



INTEGRATED BORDER MANAGEMENT AND FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT - THE LINE OF DIVISION BETWEEN (NON)FRIENDS

Integrated Border Management and Freedom of Movement - The Line of Division between (Non)Friends

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Integrated Border Management (IBM) is a coordinated approach to controlling and monitoring state borders, with the goal of increasing efficiency, security, and facilitating the legal crossing of borders. This concept relies on the cooperation of various state bodies, agencies, and international partners to provide a comprehensive approach to border management. The development of this concept can be traced back to the late 20th and early 21st centuries, particularly in the European Union. In 2002, the EU adopted a program for the integrated management of external borders, which was one of the first formal steps towards the implementation of this concept. The second step was the 2006 EU Council decision, which established the foundations of IBM in three main components: harmonization of legislation, increased operational cooperation, and solidarity through the establishment of a fund for managing the EU's common external border. These two moments created the space for IBM to be further consolidated in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, specifically in Article 77, better known as the Treaty of Lisbon 2009. Today, the concept has evolved and is applied more widely, from the Western Balkans to North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia.

The decision to introduce IBM is often motivated by the need for more efficient and secure border control in light of growing challenges such as migration, terrorism, cross-border crime, and the globalization of trade. EU member states, for example, decided to introduce IBM to ensure the security of the Schengen zone, enable free movement within the zone, and efficiently manage external borders. The introduction of IBM requires a thorough assessment of existing capacities, identification of areas for improvement, and the establishment of clear protocols and procedures for cooperation and coordination between different services and agencies involved in border management.

The purpose of integrated border management is multifaceted. The increase in security is reflected in the reduction of illegal migration, human trafficking, smuggling of goods, and other forms of cross-border crime. This method of border management increases efficiency through better coordination between different services and agencies, leading to faster and more efficient border

control processes. Legal border crossing is easier, conditions for travelers and trade are improved, waiting times are reduced, and the flow of people and goods is increased, saving time and money. A key element of the IBM concept is cooperation and interoperability. By harmonizing the legal frameworks, standards, and practices of different services, from veterinary and phytosanitary to security service coordination and data exchange, cooperation between national and international bodies, as well as between different agencies within the country, is improved.

When we talk about the advantages of this type of border management, we primarily mean increased security through better coordination and information exchange, which reduces the risk of cross-border crime. The duplication of work and costs is reduced through coordinated actions and shared resources, leading to greater efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Better service for citizens and businesses is reflected in faster and more efficient crossing of the border. Finally, cooperation with international partners and neighboring countries is improved.

The drawbacks of the concept are also significant for analysis. The introduction of an integrated system can be expensive due to the necessary infrastructure, technology, and training required to implement comprehensive policies. Successful implementation requires a high level of coordination between different agencies and bodies, which can be challenging even within the same country, let alone with neighboring states. Different state bodies may have different priorities and jurisdictions, which can lead to conflicts of interest. Concerns about privacy protection are also an issue: intensified control and information exchange may raise concerns about privacy and data protection, as well as the potential for data misuse. The concept makes more sense as a tool for countries that share borders, are at peace, and consider the other side a friend. A drawback of the concept could be that its implementation depends on the level of friendship and trust cultivated between the two sides, which then goes down to lower levels of government.

This type of cooperation is difficult even within a framework where partners are mutually recognized sovereign states that voluntarily decide to share part

of their sovereignty with a supranational body, neighboring states, and international partners. If we take the classic definition of a state, which includes a defined and internationally recognized territory, population, and sovereign authority over the territory, the question arises whether the IBM concept is reserved only for states without territorial challenges or whether it can also be applied in cases where one side views the delineation of the territory as an administrative line and the other as a state border. Another challenge is the prerequisite for the success of such complex cooperation, which is the level of trust built between partners to the point of friendship. If this is lacking, the question arises as to how effective implementation can be if we consider the four freedoms of the EU that lie at the heart of the policies of the 27-member club – the freedom of movement of people, capital, goods, and services.

After NATO's intervention in 1999, relations between Serbia and Kosovo remained extremely tense and complex. The intervention resulted in the withdrawal of Serbian forces from Kosovo and the establishment of international administration under the auspices of the United Nations, effectively making Kosovo a UN protectorate. A decade later, in 2008, Kosovo declared independence, which Serbia did not recognize. Since then, numerous dialogues have been conducted with the mediation of the European Union with the aim of normalizing relations, but these were often interrupted due to political tensions and incidents on the ground. Although some technical agreements were reached that facilitated the daily lives of citizens, fundamental issues regarding the status of Kosovo and sovereignty remain unresolved, which continues to burden relations between Belgrade and Priština, as well as the implementation of existing agreements.

However, in 2011, Edita Tahiri on behalf of Kosovo and Borko Stefanović on behalf of Serbia began technical negotiations under the auspices of the EU on issues of daily importance. Many significant agreements were reached, including the Agreement on Civil Registry Books, Cadastral Records, Freedom of Movement, Recognition of Diplomas, Customs Seals, Regional Representation and Cooperation, Collection of Customs Duties, Telecommunications, and Energy. Most agreements showed weak

implementation on both sides, a lack of political will, but also the absence of human resources and finances that would bring visible benefits to citizens. Challenges in implementing the agreements remain, and their progress is conditioned by the level of animosity between the parties.

The nature of the dialogue changed on 19 April 2013, when the First Agreement on Principles Governing the Normalisation of Relations, known as the Brussels Agreement, was reached. This agreement marked the beginning of political dialogue and negotiations at the highest level between representatives of Kosovo and Serbia, including presidents and prime ministers. The Brussels Agreement laid the foundation for resolving several key issues such as the Community of Serb Municipalities in Kosovo, the integration of the judiciary, police, and civil protection of the Serbian parallel structures in the northern municipalities into Kosovo's system, as well as holding local elections in these municipalities under Kosovo's jurisdiction. In this period, other significant agreements were also made, such as the General Principles/Main Elements of the Community of Serb Municipalities, Civil Protection Integration, Agreement on the Judiciary, the Removal of Barricades and Revitalization of the Bridge in Mitrovica, and the Exchange of Liaison Officers. All these agreements face varying degrees of implementation challenges, and this text will focus on one, the Agreement on Integrated Border Management (IBM), which is closely related to the Agreement on Freedom of Movement from 2 July 2011.

In the conclusions adopted on 2 December 2011, in the first article, both sides agreed to implement IBM: "In accordance with the Lisbon Treaty and relevant EU legislation, and considering that both sides are part of the EU Agenda for the Western Balkans, they will be required to gradually harmonize their legislation with EU acquis, particularly to implement the IBM concept." Five months earlier, a general agreement on freedom of movement was established with the intention that "residents of each side should be able to travel freely within or across the territory of the other side."

The agreement on freedom of movement brought us a system of personal documents for entry/exit forms, mutual recognition of driver's licenses, extension of the validity of KS plates, which will later be replaced by a more permanent solution, facilitated easier registration of plates in Kosovo, opening of transit crossings for Kosovo citizens traveling through Serbia, the sticker regime that was in force for a long time, and temporary auto insurance used for vehicles when moving on the territory of the other side. These solutions, as will be seen below, have enabled a drastically increased movement of people and vehicles on the territory of the other side, which not only improves the already agreed freedom of movement but also stimulates economic activity.

From this perspective, IBM has brought many benefits but also limitations that still exist. Six IBM crossings were established, systematic data sharing, continuous operation of crossings, the presence of veterinary, phytosanitary, auxiliary, and other services at crossings for at least twelve hours, as well as simplified checks in unforeseen circumstances.

Although it is not the subject of this analysis, full implementation of the four freedoms is possible if the agreement on the Common Regional Market, as a prelude to EU membership adopted at the Sofia Summit, is implemented. Freedom of movement of people with only identity cards has already been adopted, while the implementation of policies related to the free movement of goods, capital, and services is still awaited. An electronic data exchange system has been established, one-stop-shop crossings that will significantly reduce waiting times, green lanes that will drastically reduce waiting times towards countries in the region and the EU, and mutual recognition of certificates and licenses.

The general agreements, often burdened by the daily political agenda of leaders in Belgrade and Priština, were followed by many agreements of varying capacity, from written to email correspondence to oral agreements, with the aim that the four freedoms are generally guaranteed. With this goal, Serbia and Kosovo have adopted strategies on integrated border

management and generally share the idea of the concept, methodology, and purpose of this advanced concept of state border management.

According to the Integrated Border Management Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for the period 2022 to 2027, the concept of integrated border management of the Republic of Serbia implies the protection of its own and external EU borders, contributing to regional and European security while respecting international law. It requires changes to the normative and strategic framework, improvement of border control, strengthening institutional cooperation and capacity of services, as well as continuous improvement of business processes and technical equipment. Effective border control includes significant financial investments, the development of IT systems, and readiness for rapid changes and adequate responses to security threats. The strategy aligns the system with the European model through border control, suppression of cross-border crime, protection of human rights, risk analysis, institutional and international cooperation, return of foreigners, information exchange, and training.

At the same time, the state Strategy on Integrated Border Management of the Republic of Kosovo for the period 2020 to 2025 envisages similar plans: the Republic of Kosovo has clearly defined its purpose and vision for the full implementation of the IBM concept to strengthen security and border management. The free movement of people and goods is a key element of an efficient IBM system, based on EU principles, which ensures open but well-controlled and secure borders. Kosovo is committed to adhering to an efficient EU border management system, which allows for the free and legitimate movement of people and goods, prevents cross-border crime, protects citizens' health, while adhering to the highest standards of human rights and freedoms. In the drafting of this strategy, all levels of cooperation of border authorities and all IBM components were considered, with the aim of developing and strengthening the legal, institutional, and technical capacities of Kosovo to align with EU and international border management policies and strategies. Effective border management and security is Kosovo's main priority, with the main task of

ensuring the right balance between open but at the same time secure and controlled borders.

The difference between these two strategies is that Serbia's strategy does not recognize a state border with Kosovo, while Kosovo's duly records the border and border crossings with Serbia, which make up 51% of the total border. Nevertheless, both authorities and their strategies recognize that the proper implementation of IBM means progress of the society towards EU membership, which consequently means more democracy, the rule of law, respect for human and minority rights, and ultimately a better standard of living for all.

However, challenges in the freedom of movement of people and goods still largely exist even ten years later, while the freedom of movement of capital and services is of limited capacity. Political restrictions on freedom of movement, often without any notice, have been used by both sides, seriously burdening the freedom of movement of people despite the record-high frequency of border/administrative line crossings. The agreed number of crossings is still not established to the full capacity, which reduces opportunities for crossing, increases travel costs, slows down traffic, and during holidays creates significant congestion. Stickers for registrations, entry-exit papers, additional vehicle insurance, (non)-recognition of license plates have completely destroyed or continue to destroy the idea of IBM and freedom of movement.

Despite the agreements reached on freedom of movement and other agreements on the normalisation of relations, including the Ohrid Agreement of 2023 and the Annex on the Implementation of the Agreement on the Normalisation of Relations between Belgrade and Priština, from 2011 to June 2024, both sides continued to use entry bans to their territories as a political tool. Entry has been denied to political representatives from both sides, as well as public officials, media, artists, religious representatives, and citizens.

LIMITED FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT FOR PEOPLE

Since the adoption of the agreement on free movement, which enabled the recognition of travel documents and the gradual lifting of various travel bans and restrictions, including the adoption of the IBM concept that allows for smoother movement of people and goods, there has been a significant increase in travelers between Serbia and Kosovo. In just one year from the agreement's entry into force, during the period of 2011 and 2012, based on available data, the Kosovo police recorded 100,000 more crossings than in the previous year. The agreements also reduced costs for the diaspora, which previously had to use alternative road routes averaging 400 kilometers longer than the newly established routes.

The table below shows the number of crossings generated over five years at six crossings and three categories. The data clearly indicate that the need to use the established crossings is more than evident, primarily for the local population, but also for travelers from the region and the EU. Over those five years, according to the data from the six border crossings, more than 23 million crossings were registered.

Crossings between Serbia and Kosovo	Entries/exits of Serbia and Kosovo citizens	Entries/exits of citizens from the region (AL, MCD, BiH and MNE)	Entries/exits of EU/EEA citizens
2017 -2021.			
Bërnjak/Tabaliqe	1,490,619	159,598	65,762
Jarinjë/Rudnica	3,727,744	122,655	169,962
Merdarë/e	4,339,913	254,562	1,009,469
Dheu and Bardhë/ Konçulj	6,795,247	111,068	690,045
Muçibabë/ Depce	3,200,168	194,527	206,931
Mutivodë/e	477,255	5,350	107,070
TOTAL	20,030,946	847,760	2,249,239

Source: Kosovo Police, Border Department. The data is summarized by the Balkans Group and the author of this text.

Since the technical solution within the dialogue led to the generation of a higher number of passenger crossings through Serbia, the economic argument, alongside the freedom of movement, supports the full implementation of the solution, including the completion of infrastructure issues at the crossings themselves, as well as the roads that will enable citizens and the economy to reach their final destinations more safely and quickly.

The same data show that in 2011, 647,539 vehicles crossed the borders, while in 2018, the number of vehicle crossings tripled to 1,899,640, with a tendency for further growth. This means that in transit or visits, citizens who travel spend substantial amounts on fuel, food, accommodation, and other necessities, benefiting the local economy and the budgets of the Republic of Serbia/Kosovo. In other words, efficient and effective freedom of movement and the full implementation of IBM, which facilitates the legal flow of people and goods, have far-reaching positive consequences on our lives, beyond the primary ideas for which they were established. For the economy, quick and reliable crossings mean reduced transportation costs, which could consequently lead to lower food prices and more money in citizens' pockets, while simultaneously increasing supply in the competitive market.

However, not everyone shares this perspective, and we witness the undermining of freedom of movement and the inadequate implementation of IBM, with numerous acts of sabotage for short-term political gains. Restrictions on freedom of movement were evident during bans on entering Serbia or Kosovo by the authorities in Belgrade and Priština, which, over a period of ten or more years, often caused tensions, chain reactions, and suspension of negotiations. These same negotiations, from the initial talks between Edita Tahiri and Borko Stefanović to the discussions between President Aleksandar Vučić and Prime Minister Albin Kurti, are marked by distrust, an inability to grasp the bigger picture, or a lack of vision. We have often seen that unilateral actions lead to reactions due to a lack of trust that the other side will fulfill the agreements. Meanwhile, months, even years, have passed during escalations over

certain issues, which were later resolved in the way initially planned. Examples include the customs stamps, personal documents, license plates, and the final recognition of plates. Ultimately, the freedom of movement of people, goods, capital, and services has been attempted to be secured through additional agreements within various efforts to establish connectivity within the region (initiatives such as the Berlin Process (Connectivity Agenda), the Multi-Annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area (MAP REA), the “Mini Schengen”, later the Open Balkans, and the previously mentioned Common Regional Market (CRM)). However, once again, it has been shown that bilateral issues continue to impede any significant progress at the regional level.

Movement bans further burden the progress in implementing what has been achieved and the evolution of already implemented practices that are already functioning based on outdated agreements. News of entry bans from both sides has treated such situations in completely different ways, exposing citizens to contradictory information when trying to understand the reasons for the entry bans from both Kosovo and Serbian media. Each side has mostly claimed the opposite: while one side argued that the ban was justified and there was a reason, the other side stated that all necessary steps had been taken to enter the other’s territory. In some cases, this information was easy to verify, but in most cases, government representatives gave completely contradictory official statements.

One of the most common reasons for denying entry or refusing permission to enter were the following reasons: non-compliance with procedure (lack of an official entry request in the case of state representatives), violation of agreements, and security reasons.

Below are examples of publicly available bans from both sides that affected officials, politicians, religious representatives, journalists, athletes, and other citizens. This list is not exhaustive and represents only some of the examples that sparked public debate about the causes and truthfulness of the movement bans.

Since the Brussels Agreement, we have recorded movement bans every year, and depending on the level of heated relations between Belgrade and Priština, the bans have been more or less dramatic. The election campaign was mentioned as one of the reasons for preventing Serbian officials from entering the territory of Kosovo, according to Edita Tahiri, head of the Kosovo negotiating team, in early October 2013. The news was soon denied by Hashim Thaçi's advisor, Bekim Çollaku, who stated for Radio Free Europe that the decision to ban Serbian officials from entering Kosovo was not in force. This example illustrates not only the contradiction of information coming even within one side but also the need for the other side to escalate the situation excessively without valid, timely information.

Due to untimeliness at the end of 2013, the then Minister without Portfolio in charge of Kosovo and Metohija, Aleksandar Vulin, was denied entry to Kosovo for a visit to Štrpce, despite submitting a request. According to the then EU High Representative in Priština, the reason for the refusal was the failure to meet the 72-hour deadline, while Aleksandar Vulin claimed that the request was submitted within the prescribed time. During his tenure as Minister of Defense, Vulin was also denied a visit to Kosovo for the celebration of Vidovdan at Gazimestan in 2018, without stating a reason, while all other Serbian officials' requests were approved according to Kosovo authorities.

It was not just the government that was subject to bans. Vojislav Šešelj, who was convicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia for incitement to persecution, deportation, and forced displacement of Croats in the Vojvodina village of Hrtkovci in 1992, was banned from entering Kosovo on 8 April 2016, precisely because of the crimes for which he was judicially held responsible. Indeed, the same fate of a convicted war criminal awaits at the borders of almost any democratic state in the world.

The most repeated entry bans to the territory of Kosovo were applied to the former Director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija, Marko Đurić,

who held this position from 2014 to 2020 and visited Kosovo more than 150 times during his mandate. One example was in 2014 when Marko Đurić was denied entry to Kosovo on 1 July during a planned visit to Zvečan, the Trepča Mining and Metallurgical Factory, where he was supposed to meet with the factory's management and have discussions with representatives of Serbs from northern Kosovo. Đurić was turned back at the crossing, and this entry ban was described by the Serbian representative as a “flagrant violation of the agreement”. However, a more dramatic situation captured on camera occurred when members of the Kosovo Police Special Unit arrested Marko Đurić immediately after crossing into Kosovo in North Mitrovica on 26 March 2018. The Deputy Prime Minister of Kosovo, Enver Hoxhaj, confirmed that Đurić was arrested because he entered without permission, which constitutes a violation of the agreement, while official information from Serbia claimed that all procedures were followed.

During the “Mirëdita, dobar dan” festival in June 2017 in Belgrade, former President of Kosovo, Atifete Jahjaga, was turned back at the crossing and denied entry to Serbia on that occasion. Atifete stated at the time that the reason was “absurd”, emphasizing that the Serbian institutions were informed in time about her arrival.

Entry bans have also been applied to the new Director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija, Petar Petković. In 2021, he was denied entry to Kosovo six times. Petar Petković claims that, by 12 October 2022, he had been denied entry a total of ten times without explanation, despite submitting proper requests. Besides the director of the office, employees of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija have also been prevented from entering Kosovo and Metohija. For instance, in 2019, Dušan Kozarev was denied entry when visiting Kosovo for a non-political purpose.

Among prominent Serbian officials, on 12 March 2020, the then Secretary General of the President of Serbia, Nikola Selaković, who is now the Minister of Culture, was also denied entry to Kosovo. This was justified by the statement that such requests would only be considered after the

release of Nezir Mehmetaj, who was arrested by Serbian police on 4 January at the Merdare crossing on suspicion of war crimes.

Serbia did not grant permission for officials of the Kosovo Government to visit Albanians in the “Preševo Valley” on 15 August 2022. Permission was denied to Kosovo’s Deputy Prime Minister, Besnik Bislimi, who is also the head of the Kosovo delegation in the Brussels negotiations, as well as to the Minister of Interior, Xhelal Sveçla. Deputy Prime Minister Besnik Bislimi was also denied entry into Serbia on 27 October 2022.

In 2022, the then Minister of Education, Science, and Technological Development, Branko Ružić, was prevented from entering Kosovo to attend the Day of the University in Priština, temporarily located in Kosovska Mitrovica, an event organized annually on Vidovdan. The Director of the Office for Information Technology and Electronic Administration, Mihailo Jovanović, was also denied entry. Branko Ružić’s predecessor, Mladen Šarčević, was barred from entering Kosovo on 30 September 2020, to visit the University in Priština, temporarily located in Kosovska Mitrovica, at the start of the new academic year. The reasons for these denials are not fully known.

In 2022, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kosovo confirmed to Radio Free Europe that the Kosovo Police had denied entry to individuals named Dimitrije Marković and Nenad Jeremić at the Jarinje crossing. Their entry was refused due to pro-Russian views and spreading “propaganda against Kosovo and inciting national hatred.”

There are also known cases of indefinite entry bans. Kosovo police indefinitely banned Arno Gujon from entering Kosovo after he had been detained at the Merdare administrative crossing on 10 September 2018. Arno Gujon acquired Serbian citizenship in 2015 and is now the Director of the Administration for Cooperation with the Diaspora and Serbs in the Region. He is known for his extremist views and was previously convicted for participating in the brutal beating of a young Somali man in Nice during his membership in the far-right organization “Generation Identity.”

Regarding sports and sports representatives, there have been situations where athletes were not allowed to enter the territory of Kosovo or Serbia. These cases often resulted from political tensions and disagreements between Belgrade and Priština, impacting sports events and competitions. Such situations not only hinder the freedom of movement and the normal course of sports events but also further complicate relations between the two nations.

On Europe Day, 9 May 2018, Serbia banned entry to Kosovo karate athletes who were to participate in the European Karate Championship. The same delegation was again denied entry into Serbia on the same day, and as a result, this delegation did not participate in the competition due to the entry ban. In their announcement, the Office for Kosovo and Metohija mentioned the previous ban by Kosovo on the FK Crvena Zvezda team from entering Kosovo to play a charity match. The OSCE Mission also addressed the entry ban on FK Crvena Zvezda. The FK Crvena Zvezda team was again denied entry into Kosovo on 9 October 2019.

On 10 March 2019, young basketball players from Sloga Kraljevo were denied entry into Kosovo. The President of the Kosovo Basketball Federation, Arben Fetahu, stated that any Serbian club's entry into the territory requires the appropriate permission from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the relevant Kosovo sports federation.

The bans also affected ordinary citizens, such as on 19 June 2021, when a bus from North Mitrovica with 50 worshippers from central Serbia, who were on their way to commemorate Zadušnice (the day of prayers for the souls) and visit Serbian Orthodox Church temples in Kosovo, was turned back. The bus had previously been allowed to enter Kosovo at the Jarinje crossing.

As for religious representatives, the Serbian Orthodox Church Patriarch has been denied entry to Kosovo on several occasions. In December 2022, he was turned back at Merdare, and on 13 May 2024, the Kosovo Ministry

of Foreign Affairs rejected the Patriarch's request to visit Kosovo, where he intended to attend the annual session of the Holy Assembly in the Patriarchate of Peć. During the most recent denial of the Patriarch's entry to Kosovo, entry was also denied to a television crew from Tanjug. Kosovo police claim the crew was allowed entry, but Tanjug's chief editor, Jovana Joksimović, declared the Kosovo police's statements untrue in an interview with KoSSev.

Regarding media representatives, the Radio Television of Serbia crew filming the show "The Right to Tomorrow" was denied entry to Kosovo on 18 February 2024, which was also addressed by the Office for Kosovo and Metohija.

Besides the bans affecting officials, athletes, and religious representatives, there is still a ban on importing goods that affects consumers in Kosovo.

As of 14 June 2023, Kosovo imposed a ban on the import of goods from Serbia. This decision was made on the same day that Serbian authorities arrested three members of the Kosovo police. Kosovo institutions claimed that the incident was an abduction or kidnapping of police officers at the border in the municipality of Leposavić in the north, while Serbian institutions claimed it was an arrest carried out on the territory of the Republic of Serbia. Although data for 2022 shows that Serbia has an economic exchange with Kosovo worth half a billion dollars more than with Albania, with \$50 million worth of imports from Kosovo, an analysis of the freedom of movement of goods requires a more detailed approach and a separate study.

These are just some examples of bans selected based on the media attention they received, but data from the field indicate a larger number of bans. Restrictions related to security threats, illegal crossings, and procedural violations are justified, but if a ban aims to send a political message that does not contribute to reconciliation and the implementation of agreements, especially regarding freedom of movement and IBM, it contradicts statements made by government representatives.

Regardless of movement restrictions, adherence to agreements remains the main stumbling block in achieving freedom of movement and implementing IBM. The European Commission's 2023 report on Serbia's progress towards the EU notes that out of the six planned permanent joint control points, only two have been established (Merdare and Mutivodë/Mutivode). It further emphasizes that Serbia has not yet established the previously agreed permanent crossings on its side (Jarinje/Rudnica, Končulj/Dheu i Bardhë, and Depce/Muçibabë), leading to the suspension of EU funds for this project in July 2018. Additionally, Serbia must constructively engage to enable the establishment of a third crossing in northern Kosovo at Tabavije/Bërnjak-Tabalije/Brnjak, which would be under Kosovo's administration. Serbia needs to make additional efforts to close illegal roads and bypasses to ensure the exclusive use of official crossings for goods and persons entering or leaving Kosovo, the EC report concludes.

The European Commission's 2023 report on Kosovo's progress towards the EU contains an identical passage as the report on Serbia, with the additional sentence: "Serbia must also allow the continuation of joint technical IBM meetings at all levels." The report speaks of meetings at different levels of coordination, from lower-level operational officers who met twice a week, to regional meetings that took place twice a month, and high-level coordination meetings organized once or twice a year. These meetings were used to exchange information and plan joint activities, but they ceased after Serbia suspended further plans for the development of crossings under the pretext of forming the Community.

The Technical Protocol on the Implementation of IBM, agreed upon in Brussels on 23 February 2012, stipulated the formation of crossings in good faith. The parties committed twelve years ago to gradually establish and begin work on joint IBM crossings at Jarinje/Rudnica - Jainjë/Rudnice, Tabavije/Bërnjak - Tabalije/Brnjak, Bela Zemlja/Končulj-Dheu i Bardhë/Konqul, Merdare/Merdarë - Merdare/Merdare, Mutivode/Mutivode - Mutivodë/Mutivode, and Depce/Muçibabë -

Depce/Mučibaba. At the same time, the parties committed that the crossings would be located in a joint IBM zone: “where all relevant authorities, in accordance with the requirements, such as customs, police, phytosanitary and veterinary services, auxiliary, and other services of each party, shall conduct controls separately from each other within their part, in accordance with their applicable legal responsibilities and obligations, fully respecting human rights guaranteed by European and international standards.”

The protocol also committed the European Commission and both sides to provide the necessary financial resources for construction, equipping, and staff training. The European Commission later allocated 22 million euros for the construction of six crossings, of which only two are still operational today. Serbia is expected to make the three crossings under its jurisdiction fully operational, but the EC funds are currently suspended. On the other hand, Kosov is expected to establish the third crossing under their jurisdiction, but the establishment is restrained by Serbia.

CONCLUSION

Integrated Border Management represents a complex but essential strategy for efficient state border control in the light of modern challenges such as migration, terrorism, and cross-border crime. Initially developed in the European Union, this concept is now applied globally as a model of cooperation between various national authorities and international partners, aiming to enhance security and facilitate the lawful crossing of borders, including those between Serbia and Kosovo. Although it offers numerous advantages, such as reducing illegal activities and increasing efficiency, the implementation of IBM faces challenges like high costs, the need to harmonize different legal frameworks, and political misuse.

Despite agreements and technical arrangements between Serbia and Kosovo regarding IBM, challenges in fully implementing these agreements persist, requiring further efforts to build trust and manage borders more efficiently to achieve stability and development in the region. Since the adoption of the free movement agreement, including the IBM concept, there has been a significant increase in the number of travelers between Serbia and Kosovo. From 2011 to 2012, the Kosovo police recorded 100,000 more crossings compared to the previous year, and from 2017 to 2021, over 23 million crossings were recorded. These agreements have reduced travel costs for citizens and businesses, allowing for shorter and more economical routes.

Although technical solutions within the dialogue have enabled a higher number of crossings, challenges remain. Inadequate IBM implementation, along with political tensions, often leads to travel bans and sabotage. Additionally, non-compliance with agreed arrangements regarding the establishment of permanent crossings and the closure of illegal routes further complicates the situation.

Despite these challenges, freedom of movement and full implementation of IBM bring numerous economic and social benefits, positively impacting local economies and budgets of both Serbia and Kosovo.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Full Implementation of IBM:** Infrastructure projects at border crossings and roads must be completed to ensure the smooth movement of people and goods. This includes building the remaining permanent crossings and closing illegal routes. Serbia and Kosovo should also return to regular meetings at all levels.
- 2. Strengthening Dialogue and Building Trust:** Trust between Belgrade and Priština needs to be strengthened through transparent and constructive dialogue. Avoiding unilateral actions and consistently respecting agreements are crucial for the sustainability of the solutions achieved.
- 3. Public Education and Information:** Citizens and businesses should be provided with accurate and timely information about crossing rules and reasons for restrictions. This will reduce misunderstandings and tensions among the population. At the same time, procedural violations and crossing bans that may antagonize citizens and businesses and jeopardize peace negotiations should be avoided.
- 4. European Union Support:** A more active role of the EU is required in monitoring and supporting the implementation of the agreements, including financial support for infrastructure projects and facilitating the dialogue on the technical level.
- 5. Regional Cooperation:** Encouraging regional initiatives like the Berlin Process and the Open Balkans to further strengthen regional connectivity and economic cooperation.

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