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## **Council of Europe: Committee on Political Affairs, “Kosovo should be invited to become a member state”. Relations with Serbia need to be normalised**

The Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has recommended that Kosovo be invited to become a member of the Council of Europe. Approving a draft Opinion during a meeting held today in Paris, based on a report by Dora Bakoyannis, the Committee “welcomed” the “extensive list of commitments made in writing by the Kosovo authorities” and stressed that “membership would lead to the strengthening of human rights standards by ensuring access to the European Court of Human Rights for all those who are under Kosovo’s jurisdiction”. The full Assembly – bringing together parliamentarians from the 46 member states of the Council of Europe – is due to debate the Committee’s recommendation during its forthcoming spring plenary session on Thursday 18th April, during which it will vote on a final Opinion on Kosovo’s application for membership. The final decision on membership is taken by the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers. Membership of the Council of Europe would “catalyse momentum for Kosovo to continue to make progress in strengthening human rights, democracy and the rule of law and address outstanding challenges and matters of concern”, the Committee pointed out, citing issues such as the gap between normative standards and their effective implementation, the need to improve the protection of the rights of non-majority communities, and fostering a climate conducive to trust, reconciliation and inclusion. Noting the deterioration in the security situation in Kosovo’s northern municipalities, the Committee pointed out that “the risk of open violence in Kosovo is all too real” and that security depends on “the protection of the rights of the Serb community, the de-escalation of tensions and the normalisation of relations” between Kosovo and Serbia.

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