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On the second anniversary of Kosovo's declaration of independence, divisions within the EU over Kosovo's status continue to deepen. Following the [controversy caused by the ill-conceived strategy for the north](#), the so-called Quint is exerting ever more vehement diplomatic pressure on Serbia not to oppose Kosovo's independence.

By contrast, Spain, which assumed the presidency of the EU in January, advocates renewed negotiations and the search for a mutually acceptable outcome. Amid these disagreements, a key Kosovo official has warned that Albanians in Serbia's south-east are ready to join Kosovo should Serbs in the north continue to resist integration. Though a minority position within the EU, Spain's stance provides the most constructive way to resolve the Kosovo status impasse and bring lasting peace to the region.

The Quint – comprised of Britain, Germany, France, Italy and the US – recently sent a [strongly worded communiqué](#) to the Serbian foreign ministry, stating that "we have tolerated until now the Serbian aggressive rhetoric regarding Kosovo, because we believed that with time passing it could be taken off the agenda" and warning Serbia to abstain from "adventurous actions" once the International Court of Justice (ICJ) delivers its verdict of the legality of Kosovo's declaration of independence.

It remains unclear exactly what the Quint meant by "aggressive rhetoric" and "adventurous actions". Though Vuk Jeremic, Serbia's foreign minister, has proposed a special session of the UN General Assembly following the ICJ's verdict, with the aim of securing support for fresh negotiations over Kosovo's status, such initiatives are in keeping with Serbia's vow to pursue all peaceful, diplomatic and legal means to oppose Kosovo's independence.

This approach has been favourably received by Spain, in particular, whose ambassador to Belgrade, Iñigo de Palacio España, [asserted](#) that "the opinion of the International Court of Justice... will offer a very important opportunity for restarting dialogue, that would help us find a functional, sustainable agreement for all sides involved in the Kosovo question, which we

believe remains unsolved".

One of five EU member states - alongside Greece, Cyprus, Slovakia and Romania - who refuse to recognise Kosovo's independence, Spain has long supported Serbia's position. During public hearings at the ICJ, Spain's representative, Concepción Escobar Hernández, [persuasively argued](#) that, "the unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo cannot be in accordance with international law because it violated the principle of territorial integrity and sovereignty of Serbia, which is engraved in UN security council resolution 1244" and that "1244 is still in power, and... the political process for seeking a solution is ongoing, until the security council passes a different decision".

Though motivated in part by its own domestic interests, Spain remains deeply aware of the potential for frozen conflict in the Balkans, which will only further complicate and delay the region's journey towards the EU. Indeed, as if to prophesy the future conditions that Serbia will invariably face, Iñigo de Palacio España contended that "it would really be a paradox that Serbia, who is making efforts to find a solution through dialogue and negotiations, is punished and stopped on its path towards European integration". The EU's twin accession requirements of "good neighbourly relations" and constructive regional co-operation will soon become the main leverage employed against Serbia by the principal protagonists of Kosovo's independence.

As uncertainty over Kosovo's status continues to mount, the president of the Kosovo assembly, Jakup Krasniqi, has indulged in further secessionist and "aggressive rhetoric" by [warning that "ethnic Albanians in southern Serbia are ready to join Kosovo"](#) should Serbs in the north of Kosovo continue to oppose integration into Pristina's institutions. In response, Serbia's state secretary for Kosovo and Metohija, Oliver Ivanovic, immediately called upon the international community to condemn such "warmongering"; a request that remains unanswered despite the [severity and implication](#) of Krasniqi's remarks. In light of such threats, claims that Kosovo's independence contributes to regional peace and stability seem ever more incredulous and insincere.

For Lady Ashton, the new high representative of the EU, who is scheduled to visit Belgrade on 18 February, the western Balkans represents one of the most challenging, yet important, aspects of her portfolio; one that could further erode the EU's claim to be a significant player on the world stage. With the ICJ's verdict now imminent, heeding Spain's advice on Kosovo would provide the EU with an opportunity to secure a sustainable solution to the status issue; one that

EU divisions over Kosovo get deeper

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would be based upon, and demonstrate the pull of, the EU's instruments of "soft power", its multilateral approach to dispute resolution and its commitment to the UN system and the principles of international law.

Continuing to pursue the current course risks compromising the EU's entire strategy towards the region, particularly Bosnia and Herzegovina, and undermining the development of an effective and coherent common foreign and security policy more generally.