sup> Bogoni, A. *The Energy Sector of Bulgaria: Mitigating Historical Dependence on Russia*. Blue Europe: Luxembourg, 2024.
- <sup>30</sup> Bogoni, A. *The Energy Sector of Bulgaria: Mitigating Historical Dependence on Russia*. Blue Europe: Luxembourg, 2024.
- <sup>31</sup> Bogoni, A. *The Energy Sector of Bulgaria: Mitigating Historical Dependence on Russia*. Blue Europe: Luxembourg, 2024.
- <sup>32</sup> Bogoni, A. *The Energy Sector of Bulgaria: Mitigating Historical Dependence on Russia*. Blue Europe: Luxembourg, 2024.
- <sup>33</sup> Bulgaria to end Russian gas transit. Available at: <https://report.az/en/other-countries/bulgaria-to-end-russian-gas-transit-by-2026>
- <sup>34</sup> Bulgaria end Russian gas flows to Hungary and Slovakia. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/bulgaria-end-russian-gas-flows-hungary-slovakia-2027-phaseout-deadline-energy-trump/>
- <sup>35</sup> Bulgaria end Russian gas flows to Hungary and Slovakia. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/bulgaria-end-russian-gas-flows-hungary-slovakia-2027-phaseout-deadline-energy-trump/>
- <sup>36</sup> Aleksieva, Remina; Tcoolooova, Kalina. Bulgaria. In: Hillebrand, Ernst. *Energy Without Russia: How Eu-*

# Endnotes

rope Has Reacted to the Supply Crisis after the Attack on Ukraine, 2023.

<sup>37</sup> Aleksieva, Remina; Tcooloova, Kalina. Bulgaria. In: Hillebrand, Ernst. Energy Without Russia: How Europe Has Reacted to the Supply Crisis after the Attack on Ukraine, 2023.

<sup>38</sup> Aleksieva, Remina; Tcooloova, Kalina. Bulgaria. In: Hillebrand, Ernst. Energy Without Russia: How Europe Has Reacted to the Supply Crisis after the Attack on Ukraine, 2023.



**The Peace & Security Monitor is produced by  
the Platform for Peace and Humanity**

The Peace & Security Monitor  
South East Europe & Black Sea Region  
Issue 19 | March 2026  
ISSN: 2989-3046

**Platform for Peace and Humanity**

[office@peacehumanity.org](mailto:office@peacehumanity.org)

[www.peacehumanity.org](http://www.peacehumanity.org)

