Special Political (SPECPOl) TOPIC B:

The question of reducing political tensions to ensure peace and cooperation regarding the Kosovo-Serbia situation

I. Introduction of the Topic:

Political stability is essential for peace, economic growth and regional cooperation. In the Western Balkans, the relationship between Kosovo and Serbia remains one of the main obstacles to long-term stability. Since Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, two core disputes have persisted: Serbia's refusal to recognise Kosovo as an independent state and Kosovo's reluctance to grant broader autonomy to its Serb minority, especially in the four northern municipalities where Serbs form the majority. These unresolved issues are closely linked to Sustainable Development Goal 16, which calls for peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice, and strong institutions.

In recent years, tensions have intensified. Since 2021, the government of Prime Minister Albin Kurti has moved to assert stronger control over the north, ending the previous "overlapping sovereignty" in which Serbia provided services such as education and health care while Kosovo controlled policing and courts. Measures such as deploying heavily armed special police, banning Serbian goods and currency, and evicting Serbian institutions have been justified by Pristina as necessary to enforce the rule of law and respond to security threats, including the presence of Serb paramilitary groups. However, these steps have also fuelled protests, emigration of Kosovo Serbs and periodic violence.

As a result, the likelihood of further escalation is high, and trust across groups is strained. Reducing political tensions is thus vital, not only for local security, but also for both nations' European membership. By encouraging compromise, enhancing minority protections, and supporting the EU-facilitated discussion, the international community can help Kosovo and Serbia move from hostility to cooperation and a more peaceful future for the area.

II. Definition of Key Terms:

- **Political Tension**: Persistent disagreements, mistrust, or conflicts between political actors

or communities that pose a danger of instability or war.

- **Sovereignty**: The authority of a state to govern its territory independently, a central point of dispute between Kosovo and Serbia.

- **Ethnic Minority**: An ethnic minority is a group with a different ethnicity or identity from the national majority, such as the Serbs in northern Kosovo.

- **Autonomy:** level of self-governance provided to a territory or group inside a state. This is especially pertinent to discussions about self-rule for Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo.

- **Rule of Law:** Pristina uses the notion of rule of law to justify security actions in northern Kosovo, which holds all individuals and institutions accountable to the law.

- **De-escalation:** involves decreasing tensions and preventing violence through communication, compromise, and less militarisation.

-III. Background information:

Following the 1998-1999 conflict and NATO intervention, Kosovo was placed under UN administration until it declared independence from Serbia in 2008. Serbia continues to oppose Kosovo's independence, resulting in long-term political conflict in the Western Balkans.

1. **POLITICAL DISPUTES**
   a. Serbia's refusal to acknowledge Kosovo as an independent state precludes Kosovo's membership in international organisations such as the United Nations.
   b. Kosovo's unwillingness to offer major autonomy to its Serb minority, notably in northern municipalities, has strained relations.

2. **ETHNIC AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES**
   a. Northern Kosovo has seen "overlapping sovereignty," with Serbia supplying education and healthcare and Kosovo controlling policing and courts.
   b. Since 2021, Kosovo has moved to assert complete regional authority, thereby terminating earlier accords.

3. **SECURITY CONCERNS**
   a. The deployment of special police units, bans on Serbian goods and currency, and the dismantling of Serbian institutions have fuelled protests and bloodshed.
   b. Armed incidents involving Serb paramilitary groups in 2023 raised fears of escalation.

4. **INTERNATIONAL INVOLVEMENT**
   a. The European Union has facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia since 2011.
   b. NATO's KFOR continues to maintain security, but progress toward normalization remains limited.

Timeline of Events

- **1998–1999**: Kosovo War; NATO intervention; Serbian forces withdraw
- **1999**: UNMIK administration begins; KFOR deployed
- **2008**: Kosovo declares independence; Serbia refuses recognition
- **2011**: EU-facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia begins
- **2013**:Brussels Agreement signed (ASM proposed, limited implementation)
- **2015–2020**: Stalemate; overlapping sovereignty in northern Kosovo
- **2021**: Kosovo asserts stronger control over the north; tensions rise
- **2022**: Protests, election boycotts by Kosovo Serbs
- **2023**: Armed incidents involving Serb paramilitary groups; NATO reinforces KFOR
- **2024–Present**: Ongoing EU-led negotiations; no final settlement

Possible Solutions

1. **Strengthening EU-facilitated dialogue through clear incentives:** The European Union should boost the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue by establishing clear deadlines and methods for enforcing existing agreements. Progress should be linked to EU accession incentives, encouraging both Kosovo and Serbia to collaborate and alleviate political tensions while not requiring instant acceptance.
2. **Forming the Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities (ASM):** Kosovo should implement the Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities in accordance with its constitution, allowing for some local autonomy in sectors including education, healthcare, and municipal services. This would meet Serb minority concerns while still preserving Kosovo's sovereignty and geographical integrity.
3. **Promoting De-escalation and Minority Protection:** To prevent violence and rebuild trust, Kosovo should reduce its use of heavily armed forces in northern municipalities and expand community-based policing under international supervision, while Serbia should discourage parallel institutions and paramilitary groups.

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