

# The Recognition of Kosovo – A Political Affair



Brandon Pouw  
s1754076

Leiden University

Instructor: Dr. Nicolas Blarel

Second reader: Dr. Francesco Ragazzi

Political Science Department -  
International Organization

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*In 2008, about 50 states decided to recognize Kosovo as a legal independent state. These recognitions were led by the United States and were often debated. Many countries considered the Kosovar unilateral act of independence as illegal and have not recognized Kosovo yet. Examples of countries that have not recognized Kosovo are the Russian Federation, China and India. Intriguingly, Spain also decided to not recognize Kosovo. This research helps to understand why some countries decide to recognize Kosovo, while similar countries do not. Moreover, this research provides important insights in order to accelerate the research in the relatively new field of study on the recognition of states. The decision making procedures of Spain and the United Kingdom are compared in order to understand what factors explain their varying outcomes on the recognition of Kosovo. This thesis examines the influence of refined existing as well as previously neglected factors, such as close ally relationships, path dependency, secessionist movements and electoral costs on the recognition behavior of states.*

**Keywords:** *international relations; foreign policy analysis; recognition; close allies; path dependency; secessionist movements; electoral costs; United Kingdom; Spain; Kosovo*

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## 1. Introduction

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of February 2008, Kosovo declared its independence. Several states responded by recognizing Kosovo as a legal independent state. This recognition, together with the recognitions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, has substantially changed the relatively consistent practice of state recognition. Political considerations have become more important in the decisions of states to recognize new states (Ryngaert & Sobrie, 2011, p. 471). However, there are intriguing elements in the case of recognition of Kosovo. The United Kingdom (UK) was among the countries that immediately recognized Kosovo on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February 2008. Therewith, the British government was among the first countries in the European Union (EU) to support the independence of Kosovo. Despite their internal problems with possible secessionist movements, the British government urged other countries to also recognize Kosovo (Tatham, 2015).

Surprisingly, other prominent member states of the EU came to a different conclusion by refusing to recognize Kosovo. In 2008, the then Foreign Minister of Spain, Miguel Ángel Moratinos stated that Spain could not recognize Kosovo because that would 'not respect international law' (The Independent, 2008). It is important to take into account that, just like the UK, Spain had to deal with internal secessionist movements. In Catalonia and the Basque Country, some groups were interested in a possible secession. These groups might have influenced the foreign policy decision of Spain to not recognize Kosovo.

It is puzzling to see that seemingly similar countries like the UK and Spain came to such different decisions. Since Spain has not recognized Kosovo yet, the relevance of examining this topic is high. Moreover, there is a shortage of consistency and coherence in EU foreign policy regarding the recognition of new states. The causes for these

coordination problems can be explained by researching this topic.

The present studies on the recognition of states have only concentrated on the role of international law and under which conditions states become recognized by the international community. Only Beverly Crawford (1995) and Bridget Coggins (2011) try to explain why states recognize other states. They do this by combining international and domestic factors that can account for the behavior of recognition-providing states. Therefore, this paper builds on these theories. However, in light of the specifics of the cases of interest, these studies cannot provide an overarching and complete answer to the question of why states recognize other states. Particularly the cases of the UK and Spain's recognition of Kosovo are intriguing and this leads to the following research question: **why did similar countries like the United Kingdom and Spain come to a different decision regarding the recognition of Kosovo in 2008?**

This paper combines both more nuanced existing and previously neglected international and domestic variables. Factors such as close allies, path dependency, internal secessionist challenges and governmental electoral costs are derived from Crawford's domestic approach and Coggins' international approach in order to provide a more nuanced and complete answer to the question of why states recognize other states. The next section gives an overview of existing theories on the recognition of states. Subsequently, the theories on which the research is based are explained and the hypotheses are presented. In the third section, the variables are specified and the exact research methods are discussed. Then, the empirics are presented, followed by a conclusion.

## 2. Literature review

### *Recognition of new states: constitutive vs. declaratory*

The study of the recognition of states is a relatively new field. Nevertheless, recognition by itself is not difficult to define. Two different conceptualizations have traditionally been used within the existing scholarship: the constitutive school of thought and the declaratory school of thought. The first group argues that states can be seen as a state when they are recognized by other states, while the second group claims that states become states when they meet legal criteria for statehood according to international law (Ryngaert & Sobrie, 2011, p. 469; Talmon, 2005, p. 101). Because scholars of the declaratory school focus on legal reasons, they do not take political factors into account for the understanding of the recognition of states (Downer, 2013, pp. 583-586; Krasner, 1999, p. 71). Therefore, for these scholars, the foreign policy decision-making process of recognition-providing states is of no importance whatsoever.

Authors of the constitutive school argue that an exclusively juridical explanation does not explain the reality on the ground (Fabry, 2013, p. 165; Türk, 1993, p. 68). There are several examples, such as Slovenia and Somaliland, for which the international community have not consistently applied the criteria of international law regarding the recognition of new states (Eggers, 2007, p. 222; Rich, 1993, p. 39; Türk, 1993, p. 69). This provides additional support for Fabry's claim (2013, p. 166) that political reasons and decision-making processes are of substantial importance for understanding states' decisions to recognize new states. Based on these arguments, this paper follows the logic of the constitutive school of thought.

### *Which new states does the international community recognize?*

Although there is a substantial amount of literature available in the domain of the recognition of states, the main focus lies on the perspective of recognition-seeking

states. Ethnic homogeneity and mobilization, a democratic governmental body, friends in high places, institutional empowerment, relative strength and negotiated consent are variables that increase the chances of being recognized (Coggins, 2011, pp. 435-440; Franck, 1992, p. 90; Roeder, 2007). Although these studies might determine why certain states have a higher chance of being recognized than others, there is no specific explanation for the behavior of recognition-providing states. For example, Kosovo meets the legal criteria for recognition according to the International Court of Justice and is generally seen as a democratic country, but it is still only partially recognized by the international community. Therefore, to understand the recognition of new states, it is important to look at the decision-making processes within recognition-providing states while keeping the characteristics of the recognition-seeking state constant.

#### *Why and when do states recognize new states?*

Some authors do try to explain the question of why states recognize other states and sometimes decide this unilaterally. Crawford (1995) introduces the idea of domestic factors as an important element in explaining why states decide to unilaterally recognize new states. She suggests three conditions under which domestic politics matter in foreign policy issues. States act unilaterally regarding the recognition of new states when (1) the decision has to be ratified at home, (2) when the issue at stake is surrounded by substantial uncertainty and (3) when there is no clear national security threat from the newly recognized country or its former parent-state (Crawford, 1995, p. 27). Even though she mentions the possible national security threat from the recognition-seeking countries as a factor, she does not take into account the possible national security threat from inside. For instance, recognition-providing states could create a precedent that could subsequently be used by internal secessionist movements. Therefore, Crawford overlooks some important domestic factors that could influence



the foreign policy decision of recognition.

More recently, Fabry (2010) has provided a normative argument. He mentions that recognition is the result of national and international factors, because states cannot become sovereign countries only in terms of their constitution (Fabry, 2010, p. 11). He comes to the conclusion that new states should become *de facto states* before third parties should recognize their independence and third parties should not intervene in this process (Fabry, 2010, p. 89). On the one hand, this answer gives us a normative explanation for which path of recognition is the most successful and it includes the potential role that the international community could play in determining the final status of states. On the other hand, it does not provide a clear and satisfying answer about which internal factors help explain the decision of states to recognize other states.

By making a distinction between domestic authority and system membership, Coggins (2011, p. 440) is the first author that introduces a combination of international and national factors to explain why states decide to recognize new states. External security, domestic insecurity and international coordination are the determining factors (Coggins, 2011, pp. 449-453; 2014, pp. 45-48). States will recognize a new state when that decision does not threaten their own security position, when they do not have to deal with internal secessionist challenges and when there is coordination among great powers (Coggins, 2011, p. 461). Unfortunately, Coggins mainly approaches states as part of the international arena and does not sufficiently open the black box of the state by looking at the possible influence of domestic factors. Her study is mainly a quantitative study that identifies some degree of correlation between the above-mentioned variables. Although she combines her large-n study with case studies, she does not fully explain the mechanisms that take place within the recognition-providing

state, such as how and when internal secessionist movements influence their government's decision to recognize a new state. Coggins (2011, p. 463) recognizes this problem when she states that 'future research into state emergence should concentrate on the dynamics of recognition among states using in-depth case studies'.

### *Overall assessment*

International law is not a sufficient explanation for whether states are recognized or not.

The declaratory school is not backed up by empirical evidence. Political and domestic factors also seem to matter. Although there are several explanations for which potential new states are more likely to become recognized by the international community, there is not much knowledge on the question of why states recognize other states. Coggins seems to come up with the most accurate explanation by claiming that geostrategic considerations, domestic insecurity and international coordination are the determining factors for why states recognize other states. However, this explanation seems to be insufficient when we look at the recognition of Kosovo. The UK and Spain did not have to fear external threats from, for instance, Serbia. Neither was there a lack of international coordination, and both countries had to deal with internal secessionist movements. Thus, the existing theory needs to be complemented with more nuanced and complete explanations for the recognition behavior of states. A comparative case study of the contrasting decisions of Spain and the UK on the recognition of Kosovo is necessary to achieve this goal. The next section of this paper describes the theories that are used in this research and presents the hypotheses.

### 3. Theoretical framework

#### *Main theories*

The focus of this research lies on the domestic-level approach of Crawford (1995) and the international-level approach of Coggins (2011; 2014). These theories provide useful and novel variables that can explain why some states recognize new states and others do not. However, Coggins' and Crawford's hypotheses are not sufficiently nuanced and extended to explain the varying decisions by the UK and Spain on the recognition of Kosovo. Therefore, this project aims to refine the influential factors presented by Coggins and Crawford. Moreover, the approaches are combined with previously neglected variables derived from other approaches. A quantitative case study provides the opportunity to examine whether the refined hypotheses, which are presented in the following paragraph, can be confirmed in the cases of Spain and the UK regarding the recognition of Kosovo. Then, this project opens the door to further research on this topic.

This deductive research project focuses on four broad logics presented by Coggins and Crawford. Crawford (1995, p. 8) argues that there are three social forces that could influence party elites regarding the decision to recognize new states, namely public opinion, interest groups and media. Although these factors fail to explain in her article why Germany recognized Croatia, we can still derive useful hypotheses from this perspective. In this research, public opinion, interest groups and media are used to determine the influence of potential electoral costs for the Spanish and British governments related to the recognition of Kosovo. In order to also include and control for both international and domestic factors, Coggins' (2011, pp. 449-453; 2014, pp. 45-48) variables of international coordination, external security and domestic insecurity are

important to examine the question of recognition or non-recognition. Since Coggins' variables are presented in a rather general fashion, I have refined the variables and complemented them with other neglected factors. The four hypotheses are not mutually exclusive.

Lastly, since only one recognition-seeking state is examined, it is not necessary to include hypotheses based on domestic variables that account for the state composition of Kosovo. The next paragraph presents the four hypotheses that are tested.

### **3.1 Hypotheses**

#### *International level*

##### *Geostrategic*

In her international level model, Coggins (2014, pp. 45-46) includes geostrategic considerations as an important independent variable to account for why states decide to recognize new states. She mentions that states consider their own power position by looking at the existing international security environment to find out what effect the recognition of a new state would have on the status quo. In her analysis and hypothesis formulation, Coggins only focuses on the relation between the parent-state of the secessionists and the recognition-providing state by claiming that states are less likely to recognize a new state when they are in a friendly relationship with the parent-state of the secessionists (Coggins, 2014, p. 46). However, this logic can be specified by applying it to the relations among recognition-providing states. For instance, in the case of civil wars, Findley and Teo (2006, pp. 834-835) claim that states are more likely to intervene when one of their close allies has already started an intervention in the conflict. So, by looking at a combination of the strength of relationships between allies and their recognition behavior, we can derive the following hypothesis:

***H1: Recognition-providing states are more likely to recognize new states when their close ally, with whom they have a special relationship, also recognizes the new state.***

#### Path dependency

Although Coggins (2014) focuses on the relation between recognition-providing states and the parent-state of secessionist movements, she does not look at the relationship between recognition-providing states and recognition-seeking secessionists. In practical terms, Coggins would not consider the relationship that Spain and the UK have with Kosovo, because she neglects possible commitments that states have made to external secessionist movements. However, her underlying logic that recognition-providing states take into consideration their relationship with the parent-state of secessionist movements still holds when we apply it to the relationship between recognition-providing states and recognition-seeking secessionists.

For instance, several findings from the civil war literature relate close ties between the *interveners* and *intervened* through colonial history, ideological relationships and historical ties to a higher possibility of intervention and support (Greig & Regan, 2008, p. 776; Findley & Teo, 2006, pp. 834-836; Regan, 1998, p. 767). In light of former interventions by NATO and the UN, in which the UK was a more prominent player than Spain, we can link the theoretical insights to the theory of path dependency. Kay (2003, p. 411) claims that sequencing matters because former events can move a policy into a certain direction and subsequently reinforce future policy decisions that move in the same direction. Therefore, the next hypothesis is based on the findings in the field of path dependency, civil war interventions and the before mentioned logic of Coggins:

***H2: Recognition-providing states are more likely to recognize new states when they were directly committed to the creation of this new state.***

## *Domestic level*

### Internal political actors

Coggins (2014, p. 46-47) says that internal secessionist challenges are potentially influential in the matter of recognizing new states that might increase the domestic security concerns of a state. Governments have to consider the possibility that they can create a precedent for internal secessionist movements when they decide to recognize a new state (Coggins, 2014, p. 47). Secessionist movements might then see an opportunity to use a decision in their advantage by calling for their own secession. However, Coggins (2014, p.47) operationalizes this influence in a rather general fashion by stating that countries with secessionist challenges are less likely to recognize secessionists in other states. This cannot sufficiently explain the variance between the UK and Spain. Thus, a more sophisticated and specific hypothesis is necessary. I argue that states have to take internal secessionist challenges into account and I also look at whether they would create a precedent with recognizing secessionists in other states or not. This leads to the following hypothesis:

***H3: The more governments are challenged by internal secessionists, the less likely they are to recognize new states out of fear of creating a precedent.<sup>1</sup>***

### Electoral costs

One last underexplored factor is the influence of governmental electoral costs on the foreign policy decision of recognition of a new state. Liberal institutionalist theories introduce domestic constraints and the influence of governmental electoral interests into the field of foreign policy analysis (Pohl, 2013, pp. 308; 321). Moravcsik (1993, p. 481) argues that governments respond to the preferences of domestic actors before they make a decision at the international level. Governments are interested in generating as many

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<sup>1</sup> I have also looked at the potential influence of ethnic identity groups and the lobby of Kosovars and Albanians in Spain and the UK. However, there is no evidence available to assume that this ethnic group played any substantial role in the recognition processes whatsoever.

votes as possible to get reelected and, therefore, try to gain support of domestic constituencies that have the capacity to influence public opinion (Dai, 2005, p. 365; Moravcsik, 1993, p. 483). In order to secure its reelection, governments also want to avoid making decisions that could cost them electoral support. Domestic constituencies are defined as ‘individuals and private groups [...] who organize exchange and collective action’ (Moravcsik, 1997, p. 516). Hence, actors as voters, public opinion, opposition parties and politicians are potentially influential factors to equally consider.

Liberal institutionalism allows introducing the insights of Crawford (1995) into this hypothesis. She only reluctantly introduces the societal factors of public opinion, interest groups and media into the field of recognition by focusing on several interest groups, opinion polls and surveys that were published during the period that Germany decided to recognize Croatia. Although Crawford has not found a clear relationship between the influences of these societal factors and the recognition of Croatia by Germany, there are other scholars who claim that these domestic factors are important. For example, Risse-Kappen (1991, p. 510) states that mass public opinion matters in foreign-policy decision-making through indirect effects. Namely, he argues that public opinion limits the available foreign policy options and mass public opinion is particularly influential when the issue is salient to the incumbent political elites. Through relating electoral costs to the influences of media, interest groups and public opinion, this research provides a more specific and sophisticated explanation than Crawford. The insights are captured in the following hypothesis:

***H4:*** *When governments fear electoral costs as a result of recognizing a new state, they are less likely to recognize this new state.*

In the next section, the presented hypotheses and variables are explained and operationalized in order to clarify how these possible causal relationships are measured.

## 4. Operationalization

### *Case identification*

The case selection of this project is based on the Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD). Hence, it is important to select cases that are similar across most background conditions, but show variance regarding the dependent variable (Seawright & Gerring, 2008, p. 304). The cases selected for this research are the UK and Spain. These countries are not only both democratic and unitary parliamentary constitutional monarchies, but they are also members of the same international organizations. Examples of such organizations are NATO and the EU. Above all, the two cases score similarly on Coggins' independent variables that are meant to explain foreign policy decisions on recognition:

Coggins' IVs Cases	X1- Context international coordination among great powers	X2- Internal secessionist challenges	X3- External threat by parent-state secessionist	Y- Recognition or non-recognition
United Kingdom	Similar	Yes, Scotland	No clear threat from Serbia	Recognition of Kosovo
Spain	Similar	Yes, Catalonia and the Basque County	No clear threat from Serbia	Non-recognition of Kosovo

*Table 1: scores of Spain and the UK on Coggins' Independent and Dependent Variables*

Despite these similarities, the cases differ on the dependent variable. The UK has recognized Kosovo, while Spain has not. Therefore, a comparison of these cases is very useful to identify the specific reasons for why states recognize a new state or not.

### *Case-selection and research method*

The MSSD allows performing a controlled comparison. In the cases of the UK and Spain, existing theories cannot sufficiently explain the varying decisions on the recognition of Kosovo. Therefore, it is necessary to examine more nuanced as well as previously overlooked independent variables. A controlled comparison is the ideal method for cases that are 'comparable in all respects except for the independent



variables, whose variance may account for the cases having different outcomes on the dependent variable' (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 81). This argumentation makes a controlled comparison the best option to examine which variables explain why the UK decided to recognize Kosovo and Spain decided not to recognize Kosovo. Moreover, the fact that a controlled comparison looks at comparable sources from similar time periods increases the strength and consistency of the argumentation. This simplifies any possible replication of the case studies, makes the research more transparent and opens the door to further research on the topic and findings of this project. Hence, in this research it is necessary to evaluate the different hypotheses to the two cases under the same conditions.

However, this method also has some flaws. A first disadvantage of a controlled comparison is that it is hard to find cases that are completely similar (George & Bennett, 2005, pp. 151-153). Nonetheless, the case selection in this thesis shows that Spain and the UK score similarly on important independent variables and, most importantly, score different on the dependent variable that is under examination in this research. A second disadvantage of a controlled comparison based on a MSSD, is that it is hard to make generalizations. Nevertheless, this research can give concrete insights in the foreign policy decision-making behavior of European democracies with parliamentary systems that have to deal with internal secessionist challenges. Furthermore, because the recognition of new states is a rather new field of study, this research could provide insights for further general research on important variables in the foreign policy decision-making process regarding recognition or non-recognition. Finally, by analyzing national differences, this examination helps to understand why the EU is not able to generate a coherent foreign policy on the recognition of new states.

### *Dependent variable*

The dependent variable is the decision to recognize a state or not. The UK can be placed in the first category, while Spain belongs to the second. The evidence is based on statements of the Spanish and British ministers of Foreign Affairs. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of February 2008, British Foreign Secretary Miliband stated that ‘the British government has decided to recognize Kosovo’ (Reuters, 2008a). While, on the same day, Spanish Foreign Minister Moratinos said that ‘the government of Spain will not recognize the unilateral act proclaimed yesterday by the assembly of Kosovo’ (Reuters, 2008b).

### *Independent variables*

Allies with a special relationship, path dependency, internal secessionist challenges and electoral costs are the four independent variables that are derived from the hypotheses that are presented in the theoretical framework. These variables can be identified at the international and domestic levels of analysis. In the following section, the operationalization of the variables is explained.

#### *International level independent variables*

First, the independent variable derived from H1, *allies with a special relationship*, refers to situations ‘in which a foreign state is seen like another self [and] provide a more adequate account of how one is doing in one’s attempt to secure minimally just institutions and policies’ (Digeser, 2009, pp. 339-340). According to Coggins (2014, p. 48), the role of great powers is vital, because countries are more likely to recognize new states when great powers have already done so. In this research, the focus lies on the relationship of the UK and Spain with the United States (US). First, the US was one of the major great powers in 2008 and, second, the US was of decisive importance in the Kosovar case, because the recognition of Kosovo was initiated by a US-led coalition (Fabry, 2012, p. 661). Regarding the decision on the recognition of Kosovo, the close

ally relationship was either present or absent. The expectation is that a recognition-providing state will act in accordance with their close ally. Nevertheless, this relation only holds under the condition that the role and influence of the close ally, in this case the US, was also mentioned in parliamentary debates, governmental statements, speeches, interviews, party manifestos, newspapers, academic publications or policy reports. In order to find evidence for H1, I look at the convergence between the argumentations and decisions of Spain and the UK with those of the US with regards to the recognition of Kosovo. Then, I examine whether the Spanish and British governments explicitly referred to the US in their argumentations to support their decision. At last, I focus on whether there is evidence from the US that they put pressure on Spain or the UK to recognize Kosovo. H1 is confirmed when both allies made the same decision regarding the recognition of Kosovo and the close ally relationship was explicitly mentioned. The focus of this variable lies on the time period between December 2007 and February 2008, because this is the period during which the independence of Kosovo was discussed from the Council of Minister meeting of the EU on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December until the actual decision on the recognition of Kosovo on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February 2008.

Secondly, in the context of H2, *path dependency* is a situation in which ‘initial events that move policy in one direction will encourage future developments in that same direction and the effects of early policy decisions will often reinforce those decisions’ (Kay, 2003, p. 411). This is a categorical variable and path dependency was either present or not. When members of government and politicians explicitly referred to former commitments linked to the creation of Kosovo in parliamentary debates, governmental statements, speeches, interviews and party manifestos, path dependency

was *present*. When decision-makers and politicians did not explicitly mention former commitments to the creation of Kosovo in order to support their decision on the recognition of Kosovo, path dependency was *absent*. Potential commitments can be found in UNSC resolutions, military interventions, bilateral aid programs and whether there were diplomatic ties with Kosovo. Since the process towards the determination of the final status of Kosovo started with the UNSC Resolution 1244 in 1999, the time period of the data selection for H2 starts in June 1999 and ends in February 2008.

#### Domestic level independent variables

Coggins (2011, p. 47) describes *internal secessionist challenges* (H3) as a domestic constituency that expresses ethnic discontent by trying to find a legitimate way to create its own state. Coggins (2011, p. 47) also mentions that the more acute the challenge is, the less likely it is that states recognize a new state. However, the UK and Spain both seemed to be facing an acute secessionist challenge in 2008. In order to provide an opportunity to create a more sophisticated and nuanced explanation for the influence of secessionist challenges than Coggins, this variable is operationalized in an ordinal way. A secessionist challenge was *high* when secessionist movements made public statements in which they linked their plans for secessionism explicitly to the Kosovar case. Evidence of these statements is found by looking at political statements, speeches, interviews and political manifestos of internal secessionist movements and in newspapers, academic articles and policy reports. We can speak of a *medium-level* challenge when internal secessionists movements mentioned Kosovo in political statements, interviews and other sources during the decision-making process on the recognition of Kosovo, but did not link this explicitly to their own plans for secession. When internal secessionist movements did not pay any attention to Kosovo, the challenge by internal secessionist movements was *low*. In order to make a convincing

argument I first examine whether the secessionist movements in the UK and Spain were already advocating for their independence prior the Kosovar independence. Then, I look at how the secessionist movements responded to the Kosovar case. Lastly, I focus on whether the British and Spanish governments perceived the internal secessionist challenges as a potential threat. For the same reasons as with H1, the focus of H3 lies on the time period between December 2007 and February 2008.

Lastly, *electoral costs* (H4) are defined as the interest of governments in generating as many votes as possible to be reelected and, therefore, trying to avoid losing support of domestic constituencies that have the capacity to influence elections (Moravcsik, 1993, p. 483). Voters, public opinion, opposition parties and individual politicians are potential factors that could create electoral costs for governments regarding a foreign policy topic, in particular in period of elections. When public opinion polls, opposition parties, local parties and influential politicians were explicitly in favor of non-recognition of Kosovo, then the electoral costs for the government to recognize were *present*. This evidence can be found in political statements made by opposition parties and influential politicians, governmental statements that responded to requests made by domestic constituents, interviews and speeches of national and local politicians and public opinion polls in which more than 30% of the population was in favor of non-recognition. When domestic constituents were on the same line with regards to the recognition of Kosovo or when only a small part of the population (< 30%) supported non-recognition of Kosovo, governmental electoral costs for recognition were *absent*. The 30% threshold is based on the fact that about 20 to 30 percent of the public see foreign policy as salient (Risse-Kappen, 1991, p. 481). These people could change their voting behavior as a consequence of the foreign policy of a

party. Therefore, when less than 30% of the total population supported non-recognition, it is likely that only a non-influential percentage of the electorate would have changed their voting behavior. A higher threshold cannot be justified, since relatively small parts of the population can create substantial effects on the Spanish elections outcome.

To find evidence for H4, I also look at media coverage, because this is a strong indicator for whether the issue was salient. As with the H1 and H3, the focus lies on the period between December 2007 and February 2008.

### *Data*

The evidence for this research is based on both primary and secondary sources. A combination of both primary and secondary sources is necessary to discover latent and manifest reasons for the recognition of Kosovo by the UK and the non-recognition of Kosovo by Spain. On the one hand, primary sources such as speeches, press releases, political manifestoes, governmental documents, opinion polls and public statements are used to discover the underlying argumentation of both decision-makers and influential actors in the decision-making process regarding the recognition of Kosovo in the UK and Spain. These sources are useful in a controlled comparison, because most of the evidence for the hypotheses can be found in clear statements and explicit references to certain factors such as close allies, secessionist challenges and former commitments. By looking at comparable data in both countries, it is possible to make a comparison between the UK and Spain on the relative influence of independent variables that are examined in this research.

In particular, statements made by ministries of both countries, political parties and politicians are used as evidence. The most relevant political parties for this research are the Labour Party (Labour), the Conservative Party (Conservatives), the Liberal Democrats (LibDems), the Scottish National Party (SNP), Partido Socialista Obrero

Español (PSOE), Partido Popular (PP), Convergència i Unió (CiU), Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) and Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV). Furthermore, statements of Prime Ministers Gordon Brown and José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, Foreign Ministers David Miliband and Miguel Ángel Moratinos and influential secessionist and opposition politicians like Alex Salmond, Artur Mas, Mariano Rajoy, David Cameron and Juan José Ibarretxe are used to support the claims made in this research. Lastly, I build on declassified documents from the archives of the UK, Spain, Catalonia and Scotland.

On the other hand, secondary sources, such as local and national newspapers of different political ideologies, academic articles, history books and policy reports are consulted. Secondary sources make it possible to trace certain underlying arguments that are not always mentioned by, for instance, members of government. By looking at the presence and intensity of the independent variables in public debates through secondary sources, it is possible to get a clearer and more comprehensive overview of the importance of these variables in the decision-making processes regarding the recognition of Kosovo. Examples of local and national newspapers and of different political affiliations that I use to find evidence are The Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, The Scotsman, The Herald, El País, El Periodico, La Vanguardia, La Razón and El Mundo. Moreover, I build from the findings of several scholars that have written on this issue. The subsequent section of this thesis presents the evidence I have found in the consulted sources.

## 5. Empirical section

### 5.1 *Close allies*

As the major great power of the last twenty years, the position of the US with regards to the independence of Kosovo was of vital importance. The recognition of Kosovo by a part of the international community was the consequence of a well-prepared and deliberate lobbying effort led by the US (Fabry, 2012, p. 661). In order to examine whether the relationship between the UK, Spain and the US was decisive in their decisions on the recognition of Kosovo or not, it is important to know how the position of the US towards Kosovo evolved.

The US was strongly committed to the determination of the final status of Kosovo. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of May 2009, the Vice President of the US, Joseph Biden, declared to the Assembly of Kosovo that the ‘success of an independent Kosovo is’ a US ‘priority’ (White House, 2009). Above that, the US actively and continuously urged other countries to recognize Kosovo and to promote their integration in the international community (Woehrel, 2011, p. 342).

The supportive position of the US was already present before the Kosovar declaration of independence on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February 2008. The US Ambassador to the United Nations (UN), Zalmay Khalilzad, said, during a meeting of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February 2008, that the recognition of Kosovo was the direct result of ‘a long unique process’ which started after the violence during the Yugoslavian wars in the 1990s. UNSC Resolution 1244, which was adopted in 1999, was the first step towards the determination of Kosovo’s final status and since then, the US had supported Kosovo’s path towards independence (Security Council Report [SCR], 2008, p. 18). In March 2007, UN Special Envoy, Martti Ahtisaari stated



that the independence of Kosovo was the only viable solution for peace and security in the region (SCR, 2016). This conclusion was seen as the official permission for Kosovo to declare its independence and was immediately supported by the US (SCR, 2007; SCR, 2008, p. 18).

The US officially recognized Kosovo one day after the Kosovar declaration of independence (US Department of State, 2008a). The US Ambassador to the UN said that the recognition of Kosovo was the ‘logical, legitimate and legal response to the situation at hand’ and ‘fully consistent with’ former resolutions (SCR, 2008, p. 18). Hence, the US was a perseverant and committed advocate for the recognition of Kosovo as independent state and also tried to convince their allies to join the coalition in favor of the recognition of Kosovo.

In the next part, the focus lies on demonstrating whether there was a link between the UK and Spain positions on Kosovo and the position of the US.

#### 5.1.1 United Kingdom

Since the Second World War, the UK and the US have had a special relationship based on shared values, language and history (Dumbrell, 2009, p. 65). They often worked together on foreign policy issues and they professionalized their alliance with commitments through international organizations, such as NATO. Moreover, they held formalized expectations of co-operation and collaboration (Dumbrell, 2004; Dumbrell, 2009, p. 65). In 2008, there were no signs that the strong and close alliance between the UK and the US had changed (Dumbrell, 2009, p. 71). Though, Prime Minister Gordon Brown used a different rhetoric with regards to the special relationship with the US, because he wanted to be less dependent on the US than his predecessor Tony Blair (Dumbrell, 2009, p. 71). Nevertheless, the close alliance might have played an

important role on the similar decisions of the UK and the US regarding the recognition of Kosovo.

First, it is interesting to emphasize that the US and the UK used similar argumentations regarding the path to and the actual recognition of Kosovo (United Nations, 2008). Just like his American colleague, the UK Ambassador to the UN, Sir John Sawers, referred to the long and unique process towards the determination of the status of Kosovo as an independent state, that started with the UNSC resolution 1244 (SCR, 2008, pp. 12-13). Furthermore, in line with his American colleague, Sir John Sawers supported the conclusion of UN Special Envoy, Martti Ahtisaari, that the independence of Kosovo was the best solution to create peace and security in the region and was ‘the only viable way forward’ (SCR, 2008, p. 13). For the British government, the chronology of events led to the decision to recognize the independent state of Kosovo. The British and the Americans used similar argumentations, but the question is whether this means that the British decision to recognize Kosovo was the direct result of their special relationship with the US or not.

In fact, a reference to the decision of the US regarding the recognition of Kosovo was not included in the British argumentation. The British mainly focused on the chronology of events, democratic values and human rights with regards to their decision to recognize Kosovo (Chatham House, 2008; UK Parliament, 2008a; SCR, 2008, p. 13). In his written ministerial statement on the 19<sup>th</sup> of February, Secretary of State of Foreign Affairs Miliband did not mention the US at all (UK Parliament, 2008a). Actually, the independence of Kosovo was framed as a ‘European issue’. The press office of the UK government stated that the Kosovar issue ‘must be resolved [...] with the EU in the

lead' (Foreign & Commonwealth Office [FCO], 2007)<sup>2</sup>. Miliband also said that the EU had 'to play a leading role in bringing the status process through to conclusion' (Der Spiegel, 2008; UK Parliament, 2008a). Moreover, the UK declared their recognition of the independent state of Kosovo on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February. The US made that decision on the same day, but EU countries were the first to announce their policy on Kosovo (Der Spiegel, 2008). This evidence shows that the EU countries, led by the UK, were trying to take a united stance regardless of the policy of the US.

From the American side, there were some references made to the relationship with the UK regarding the recognition of Kosovo. Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Daniel Fried, for instance stated in an interview with the Washington Journal that 'The United States has a responsibility in the world. In Kosovo, we are working not alone, not unilaterally, but with our European allies, especially with the United Kingdom' (US Department of State, 2008b). It might be the case that the Americans needed countries such as the UK to justify their own decision to recognize Kosovo. However, ten days after the recognition of Kosovo, a report was released by the American Congressional Research Service on the state of the partnership between the US and the UK. This report presented several examples of foreign policy decisions in which the UK followed the US. Regarding Kosovo, the report only referred to the military support that was given by the UK during the NATO air campaign in 1999 (Archik, 2008). There was no reference made to the decision of recognizing the independent state of Kosovo. There was no direct evidence that the US pushed the UK in a certain direction.

Based on the evidence, the US and the UK coordinated their behavior regarding

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<sup>2</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> of December 2007. Letter from the press office of the UK government. ('Kosovo final status – Media.'). The citation can be found in the appendix, document no. 1

the recognition of Kosovo. First of all, both countries recognized Kosovo on the same day. Secondly, the fact that the US and the UK used exactly the same argumentation to justify the recognition of Kosovo is particularly interesting. Thirdly, both the US and the UK often referred to the coordination between the Western allies and particularly the coordination between each other with regards to the recognition of Kosovo.

Nevertheless, the claim can be made that the close ally relationship factor between the UK and the US was *absent* with regards to the recognition of Kosovo. Firstly, British officials did not explicitly mention that the British decision to recognize Kosovo was based on the decision of the US. This might be related to the fact that Prime Minister Brown tried to be less focused on the US than his predecessor Tony Blair. Secondly, the British government framed the issue as a European one and supported the position that the EU should play a leading role in determining the status of Kosovo. Lastly, the US never made any statements that implied that they put pressure on the UK regarding the recognition of Kosovo.

#### 5.1.2 Spain

The relationship of Spain with the US can be characterized as strong. American politicians see Spain as ‘an important US ally and one of the closest US partners in Europe’ reinforced by ‘extensive cultural ties and a mutually beneficial economic relationship’ (Mix, 2015). The intensity of the close ally relationship between the two countries partially depends on the political ideology of the government in power. The ties are generally stronger when the government is led by the conservative PP instead of by the socialist PSOE (Mix, 2015, p. 7). An example of this difference is the foreign policy change that happened under the socialist Zapatero led government after the pro-Atlantic government of the conservative PP lost the elections in 2004. The Zapatero

government changed its focus from the Atlantic to the European continent and aimed for more cooperation with the EU rather than with the US (Vaquer i Fanés, 2011, p. 15). After the elections, Zapatero immediately and abruptly withdrew all Spanish troops from Iraq and this seemed to end the special relationship that had carefully been constructed by the Aznar government (Basora, 2009, p. 94; Mix, 2015, p. 7). Notwithstanding this policy change, the bilateral relationship continued during the years prior to the declaration of independence of Kosovo (Basora, 2009, p. 94). Therefore, the Spanish-American relationship still might have played an important role with regards to the decision on the recognition of Kosovo.

Until the debates on the final status of Kosovo started, the Spanish and American positions regarding the fate of Kosovo seemed to be broadly similar. Since 1999, Spain had supported UNSC resolutions and NATO statements in favor of international intervention in Kosovo. However, the main argumentation for the Spanish support was based on the promotion of European and Atlantic unity and the reinforcement of democratic values and human rights in the Balkan Peninsula (Johansson-Nogués, 2008, p. 2). The conviction that the final status of Kosovo should had been determined by the international community in order to promote peace and security in the region was not included in the public Spanish argumentation. The argumentations of the US and Spain started to diverge publicly after the publication of the Ahtisaari Plan, which saw the independence of Kosovo as the only viable solution, and the failure of the subsequent negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia (Johansson-Nogués, 2008, p. 2). The main disagreement focused on the legality of the Kosovar independence. According to the Spanish government, the independence of Kosovo was a unilateral act that was not in line with international law and UNSC Resolution 1244

(Senado, 2009, p. 145). By contrast, the Americans were convinced of the legality of the independence of Kosovo which was justified by UNSC Resolution 1244 (SCR, 2008, p. 18). Hence, unlike the British, Spain had a completely different interpretation of what happened prior to the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo than the Americans.

The Spanish opposition against the US-led coalition in favor of recognition was intensified by the position of the European-centered Zapatero government. In December 2007, after the meeting of the European Council, the Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero stated that peace and security should be restored in the Western Balkans and that the EU should have a ‘common and unique position’ regarding the final status of Kosovo (El País, 2007a; Johansson-Nogués, 2008, p. 3). Moreover, the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs Moratinos declared that he ‘supported European unity’ on this issue (El País, 2007b). There were no references made by the Spanish government to promote unity with the US. Furthermore, the pro-Atlantic PP was against the recognition of Kosovo (Vaquer i Fanés, 2011, p. 13). The leader of the PP, Mariano Rajoy, stated in an interview on the 17<sup>th</sup> of February 2008 that he strongly opposed the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo and that he expected the incumbent government to not recognize the sovereignty of Kosovo (El País, 2008a). Gerardo Galeote, a Member of the European Parliament of the PP added that the declaration of independence of Kosovo was ‘very bad news for Spain’ and should be rejected (El Mundo, 2008). Thus, the most pro-Atlantic parliamentarians were against the recognition of Kosovo as well and did not take the relationship with the US into consideration.

In fact, Spain made statements that publicly countered the arguments made by

the US and its close allies regarding the Kosovar recognition (Fabry, 2012, p. 666). For instance, Spain voted in favor of requesting the International Court of Justice to provide an advisory opinion on the legality of the independence of Kosovo, while the US voted against such a decision (United Nations General Assembly, 2008). Eventually, Spain led the anti-recognition coalition of member states within the European Union (The Guardian, 2008a). The US Ambassador to Spain had concerns ‘regarding third countries reporting that Spanish diplomats have lobbied against Kosovo recognition, sometimes opposing other EU diplomats who were seeking to promote recognitions’ (US Embassy to Spain, 2008a). Although they denied the accusations, Spain actively lobbied against the US-led coalition that was trying to convince other states to recognize Kosovo (MacShane, 2008).

An additional possible explanation for the Spanish disagreement with the US might have been its room to maneuver on this topic, because the recognition of Kosovo was not a hot topic in such a way that it could rise tensions between the US and Spain (Mix, 2015, p. 7). After Spain decided to not recognize Kosovo and to withdraw its troops from Kosovo, the US Vice President, Joe Biden stated that ‘the relationship we have with Spain exceeds whatever disagreement we may have over Kosovo’ (Reuters, 2009). However, the US unsuccessfully asked Spain for clarification of their position and they pressured Spain not to act counterproductive in the process (US Embassy to Spain, 2008a).

Eventually, the disagreement led to diverging decisions with regards to the recognition of Kosovo. There are several justifications to claim that the close ally relationship between Spain and the US was *absent* in the decision-making process towards the non-recognition of Kosovo. Firstly, the actual decisions on the status of

Kosovo were completely opposite. Spain decided to not recognize Kosovo and led the anti-recognition coalition of European countries, while the US recognized Kosovo and led the international coalition of Kosovo recognizing states. Secondly, the relations between Spain and the US were rather cold during the Zapatero government, but even the most pro-Atlantic parliamentarians of the PP were against the recognition of Kosovo. Thirdly, despite some diplomatic pressure, Spain opposed the statements of the US regarding both the recognition of Kosovo and the advisory opinion of the ICJ in 2010. Lastly, the alternative explanation that Spain tried to focus on European allies due to the shift in focus of the Zapatero government from the US to the EU is not convincing. After it became clear that there was no single voice in the EU regarding the status of Kosovo, Spain decided to act on its own and decided to not recognize Kosovo.

Concluding, since H1 cannot convincingly explain the variance in the British and Spanish decisions on the recognition of Kosovo, it is necessary to look at other possible explanations. In the next section, the influence of path dependency is examined.

### *5.2 Path dependency*

The US Vice President Joseph Biden stated to the Assembly of Kosovo on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May 2009 that the path to the Kosovar independence ‘included nearly a decade of U.N. administration and determined diplomacy by the US and our partners in Europe that resulted in the plan that you are following to this day’ (White House, 2009). This decade of diplomacy started with the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1244 in 1999 and was followed by a NATO intervention, the deployment of international peacekeeping forces and several financial aid programs. During such an intense diplomatic process, it is possible that some states took binding commitments that led to a certain policy



direction. In the next section, the focus lies on the possible commitments that were made by the UK and Spain that might have led them to the recognition of Kosovo.

### 5.2.1 United Kingdom

The UK had maintained extensive ties with Kosovo, since the end of the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s (Doyle & Morina, 2013, p. 6). The relationship between the UK and Kosovo is a classic example of how historical context matters in international relations (Selimi, 2011). During the Distinguished Speaker Series of the The Hague Institute for Global Justice on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2016, President Elect of the Republic of Kosovo Hashim Thaçi, stated that the relationship between Kosovo and the UK is historically strong and special (Thaçi, 2016). The history of interactions between the UK and the Kosovar movement might have led to certain commitments that eventually explain why the UK recognized Kosovo.

The British commitment towards Kosovo's status started during the preparations for the NATO intervention in 1999 when Tony Blair played a 'crucial role' in passing UNSC resolution 1244 that 'saved Kosovo' (Selimi, 2011). Because of these efforts, current President Elect of Kosovo, Hashim Thaçi, called Tony Blair 'a political giant given the tremendous role that Blair played in helping my country forge its independence' (Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo, 2016). UNSC resolution 1244 cleared the way for an international civil and military presence in Kosovo in order to 'establish an interim administration for Kosovo under which the people of Kosovo can enjoy substantial autonomy' (UN, 1999). Contrary to comparable resolutions, it did not explicitly prohibit a possible declaration of independence. Therefore, UNSC resolution 1244 is often seen as an important step towards the independence of Kosovo (Hilpold, 2012, p. 323).

The British did not only play a crucial role in the adoption of UNSC resolution 1244, they also participated in the following military intervention. The NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR), which came into play after the adoption of UNSC resolution 1244, underlined the British commitment to actively participate in securing a peaceful and safe future for Kosovo (Doyle & Morina, 2008, p. 9). By sending 10500 troops to the mission, the British were responsible for the support of almost 20% of the whole mission which comprised a total of 50.000 troops (House of Commons, 1999). Eventually, the total cost for the military operation in Kosovo was estimated to be more than 1 billion pounds (The Guardian, 2014).

Besides the military support and the commitment to establishing a final settlement for Kosovo, the UK focused on state building and development aid. The British government provided indirect support for the improvement of the government capacity of Kosovo through the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). According to Doyle and Morina (2008, p. 9), the British participation in UNMIK was comparable to other EU countries, but this participation also made it possible for the UK to develop its bilateral help to Kosovo that was vital for a future independence of Kosovo.

The bilateral help from the UK was more extensive than the bilateral help of other EU member countries for Kosovo. In the beginning of this century, from 2000-2002, the British government spent over 17 million pounds on bilateral assistance to Kosovo in order to establish a governmental framework (Doyle & Morina, 2013, p. 8). After that first period, the British government remained committed to the state building process of Kosovo (Doyle & Morina: 2013, p. 8). By providing bilateral aid, the British tried to fulfil several goals, such as stabilizing Kosovo through developing stable and

accountable central government institutions, supporting the European integration of Kosovo and promoting the international cooperation within the state (Doyle & Morina, 2013, p. 8). This commitment to strengthening the capacity and efficiency of the governmental structure of Kosovo had a substantial effect on the internal position of Kosovo. It is likely that Kosovo could not have convincingly declared its independence without the British political, financial and juridical support (Doyle & Morina, 2013, pp. 11-13). The UK also built diplomatic relations with Kosovo before its independence (Doyle & Morina, 2013, p. 8). Moreover, in 2004/2005, British officials formulated in an internal document that it 'should make clear that the logical destination of Kosovo is independence' (FCO, 2004/2005)<sup>3</sup>.

When Kosovo declared its independence on the 17<sup>th</sup> of February 2008, UK officials explicitly referred to former decisions that the British government took with regards to the creation of the Kosovar state. For instance, the UK Ambassador to the UN referred to the chronology of events and UNSC resolution 1244 as being important steps towards determining the independent status of Kosovo (SCR, 2008, pp. 12-13). In addition, the British Ambassador to the Republic of Kosovo and the current leader of the UK mission to the UN emphasized the long-lasting and continuing British support for the independence of Kosovo (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kosovo, 2011; Tatham, 2015).

In sum, the British government committed itself to the creation of the new state of Kosovo through playing a crucial role in the adoption of UNSC resolution 1244. After this resolution, the UK continuously supported the state building, capacity building and governmental improvement of Kosovo through bilateral aid programs.

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<sup>3</sup> 2004/2005. Internal document from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office. ('Kosovo: Elements of UK strategy 2004/2005.'). The citation can be found in the appendix, document no. 2

These programs played an important role in creating the opportunity for Kosovo to declare its independence. With every step they took, officials mentioned the relevant decisions the British government had taken beforehand. Initial events moved UK policy in one direction and encouraged and reinforced future developments in that same direction. Hence, path dependency was *present* as a factor in the decision of the UK to recognize Kosovo.

### 5.2.2 Spain

The Spanish government never played a crucial role in the Balkans (Vaquer i Fànes, 2011, p. 9). In the 1990s, Spain was more committed to improving its integration within the Euro-Atlantic family than to solving the problems in Yugoslavia (Vaquer i Fànes, 2011, p. 9). Because of the focus on its own position, Spain had not a clear policy regarding the Balkans and Kosovo. Therefore, after the conflict between Serbia and Kosovo broke out in 1998, Spain followed the general EU policy regarding the Balkans (Vaquer i Fànes, 2011, p. 10). Furthermore, the relation between Spain and Kosovo was weaker than the one between the UK and Kosovo. For instance, unlike the UK, Spain never established diplomatic relations with Pristina (Vaquer i Fànes, 2011, p. 10). Consequently, in contrast with the UK, Spain had not directly committed itself to the creation of the new state of Kosovo.

In 1999, when the UNSC resolution 1244 was adopted, Spain did not have a seat in the Security Council and therefore did not vote on the resolution. Nevertheless, the Spanish government made some official statements with regards to the resolution. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of June 1999, the Spanish Prime Minister, José Maria Aznar stated that the resolution provided a solution for the political crisis in Kosovo and that Spain supported the resolution in order to defend democratic values and human rights (Congreso de los

Diputados, Leg. VI, Num. 246: 13058). Subsequently, the Spanish Secretary of State of Foreign Policy and the European Union, Miguel y Egea, declared that the Spanish support for the missions did not mean that Spain was in favor of the independence of Kosovo (Asociación Española de Profesores de Derecho Internacional y Relaciones Internacionales, 2003, p. 187). Through this statement, the Spanish government demonstrated its willingness to not commit itself to the possible creation of Kosovo. The Spanish reluctance was reiterated during the process towards the Ahtisaari plan. When UN Special Envoy Ahtisaari was working on his proposal on the final status of Kosovo, the Spanish government clarified that it was against an imposed independence for Kosovo by the UNSC out of fear of creating a precedent (Perritt, 2010, p. 136).

Despite its opposition against the independence of Kosovo, Spain decided to participate in the UNMIK and KFOR missions. In 1999, the Spanish government declared to send 1.200 troops for the KFOR mission, which accounted for 2.5% of the total mission, and to provide about 40 million pounds for humanitarian aid and the reconstruction of Kosovo (Congreso de los Diputados, Leg. VI, Num. 512, p. 2). From 1999 until 2009, 22.000 Spanish soldiers served in Kosovo and the total costs for humanitarian and development aid were estimated at about 750 million pounds (Spanish Ministry of Defence, 2016). In general, the Spanish support for Kosovo was comparable with the support provided by the government of the UK, but the commitments and argumentation differed. Unlike the UK, Spain did not set up a bilateral aid program in which they committed themselves to the improvement of the governmental capacity, European integration and the international participation of Kosovo.

In fact, the extensive financial and military support for Kosovo by Spain was mainly based on prestige and on improving its own power position (Johansson-Nogués,

2008, pp. 2-5; Vaquer i Fànes, 2011, p. 10). First of all, two important positions were occupied by Spanish officials, namely the NATO Secretary-General (Javier Solana) and the Personal Representative for the Former Republic of Yugoslavia (Felipe González). Secondly, due to a lack of cultural, historical, economic and linguistic ties, Spain had no interest in Kosovo and the Balkan region itself (Johansson-Nogués, 2008, pp. 1-2; Vaquer i Fànes, 2011, pp. 16-17). Third, the government focused more on international law than on the position of Kosovo when it came to their argumentation for the non-recognition of Kosovo (Vaquer i Fànes, 2011, pp. 8-17). Last, and most important, the communication with Kosovar authorities took place through the international missions, since Spain had never established diplomatic relations with Pristina (Vaquer i Fànes, 2011, p. 10). The Spanish lack of interest in Kosovo came to the surface when European unity on the recognition of Kosovo was unachieved and Spain became the group-leader of the non-recognizing coalition (The Guardian, 2008a; Vaquer i Fànes, 2011).

In sum, despite the fact that Spain had supported most of the policies of NATO and the EU, it was always clear about its opposition against an independent Kosovo. After the resolution in 1999, the Spanish government stated that it would not recognize Kosovo. Moreover, it differed from other countries by not establishing a diplomatic presence in Pristina. Although Spain contributed to the military missions in Kosovo and provided financial aid to Kosovo, it did not commit itself to the creation of a Kosovar state by making statements in favor of Kosovar state building. Spain had no interest in the fate of Kosovo. As European unity on the issue of recognition of Kosovo was not achieved, Spain could decide to not recognize Kosovo without breaking any of its alliance commitments. Hence, path dependency was *absent* in the Spanish case.

In general, H2 shows that the final UK and Spanish decisions on the recognition

of Kosovo were in line with their former statements. Nevertheless, this variable cannot explain on its own why the UK and Spain made their final decision. In 1999, the British and Spanish governments were not aware that they had to decide on the recognition of Kosovo in 2008. Therefore, it is necessary to look at potential other factors, such as secessionist challenges and electoral costs.

### *5.3 Secessionist challenges*

The UK and Spain are both countries that had to deal with internal secessionist movements in 2008. In the UK, the Scottish demonstrated their ethnic discontent by advocating in favor of the creation of their own state, while the Basques and Catalans tried to achieve statehood in Spain. Prior to the decision on the recognition of Kosovo, secessionist movements in both countries had been calling for the holding of referenda on the future of their regions. The SNP was the main political actor in favor of Scottish independence. In May 2007, the SNP obtained 47 seats and became the biggest party in the Scottish parliament after a strong nationalistic campaign (BBC News, 2012). In the meantime, the Spanish government had to deal with the PNV as one of the most prominent political actors in favor of independence of the Basque Country and their leader already called for an independence referendum in 2007 (El Mundo, 2007). The most prominent Catalan nationalist movement of Artur Mas, CiU, was more focused on gaining greater political autonomy than on secession. However, after the publication of the new Statute of Autonomy in 2006, tensions with regards to the status of Catalonia rose and led to early elections (Lang, 2013, p. 1).

Altogether, the secessionist challenge was already present in both the UK and Spain before 2008. However, the decisions regarding the recognition of Kosovo differed. In order to explain this difference, it is necessary to look at the positions of the

secessionist movements prior to the 2008 decision on the recognition of Kosovo, to evaluate whether the secessionists referred to Kosovo in their advocacy for independence and whether British and Spanish government officials considered the secessionist movements as a threat.

### 5.3.1 United Kingdom

The decision on the recognition of Kosovo came less than a year after the elections for the Scottish Parliament. Following the ‘historic victory’, the SNP acted in favor of enforcing independence through a referendum (The Guardian, 2007). The SNP believed that ‘independence is the natural state for nations like our own’ and ‘with independence Scotland will be free to flourish and grow’ (SNP, 2007, p. 7). Moreover, the SNP supported ‘a written constitution for an independent Scotland to guarantee the rights and liberties of citizens and limit the power of government’ (SNP, 2007, p. 66). The right of self-determination of the people was of great importance for the SNP and a referendum was considered to be the best way to achieve independence. Therefore, the SNP stated that they trusted ‘Scots to take the decision on Scotland’s future in an independence referendum’ (SNP, 2007, p. 5). A few months after the elections, the leader of the SNP, Alex Salmond, put these statements into practice by starting a public consultation with the Scottish people on the position of Scotland. Salmond initiated a ‘National Conversation’ that had to determine the status of Scotland with a referendum as one of the possibilities (Scottish Government, 2016). Thus, the threat of Scottish secession was high in the months prior to the British decision to recognize Kosovo.

Nevertheless, the SNP did not pay any attention to Kosovo in their party manifesto in 2007. A possible explanation for this is that the SNP was cautious about referring to Kosovo, since the issue could have caused electoral problems based on a



previous costly precedent. Namely, Salmond opposed the bombardments of NATO in Serbia in 1999 out of fear that the actions would be ineffective (Herald Scotland, 2001; World Socialist Website, 1999). In fact, the bombardments effectively stopped Slobodan Milosevic. Hence, a big emphasis on the developments in Kosovo might have brought back to light the controversial statements by Salmond regarding this topic.

Prior to the British recognition of Kosovo in 2008, the SNP had not made any public statements about Kosovo being a precedent for Scottish independence. In the plenary parliamentary meetings, debates and meetings of the European and External Relations Committee surrounding the declaration of independence of Kosovo, the Scottish politicians only mentioned Kosovo once. A Member of the Scottish Parliament for the SNP, Aileen Campbell, presented a motion to the Scottish Parliament on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February 2008 in which he ‘congratulates Kosova on achieving her independence’ and ‘fully recognizes Kosova as a member of the international community’ (Scottish Parliament, 2008). The Scottish pro-independence movement avoided any comparison with the Kosovar unilateral declaration of independence, because of its violent character (Bourne, 2014, p. 111). Scotland was aware of the Spanish resistance regarding the recognition of Kosovo and, therefore, the SNP was afraid that a comparison with Kosovo could endanger the recognition of Scotland by Spain and therewith a potential Scottish EU membership in case of a Scottish independence (Financial Times, 2008a). Hence, interestingly, the SNP had no interest in comparing Scotland with Kosovo and there was barely any risk of creating a precedent for the British government.

From the perspective of the British government and opposition, there were no indications of concern about secessionism either. Despite the high secessionist challenge from the most prominent political actor in Scotland, the British government

did not seem to be constrained with regards to their decision on the recognition of Kosovo. The mainstream British parties, Labour and Conservatives, did try to force Salmond to apologize for his statements on the NATO bombardments in 1999 (Daily Record, 2008; Scottish Parliament, 2008b). Moreover, George Foulkes called the ‘celebratory tone of Aileen Campbell’s motion [...] misguided at best and political opportunism in the extreme’ (Scottish Parliament, 2008c). However, this was more likely a strategy meant to affect the electoral prospects of the SNP than to force them to accept that Kosovo was no precedent for Scotland.

Furthermore, British government officials did not mention Scotland in their statements on the recognition of Kosovo. Both the UK Ambassador to the UN and British Foreign Minister Miliband said that EU Ministers were clear in their view that Kosovo constituted a *sui generis* case which did not set any precedent (UK Parliament, 2008a; SCR, 2008, p. 13). However, this last statement was not unique to British officials as it was coordinated with other European governments and was initiated by Spanish diplomats (Vaquer i Fànes, 2011, p. 14). Therefore, the British government did not perceive Kosovo as a possible precedent for Scotland.

In sum, the Scottish secessionist movement cleared the way for the British government to recognize Kosovo by not framing Kosovo as a possible precedent. Despite their plans for creating a Scottish state, the Scottish nationalists actually tried to avoid any comparisons with Kosovo. Moreover, the British government did not refer to the Scottish issue whatsoever. Therefore, the British government did not have to fear the creation of a precedent with the recognition of Kosovo and, consequently, the secessionist challenge was *low*.

### 5.3.2 Spain

In 2008, the most persistent secessionist challenge in Spain came from the Basque Country. Namely, the demand for Basque independence was accompanied by violent actions and the non-violent PNV presented its referendum plan for independence in 2007 (Rodríguez-Izquierdo Serrano, 2011, pp. 429-430). For several years, the PNV had been the biggest party in the Basque parliament and it continuously made statements in favor of Basque independence. After their victory in 2001, the PNV developed a new political strategy to achieve Basque independence in a constitutional and political context (Rodríguez-Izquierdo Serrano, 2011, pp. 430-434). The refusal of the 'Ibarretxe Plan', which tried to make independence possible by changing the Basque constitution, led to the creation of a new way to achieve independence. This strategy came into play in September 2007 when the PNV-leader and president of the Basque region Juan José Ibarretxe presented his plan to hold a referendum on the future of the Basque Country on the 25<sup>th</sup> of October 2008 (El Mundo, 2007). Therefore, the Spanish government was aware of the secessionist challenge by the Basques when they had to decide on the Kosovo issue.

Another potential secessionist challenge for the Spanish government came from Catalonia. However, in 2008, the Catalan nationalist parties were focusing on increasing their autonomous status within Spain rather than on creating their own Catalan state (Rodríguez-Izquierdo Serrano, 2011, p. 429). The Catalan nationalists CiU agreed with the new Statute of Autonomy in 2006, because it 'responds to the Catalan wish of self-government' and 'is supported by 90% of the Catalan representatives' (Parlament de Catalunya, 2005, p. 10). Therewith, they agreed with the increased autonomy of Catalonia and had no intentions of proposing secession. The radical, but small Esquerra

Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) was the only party that rejected the Statute of Autonomy, because they preferred a path towards secession (Castellá Andreu, 2008, pp. 96-97). The CiU did not change its position until it decided to develop a secessionist position, due to the economic crisis in 2010 and the problems with regards to the Statute of Autonomy (Blas, 2013, p. 399; Bourne, 2014, p. 95). Hence, the threat of Catalan secession was low in the months prior to the Spanish decision to recognize Kosovo, because the main political actor in Catalanian politics, CiU, was not in favor of secession yet. Nevertheless, secession and gaining autonomy were on-going issues in Catalonia.

Kosovo was more important to the secessionists in Catalonia and the Basque Country than to those in Scotland. Immediately after Kosovo declared its independence, several secessionist politicians reacted. The Basque government, led by the PNV, linked the Kosovar issue to their own situation. The spokeswoman of the nationalist Basque government, Miren Azkarate, said that this event was ‘a lesson for resolving identity conflicts in a peaceful and democratic way’ and that ‘the will of citizens is important for solving entrenched political problems like this.’ (El Mundo, 2008; El País, 2008b). Therewith, the link to their referendum plan was made. She also put extra pressure on the Spanish government to recognize Kosovo by referring to other Western countries that immediately recognized Kosovo and treated the case as a normal situation (El Mundo, 2008).

Contrary to the Basque statement, the most prominent Catalan secessionists did not compare the Kosovar issue with their own situation. In fact, the CiU declared that, although they respected the democratic will of Kosovo, ‘Catalonia is not Kosovo’ (Diario de Sevilla, 2008). The leader of the more radical secessionists of the ERC,

Josep-Lluís Carod-Rovira, admitted that a comparison between Kosovo and Catalonia ‘makes no sense’, because they had to deal with ‘completely different realities’ (Diario de Sevilla, 2008; El Mundo, 2008). However, it is important to note that Carod-Rovira was also the vice president of the Catalan Generalitat and was therefore committed to a moderate view. Namely, his party members Joan Ridao and Joan Puig called Kosovo ‘a very important precedent’ and said that Catalonia ‘will be independent if a political and social majority decides it’ (US Embassy to Spain, 2008b). Moreover, the Catalan parties supported the Kosovar declaration of independence. Both Mas and Carod-Rovira put pressure on the Spanish government to recognize Kosovo as soon as possible (US Embassy to Spain, 2008b). Mas said that the Spanish government was not acting ‘democratically’ if it decided to not recognize Kosovo, because that would have been ‘against the democratic will of the Kosovar people’ (Diario de Sevilla, 2008). Furthermore, representatives from both CiU and ERC announced that they would go to Kosovo to ‘study the secession process’ (US Embassy to Spain, 2008b).

The division between Madrid on the one hand and Barcelona and Vitoria-Gazteiz on the other hand was felt by the Spanish government. Already in December 2007, before the common statement of the EU ministers on Kosovo, Prime Minister Zapatero called the case ‘exceptional’ and said that he ‘would not recognize a unilateral declaration of independence’ out of fear of Spanish secessionists (Público, 2007). Before that, the Spanish Foreign Minister Moratinos said that ‘Kosovo has no relation to territorial and administrative division in Spain from either a political, diplomatic or legal position’ (Johansson-Nogués, 2008, pp. 2-3). Eventually, this led to the EU Council of Ministers making a special statement in which they stated that Kosovo was a ‘unique case’ and could not be compared to other cases of secessionism because of the

principle of ‘sui generis’ (Europa Nu, 2008). This statement was vital for Spanish diplomats to prevent the Catalans and Basques from using the Kosovar case in their advantage (Vaquer i Fànes, 2011, p. 14). In a leaked document from the Embassy of the US to Spain, the US Ambassador wrote that Spanish diplomats had told him that the recognition of Kosovo by Spain was ‘not a near-term prospect due to domestic considerations influenced by autonomous communities politics, particularly in the Basque Country and Catalonia’ (US Embassy to Spain, 2008a). Herewith, the Spanish government did not only implicitly link the secessionist challenge of the Basque Country and Catalonia to their decision on the recognition of Kosovo, but also explicitly declared that they feared that Kosovo would create a precedent.

Concluding, the Basque and Catalan secessionist movements explicitly pressured the Spanish government to recognize Kosovo and particularly the Basques linked the Kosovar case to their own position. Although the Catalans were more reluctant to compare themselves with Kosovo, they still encouraged the people of Kosovo and supported their path to independence. Moreover, the Spanish government continuously feared a possible precedent and despite clear statements that Kosovo was not a precedent, the evidence supports that it was afraid of internal problems. Therefore, the secessionist challenge from the Basque Country and Catalonia was *high* in 2008 and the fear of creating a possible precedent could explain why Spain did not recognize Kosovo.

H3 shows that Coggins’ secessionist challenge variable needs some nuance and sophistication to understand the mechanisms that explain the influence of secessionist movements on a governments’ decision on the recognition of states. The presence of a secessionist movement seems to be insufficient, since a secessionist movement most

likely should link its own situation to that of external secessionist as well. However, secessionist movements referring to the Kosovar issue might be a necessary condition; it is not a sufficient condition. Namely, it is important to look at whether the Spanish government had to take these interests into account. In the next section, the potential electoral costs of the government with regards to the recognition of Kosovo will be discussed.

#### *5.4 Electoral costs*

In 2008, when the decision on the recognition of Kosovo was made, the British government was led by Labour and Prime Minister Brown. Labour had obtained 355 of the 646 seats in the House of Commons during the general elections of 2005. Their biggest competitors were the Conservatives with 198 seats and the LibDems with 51 seats. The next elections were more than two years away and were planned for the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 2010. In Spain, the PSOE had won the elections in 2004 and formed the Zapatero government with a large minority of 164 out of 350 seats. In order to obtain a majority, the government was supported by the ERC and Izquierda Unida (IU) (El País, 2004). The biggest and only competitor of the PSOE was the PP, which held 148 of the 350 seats in the Spanish parliament. Interestingly, the Zapatero government was dissolved in January 2008 and the next elections were scheduled on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2008, just a few weeks after Kosovo had declared its independence.

Because of the variation in electoral proximity, it is important to look at whether recognizing Kosovo could damage the electoral position of the two governments. Therefore, I mainly focus on the role played by the influential opposition parties, the Conservatives, the LibDems and the PP, public opinion and media coverage to determine whether electoral costs can explain the variation in the decisions.

#### 5.4.1 United Kingdom

The coverage of the Kosovar independence issue was not extensive in the UK. Except for some columnists in *The Guardian* and *The Herald*, there was not much coverage in either Scottish or British newspapers on the recognition of Kosovo. A columnist in *The Guardian* called the recognition of Kosovo ‘the least worse solution’ (*The Guardian*, 2008b), while a columnist in *The Herald* tried to describe a fictional and comparable situation with Kosovo when Berwick would decide to secede from England (*The Herald*, 2008). In general, newspapers, such as *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Sunday Herald* and *The Scotsman*, only published some general factual accounts about the independence of Kosovo and focused more on the non-recognizing countries in the EU and on the position of Russia rather than on the decision of the British government. Moreover, the *Daily Telegraph* mentioned the possible precedent that Kosovo could create for other separatists, but did not link it to the British situation (*The Daily Telegraph*, 2008). Hence, the most relevant newspapers in the UK did not see a British recognition of Kosovo as salient and there has not been much criticism of the decision of the British government in the newspapers.

The general consensus in favor of the recognition of Kosovo was also present in the British parliament. The Labour government of Tony Blair had been supporting the determination of the final status of Kosovo since the adoption of UNSC resolution 1244 in 1999. The Labour government of Gordon Brown prolonged this line by recognizing the independence of Kosovo on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February 2008. Interestingly, the position in favor of the independence of Kosovo was, already prior to the decision on recognition in 2008, supported by the main competitor of Labour in the British parliament. In November 2007, the leader of the Conservatives, David Cameron, said that ‘the harsh truth is that after the events of 1999, there was never any prospect that Kosovo could



remain under the sovereignty and administrative umbrella of Belgrade’ and that ‘we need to take the steps to pave the way for Kosovo's independence, and to ensure that the threats to stability are contained’ (Cameron, 2007). Moreover, within a few days after the independence of Kosovo, other British parties publicly supported the recognition. Sarah Ludford, a Member of the European Parliament for the LibDems, stated that ‘there really was no other option but the independence of Kosovo’ (Liberal Democrats, 2008). Additionally, in the first debate on the recognition of Kosovo in the British Parliament, Jo Swinson (LibDems), said that ‘I and my party very much welcome the Kosovan declaration of independence and the recognition of Kosovo by the Government’ (UK Parliament, 2008b). In the Scottish Parliament, both the Conservatives and Labour supported a motion of the SNP that congratulated Kosovo on achieving its independence (Scottish Parliament, 2008a; Scottish Parliament, 2008b). Therefore, support for the government’s decision to recognize Kosovo was high.

The only criticism of the recognition of Kosovo came from members of the Conservatives. In the European Parliament, Charles Tannock said that he was afraid that Kosovo might create a precedent and that not all countries would see it as a sui generis case (European Parliament, 2008). Though, his criticism more focused on potential problems for other countries and on the position of his party leader than on the decision of the British government. In the British parliament, members of the Conservatives, namely Daniel Kawczynski and Bill Cash, were afraid that the recognition came too early and blamed the government for taking the wrong decision (UK Parliament, 2008b). However, they were immediately reminded by their fellow Conservative Keith Simpson that it was ‘on record that the Opposition support the Government’s position on the independence of Kosovo’ (UK Parliament, 2008b). Therefore, there is

convincing evidence to claim that there was an overall consensus in the British parliament on the recognition of Kosovo and that Labour had no reason to fear a possible overflow of voters to other parties.

Unfortunately, there are no polls available that asked the British people about the recognition of Kosovo. However, it seems that the people of the UK have always been rather strong supporters of Kosovo. Already in 1999, about 70% of the British population supported the NATO air strikes in order to liberate Kosovo from the terror of Slobodan Milosevic (Ipsos Mori, 1999; Universiteit Leiden, 2008, p. 21). The UK was one of the few countries where a majority of the people would have been in favor of sending ground troops to Kosovo (Ipsos Mori, 1999; Universiteit Leiden, 2008, p. 21). This support could only be an indicator that British support for the plight of the Kosovar was high in 1999. Therefore, it is not possible to link this directly to the position of the British population on the recognition of Kosovo in 2008.

In sum, electoral costs for the British government linked to the recognition of Kosovo were *absent*. Opposition parties and their leaders were generally supportive towards the recognition of Kosovo. The biggest competitor of Labour was also in favor of the recognition of Kosovo. There was not much criticism from either opposition parties or the media regarding the behavior of the British government. Furthermore, there are no indications that a substantial part of public opinion was against the recognition of Kosovo, although this last claim cannot be directly supported by any explicit empirical evidence.

#### 5.4.2 Spain

In Spain, there was less consensus on the Kosovar issue than in the UK. Most secessionist parties from Catalonia and the Basque Country supported the independence

of Kosovo, while the PP was the most outspoken party against the recognition of Kosovo. Moreover, the Zapatero government came into conflict with two of its electoral promises (Johansson-Nogués, 2008, p. 1). On the one hand, the government had promised to focus on the EU instead of on the Atlantic alliance. On the other hand, Zapatero wanted to give more autonomy to the Spanish regions without giving them the possibility to secede. The Kosovar issue endangered these promises, since recognition could have created a precedent for the Spanish regions, while non-recognition could have created disagreement within the EU (Johansson-Nogues, 2008, p. 1). With the upcoming elections, the PP tried to exploit this conflict of promises by pushing the Zapatero government to make a decision on the status of Kosovo.

For years, the PP accused Zapatero of ‘balkanizing’ Spain and ‘presiding over the dissolution of 500 years old Spanish Kingdom’ (El País, 2005; US Embassy to Spain, 2008c). Already prior to the declaration of independence of Kosovo, the PP made clear that it would reject the independence of Kosovo and immediately started to question whether the Zapatero government would be capable of dealing with this matter (Vaquer i Fanés, 2011, p. 13). On the 17<sup>th</sup> of February 2008, the leader of PP, said that he would oppose a unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo and that he expected the incumbent government to not recognize the sovereignty of Kosovo (El País, 2008a). Moreover, the spokesperson for Foreign Affairs of the PP, Gustavo de Aristegui, stated that accepting a unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo would be a ‘mistake’, because Kosovo is ‘a Serbian province’ (Europa Press, 2008).

After the Kosovar declaration of independence, the president of the PP Mariano Rajoy, believed that ‘Spain should not recognize Kosovo as an independent state if there is no agreement between the parties and no new resolution from the UN Security

Council' (US Embassy to Spain, 2008b). Moreover, he said that Spain 'should not send or maintain the presence of civilian officials' and blamed the Zapatero government of 'incongruity' and bad diplomacy (US Embassy to Spain, 2008b). Hence, the PP used the Kosovar issue to criticize the PSOE, framed it as incapable of dealing with international issues and blamed it for reinforcing secessionist tensions within Spain.

This position of the main competitor of the PSOE led to concerns about a potential electoral loss during the upcoming elections. In a leaked document, the Spanish Director for North America and Europe, Pene Pons, said that 'Kosovo would be an elections issue', because it was 'in the headlines and the debate in Europe is drawing the government's attention away from its campaign priorities' (US Embassy to Spain, 2008d). The Chief of Staff of Foreign Minister Moratinos, Javier Sancho, stated that 'it was politically impossible for the government of Spain to support Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in the middle of a hotly contested campaign' (US Embassy to Spain, 2008c). Therefore, the Spanish government tried to keep the issue quiet. He also said that Spain would not change its position 'until after the elections', because the government 'wants it out of the headlines' and that 'if Zapatero wins reelection, the government of Spain will be willing to discuss further avenues for progress toward peace and stability in the Balkans' (US Embassy to Spain, 2008c). The PSOE was not only concerned about the framing of the PP, but was also afraid of losing moderate voters to the PP (US Embassy to Spain, 2008b).

Namely, the Spanish people are traditionally more reluctant when it comes to supporting Kosovo than the British. In 1999, about 30% of the Spanish population supported the NATO air strikes in Kosovo, while a majority of 53% was against the NATO operation in Kosovo (Barbé, Herranz & Mestres, 2003, p. 5). This trend of

Spanish reluctance to support Kosovo was still present in 2008. According to a poll of Real Instituto Elcano, which was held just after the decision of the Zapatero government not to recognize Kosovo, at least 40% of the Spaniards was against the recognition of Kosovo (El Periódico, 2008).

Furthermore, despite the attempts of the Spanish government to avoid media coverage, and unlike the Scottish and British media, Spanish newspapers widely reported on the issue of Kosovo. Hence, the saliency of the issue was high in Spain. In fact, the newspapers were divided in their opinion. The Madrid-based newspapers, such as El País, El Mundo, ABC and La Razón, were supporting the government in their opposition against the recognition of Kosovo, while the Barcelona-based newspapers, such as La Vanguardia, El Periódico and Avui, were in favor of the recognition of Kosovo (Vaquer i Fànes, 2011, p. 14). For instance, Andres Ortega, a journalist of El País, wrote about Kosovo that ‘more than a declaration on independence it seems like a declaration of dependence, Kosovo does not appear to be a prepared or viable country’ (El País, 2008c). Both the conservative dailies ABC and La Rázon wrote that the independence of Kosovo would set a dangerous precedent (ABC, 2008; US Embassy to Spain, 2008b). By contrast, the Catalan newspaper La Vanguardia wrote that ‘the independence of Kosovo is not illegal’ and a ‘recognition of Kosovo can be easily explained’ (La Vanguardia, 2008).

Concluding, the stakes for the Spanish government were high with regards to their decision on the recognition of Kosovo. The elections were going to take place just a couple of weeks after the decision and the Zapatero government was facing criticism from their biggest competitor. The PP opposed the recognition of Kosovo and feared that a possible precedent would be created. This position was reinforced by the fact that

Basque and Catalan parties, as well as the Catalan media supported the independence of Kosovo. Furthermore, the Madrid-based media were advocating against the recognition of Kosovo. Therefore, the PSOE could potentially lose moderate voters to the PP, if the government decided to recognize Kosovo. This concern was supported by the fact that at least 40% of the Spanish voters opposed the recognition. With the electoral calendar in mind, the electoral costs for the Spanish government to recognize Kosovo were *present*.

### *5.5 General findings*

This research on the decisions of the UK and Spain with regards to the recognition of Kosovo has provided some interesting results. The close ally relationship with the US was absent in the cases under examination. Both the UK and Spain had not based their argumentation and decision on the behavior of their great power ally. There might have been some coordination with the US or the EU with regards to their statements, but the relationship cannot explain the varying decisions on the recognition of Kosovo. Therefore, it was necessary to look at path dependency as a possible explanation. H2 can be confirmed, since the UK continuously committed itself to the creation of the state of Kosovo and Spain explicitly avoided any commitment towards the recognition of Kosovo. Nevertheless, this variable is not a sufficient condition to explain why these countries made opposite decisions. Namely, in 1999, both Spain and the UK could not expect that they had to decide on the recognition of Kosovo in 2008.

Hence, the explanation had to be found at the domestic level of analysis. First, both the UK and Spain had to deal with secessionist movements that wanted to secede. However, in the UK, Scottish secessionists did not see Kosovo as a precedent, while in Spain, Catalan and Basque secessionists explicitly linked their future to the decision of

the Spanish government. Thus, the fear to create a precedent by recognizing Kosovo seemed to be decisive in the considerations of the British and Spanish governments. Moreover, the electoral costs in both contexts seems to provide a more substantial explanation. In Spain, elections were closer to the decision on the recognition of Kosovo than in the UK and, therefore, the issue was more salient. Furthermore, the consensus in favor of recognition was bigger among British parties than among Spanish parties. Moreover, there was more media coverage of the Kosovar issue in Spain and the Spanish population was more critical of the recognition of Kosovo than the British population. Therefore, recognition could have led to more potential electoral loss for the PSOE in Spain than for Labour in the UK. Overall, this table summarizes the findings:

<b>Hypotheses</b>	<b>United Kingdom</b>	<b>Spain</b>
H1: close ally relationship (decision depends on US)	Discarded	Discarded
H2: path dependency (commitment to creation of Kosovo)	Confirmed (presence of path dependency → recognition)	Confirmed (absence of path dependency → non-recognition)
H3: secessionist challenge (fear for creating precedent)	Confirmed (low fear for precedent → recognition)	Confirmed (high fear for precedent → non-recognition)
H4: electoral costs (potential electoral loss with recognition)	Confirmed (absence of electoral costs → recognition)	Confirmed (presence of electoral costs → non-recognition)

*Table 2: Findings with regards to hypotheses*

## 6. Conclusions

This controlled comparison of two most similar cases with different outcomes on the recognition of a new state has generated some interesting and novel findings in this relatively new field of study in Political Science. First of all, H1 cannot explain the varying British and Spanish decisions. Therefore, the importance of recognizing-behavior of great powers does not seem to matter as much as Coggins suggests in her research. Another important implication of this research is that the previously neglected variable of path dependency (H2) proved to be an important indicator for the behavior of Spain and the UK and could thus be an important factor to predict what states will decide eventually. However, this variable could not sufficiently explain why states make a certain decision with regards to the recognition of a new state.

The most important findings came from the domestic level of analysis. Although the secessionist challenge (H3) was present in both the UK and Spain, this was not sufficient to explain the variance in their decisions on the recognition of Kosovo. The difference was caused by the rhetoric of the secessionist movements and whether they explicitly linked their position to the Kosovar issue. Spain could not recognize Kosovo, because the secessionist movements in Catalonia and the Basque Country explicitly linked the Spanish decision on Kosovo to their own political future. Since the Scottish nationalists did not explicitly make this link, the UK could recognize Kosovo. Hence, this adds a very important sophistication and nuance to Coggins' secessionist challenge variable and should be tested through additional research. Furthermore, electoral costs (H4) form a neglected variable that is of high importance. With upcoming elections, the electoral costs for the Spanish government to recognize Kosovo were high. By contrast, the British government did not have to fear electoral costs as a result of recognizing Kosovo, because there was a broad consensus in favor of the recognition of Kosovo. H4



plays an important role in explaining the varying decisions of the UK and Spain. Therefore, the central claim of this research is that countries are less likely to recognize a state when they fear creating a precedent for their internal secessionist movements and when the government faces electoral costs as a result of recognizing a country.

Nevertheless, there are some recommendations for further research. During the research, it became clear that the socialist Spanish government also possibly had to deal with a different kind of path dependency following their rigid interpretation of international law regarding the Spanish decision to join the coalition of the willing in the Iraq war. The conservative PP government decided in 2002/03 to join the coalition, a decision which was contested by the then Socialist opposition due to a lack of international legal legitimacy. In absence of an explicit new UNSC resolution on Kosovo, the government stated that UNSC Resolution 1244 could not legitimize the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo. This possible additional explanation might be an interesting variable to look at in further research on this topic.

One possibility to get a more detailed explanation of what accounts for the varying decisions of Spain and the UK on the recognition of Kosovo is conducting interviews. For instance, interviews can provide new insights on party considerations of politicians that had to decide on the recognition of Kosovo. The major players in the decisions processes on the recognition of Kosovo are now possibly available and willing to give interviews, since they do not hold prominent positions in current politics. Namely, politicians like Ibarretxe, Moratinos, Brown and Miliband have resigned from their political positions and are not actively participating in public debates anymore.

Moreover, in order to increase the generalizability of the findings, it is recommendable to apply the same hypotheses to different case studies or a quantitative

study. The recognition of countries has become politically burdened after the recognition of Kosovo and was followed by controversial recognitions of independence of regions such as South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This research only focused on Western and European democracies. The generalizability could be increased by examining a wider sample of the recognizing-behavior of non-democracies and countries in different regions or with different ethnic compositions. For instance, Italy and Switzerland might be interesting cases to look at whether the Albanian diaspora played substantial roles in the Swiss and Italian recognition of Kosovo in 2008.

Finally, there seems to be an interesting interaction between the secessionist challenge variable and the electoral costs variable that could be further examined. In Spain, the PP tried to blame the PSOE for being inconsistent by creating a dangerous precedent for Spain. This had everything to do with the fact that secessionist movements in Spain were framing Kosovo as a possible precedent. If these movements had not referred to Kosovo, the PP could not have made that argument. In further research, it would be interesting to examine how these two variables interact and whether the variable of electoral costs would also be applicable to countries without secessionist movements or to countries with secessionist movements, but parliamentary consensus. A process-tracing method could provide the necessary insights to answer this question. Possible cases to consider are Slovakia and Greece, since these countries have not recognized Kosovo, but had no elections in 2008.

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## Appendix

### 1. Foreign & Commonwealth Office (2007). Kosovo final status - Media. Declassified document.

[REDACTED]

From: Andy McGuffie  
Press office, W7, KCS

7 December 2007

#### Minister for Europe

#### KOSOVO FINAL STATUS - MEDIA

##### Issue

1. Media update on the Kosovo Final Status Process. What do we want our public position to be by recess?

##### Objective/aims/key messages

2. HMG wishes to bring the Kosovo Final Status Process through to the best possible conclusion for regional stability and without major violence. In the absence of agreement under the Troika process that means implementing the Ahtisaari proposals.
  3. By recess, our aims are to demonstrate through media activity that:
    - Huge diplomatic time and effort have been put into the Final Status Process by the international community – the process is now exhausted.
    - Despite the failure to reach agreement so far this must be resolved politically, not militarily, with the EU in the lead.
    - HMG believes on the basis of the situation on the ground that the status quo is unsustainable.
    - Rapid resolution of Kosovo's status is necessary for the Western Balkans to be integrated into the EU and NATO.
  4. Our key messages are:
    - The Troika talks have left no stone unturned. One or the other side have rejected every possible option. Further negotiations would be fruitless.
    - We welcome the commitment from both sides to reject any recourse to violence.
    - We agree with the UNSG's assessment that the status quo is unsustainable.
    - The EU must now take a lead and take difficult decisions on the status of Kosovo.
- [REDACTED]

## 2. Foreign & Commonwealth Office (2004/2005). Kosovo: Elements of UK strategy 2004/2005. Declassified document.

- We need a strategy to handle the Review and to handle what next. Our aim should be to get the Kosovans to the point where the Review can legitimately be described as positive. But this may not be possible. In that event, we will need contingency planning to cope with disruption, including violence, arising from frustrated hopes: NATO and the UN will need to do this.
- If the Review is positive, then as indicated by the UN Security Council last December, it will allow us to initiate the process that leads to final settlement. How fast we move at this point will depend on just how much progress was made on the minimum standards, and on the overall level of commitment of the leadership in Kosovo. It would be sensible to deal with this incrementally – appointing a high level envoy say to prepare the ground for status talks with both sides (this should be a formal role – unlike the shuttle diplomat – but should not be the SRSG. Kai Eide would be a good choice for this role).<sup>1</sup> The preparations could include elaborating a set of guiding principles, akin to the Venice declaration of 1980, or some other guidance set down by the Security Council. A timetable for settlement talks to begin should be elaborated contingent on further progress on the minimum standards.
- In parallel with the minimum standards we also need to develop the role of the KPC and security sector reform, recognising that the KPC will have some role in indigenous security and law and order capacity (though possibly desegregated into different agencies, with provisions for minority representation). We should be mindful however of the leverage the future of the KPC offers.
- We need to consider the public message to the Kosovans on status. We should make clear that the logical destination of Kosovo is independence, within the context of Europe and with proper protection for minorities. The timetable for independence would be dictated by implementation of the key standards. The international community would devise a strategy to move Kosovo along that path but it would be clearly on the basis of the minimum standards being fully achieved, hence conditionality would be maintained. Once independence had been established, there would be a likely need for the first few years for international civilian and military presences to oversee implementation of a peace settlement and provide regional and minority reassurance. A complementary strategy to move a constructive Belgrade closer to Europe would also be needed in parallel.
- The timing of such a message on status deserves further consideration. There is a case for making this clear at the time the minimum standards are elaborated, as an incentive to implement them. (This might also be useful in the context of the October elections.) [REDACTED]  
Another point would be at the time of the Review itself. The key will be to keep

<sup>1</sup> At the point at which a high level envoy was appointed, the need for private diplomacy would have fallen away; so rather than a plethora of senior figures, we'd envisage only one at any given time, in addition to the SRSG).