

# Report

## **“In-House meeting with a five-member delegation from Kosovo”**

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**THE INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC STUDIES,  
ISLAMABAD**

*“In-House Meeting with a five-member delegation from Kosovo”*

On 10 March, 2014, the Chairman of the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI), welcomed a five-member delegation from Kosovo headed by Mr Enver Hoxhaj, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kosovo. The Minister’s visit to Pakistan marks the first ever visit by a Kosovo official to the country. The Institute hosted a lively in-house discussion that touched upon Kosovo-Pakistan relations and Kosovo’s progress since its declaration of independence in 2008.

Mr Hoxhaj discussed the history of his country, explaining that Kosovo was a part of Yugoslavia, which ceased to exist in 1991. In the late 1990’s, Kosovo faced ethnic cleansing and human rights violations at the hands of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, who championed Serbian nationalism and tried to suppress the ethnic Albanian majority’s independence campaign in Kosovo. By the summer of 1998, Albanians had stepped up their protests against Serbian rule and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) continued to oppose the Serbian crackdown. After a failed attempt by the international community to broker peace, NATO launched air strikes against targets in Kosovo and Serbia in March 1999. Milosevic was later tried for war crimes against the Kosovo Albanians.

Mr Hoxhaj discussed the current situation in Kosovo in terms of five major parameters; political stability, economic stability, military security, building an inclusive, multiethnic society, and creating a vibrant civil society and free media. In terms of economic stability, he explained that Kosovo has been able to maintain economic and fiscal stability despite the fact that the world was facing a global financial crisis just as Kosovo gained independence in 2008. Over the past three years, Kosovo has maintained an annual GDP growth rate of 5%. Political stability is also critical for young nations like Kosovo and the country has been able to maintain a stable political landscape even though it is the youngest state in south-east Europe. Kosovo has also been able to build up its military security and its police and armed forces have assumed responsibility for safeguarding the country. Mr Hoxhaj acknowledged the fact that Pakistan contributed soldiers to the peacekeeping mission in Kosovo.

Another important point that he touched upon was the importance of building a multiethnic society in a region that has been plagued by violent ethnic conflict. Maintaining a balance between the majority and minority ethnic groups was the biggest challenge for Kosovo and the government has taken steps to integrate all the minority groups. Furthermore, he spoke about the creation of a free media and vibrant civil society, both of which are essential pre-requisites for a tolerant and open multiethnic society.

With regard to Kosovo’s regional aspirations, Mr Hoxhaj explained that Kosovo began negotiations with the EU last year, for which it had to meet certain benchmarks with respect to economic and political security and the status of its minorities. Kosovo has expressed its desire to become a member of the European Union and NATO.

Kosovo has a bitter history with Serbia but the delegation maintained that as a small state, it recognizes the importance of pragmatism in engaging with all its neighbors, especially Serbia. For this reason, although Serbia and Kosovo do not have full diplomatic relations, they have been engaging on a diplomatic level since 2007 and have agreed upon a modus vivendi in order to ensure cooperation. Kosovo maintains a liaison office in Belgrade and there are three permanent border crossings between the two countries, although border demarcation remains an outstanding issue for the Balkan region as a whole. Mr Hoxhaj stated that although he would

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like to have an embassy and official border demarcation and resolution of all outstanding issues, it is in Kosovo’s national interest to maintain relations and engage with its neighbors.

Finally, the Minister reaffirmed his commitment to forging a relationship with Pakistan at all levels. He reasoned that Kosovo could be an important transit point for Pakistan to gain access to the European market. Similarly, Pakistan is a very important hub for Kosovo in terms of political, trade and economic ties, and access to the South Asian region as a whole. He also appreciated the efforts of the Pakistani government in fighting terrorism and acknowledged that terrorism is a security threat faced by all countries. In outlining a roadmap for increased cooperation between Pakistan and Kosovo, Mr Hoxhaj put forth the idea of people to people contact through educational scholarships and cultural exchanges in order to bring the people of the two nations together.

Meanwhile, the Chairman expressed admiration for Kosovo’s struggle for self-determination and conceded that Pakistan had taken some time in giving formal recognition to Kosovo. 2013 marked the first time a Pakistani official visited Kosovo after Pakistan formally recognized the country. He appreciated and reaffirmed Mr Hoxhaj’s suggestion for people to people interaction between the two nations and said that Pakistan looked forward to Kosovo becoming a member of the EU. Both the Chairman and Mr Hoxhaj called for collaboration at the diplomatic level and between scholars and research institutions from both countries.

- *Prepared by*

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