

# Digitalization of public services as a tool for implementing European administration standards in Kosovo: analytical approach on the impact on reducing administrative burden

PhD Cand. Elsa Zyberaj

South East European University (SEEU)

Email : [ez31437@seeu.edu.mk](mailto:ez31437@seeu.edu.mk)

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**Abstract-**This article addresses the digitalization of public services in Kosovo as an essential instrument for implementing European standards of public administration and reducing the administrative burden. The use of analytical and comparative approaches has enabled the identification of the impact of existing platforms – such as **e-Kosovo** , **online fiscal reporting systems** and **e-procurement** – in improving the efficiency and transparency of public institutions. The analysis of scientific literature and official documents showed that digitalization has brought tangible benefits, reducing time and costs for citizens and businesses, reducing bureaucratic burdens and increasing the level of institutional accountability. However, the study highlights that the process remains limited due to the lack of interoperability between systems, limited technical capacities and low level of use by citizens, especially in rural areas. Compared to the experiences of EU countries, Kosovo is still at an initial stage of digital governance, but the benefits achieved so far confirm the great potential of this transformation. The main conclusion is that the digitalization of public administration in Kosovo should not be seen only as a technological modernization, but as a political and institutional process closely related to European integration. Through an integrated strategy, investments in infrastructure and human capacities, as well as the harmonization of legislation with EU directives, Kosovo can build an efficient, transparent and European-standard public administration.

**Keywords:** Digitalization, Public Administration, European Standards, Administrative Burden, Kosovo.

## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Importance of the topic

In the era of digital transformation, public services have become the main axis of modernization of states and increasing the capacities of public administrations. For Kosovo, which is still in the phase of institutional

consolidation and in the process of approximation with the European Union, digitalization represents not only a technological tool, but a comprehensive institutional and social transformation. It is an indispensable instrument to guarantee efficiency, transparency and accountability in relations between the state and the citizen<sup>1</sup>. The importance of this topic lies in the fact that the public administration of Kosovo has faced for decades numerous bureaucratic challenges: delays in procedures, lack of transparency, excessive documentation and high administrative burden for both citizens and businesses. In this context, digitalization is seen as the most direct path to overcome these challenges and to meet the standards of **good governance** set by the European Union, including the principles of efficiency, transparency, equality and accountability<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, the experience of European countries, especially Estonia, shows that a digitalized administration significantly reduces costs for citizens and institutions, increases public trust and improves the democratic approach to the activity of public administration<sup>3</sup>. For Kosovo, which still faces major challenges in the rule of law and the credibility of institutions, digitalization can serve as a catalyst for deep structural reforms and as an indicator of readiness for European integration.

## 1.2 Purpose of the research

This study aims to critically examine the impact of digitalization of public services in Kosovo as an instrument for meeting European standards of public administration. The objective is not only to analyze the successes achieved, but also to identify structural shortcomings and institutional obstacles that prevent a complete transformation. The study aims to show that digitalization should not be seen as a fragmented process limited to a few platforms, but as a comprehensive strategy that affects every dimension of the state-citizen relationship. In this context, emphasis is placed on the real impact of digitalization in reducing the administrative burden, which has an impact on reducing costs and reducing the time spent by citizens, and which is considered a key element for improving governance and for the path towards European integration of the state of Kosovo.

## 1.3 Hypotheses and research questions

The underlying hypothesis is that digitalization has clear potential to impact the reduction of administrative burden and to align Kosovo's public administration with European Union standards, but structural challenges, limited human capacities, and lack of legal harmonization prevent the full achievement of this potential.

Several research questions arise from this hypothesis:

- To what extent has digitalization influenced the reduction of administrative burden for citizens and businesses in Kosovo?
- Is the digitalization process harmonized with EU standards on good governance and transparency?
- What are the main obstacles that limit the full implementation of digital public services?
- What alternative strategies can be proposed to bridge the gap between potential and reality of implementation?

These questions aim not only to measure the current situation, but also to encourage critical reflection on Kosovo's strategic orientation.

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission . Kosovo 2022 Report . Brussels : European Commission , 2022. [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/kosovo-report-2022\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/kosovo-report-2022_en) (last viewed September 2025)

<sup>2</sup> European Union. *Quality of Public Administration – A Toolbox for Practitioners* . Luxembourg : Publications Office of the EU, 2019. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8209> (last viewed August 2025)

<sup>3</sup> Lember , Veiko , Rainer Kattel , and Piret Tõnurist . " Technological Capacity in the Public Sector : The Case of Estonia." *International Journal of Public Sector Management* 31, no . 1 (2018): 62–80. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPSM-07-2017-0194>

## 1.4 Research methodology

The study uses an analytical- **comparative approach** and **document analysis** . The comparison is made between the experience of Kosovo and the countries of the European Union or the Western Balkans, highlighting best practices and common challenges. The documentary analysis extends to: **Local legislation** , **European Commission Reports** on Kosovo's progress, OECD and Eurostat **international statistics** on the use of digital services, **International scientific literature** on digital governance and administrative reforms. This approach was chosen to combine the normative dimension (European standards) with the empirical one (the factual situation in Kosovo). However, limitations are obvious: the lack of detailed statistical data, the uneven distribution of digital infrastructure and the fact that international reports often reflect the institutional perspective rather than the direct experience of citizens. Despite these limitations, the chosen methodology provides a solid framework for understanding how deeply digitalization is affecting the reduction of administrative burden and the approximation of Kosovo to European Union standards.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ON DIGITALIZATION

### 2.1 Definition of digitalization and electronic public services

Digitalization in public administration is defined as the process of transforming traditional physical services into accessible electronic services through online platforms , aiming to facilitate access and reduce costs for citizens and businesses. It is not just about the use of technology, but about a complete change in institutional culture and the way the state interacts with society <sup>4</sup>. This process, according to the main authors, is closely linked to the digital transformation of the state itself, which moves from a reactive and bureaucratic administration towards a proactive and innovative governance model . In this sense, digitalization is not only a technical mechanism for modernizing procedures, but also a political instrument for increasing efficiency, transparency and citizen trust in institutions. It creates space for open governance and for more direct communication between citizens and the administration <sup>5</sup>.

### 2.2 European standards of public administration

The European Union has developed a clear framework for the functioning of modern public administrations, emphasizing the principles of good governance or " good governance". governance "which are: efficiency, transparency, accountability and equity in service delivery. European Document Interoperability The European Infrastructure Framework (EIF) stipulates that an administration oriented towards the European Union must ensure cooperation between systems, data interoperability and equal access for citizens <sup>6</sup>. The European Commission's reports on Kosovo consistently highlight the need to comply with these standards, emphasizing the simplification of procedures and the reduction of administrative burden as an integral part of the public administration reform process <sup>7</sup>. In this context, digitalization is not only a modernization option, but a political and institutional obligation for countries aiming for membership in the European Union.

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<sup>4</sup>Mergel, Ines , Noella Edelmann , and Natasha Haug . " Defining Digital Transformation : Results From Expert Interviews ." *Government Information Quarterly* 36, no . 4 (2019): 101385, p. 12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2019.06.002> (last accessed August 2025)

<sup>5</sup> Heeks , Richard . *Implementation and Managing eGovernment : An International Text* . London : SAGE Publications , 2006, p. 59.

<sup>6</sup> European Commission *Interoperability Framework – Implementation Strategy* . Brussels : Publications Office of the EU, 2017, pp. 8–11. [https://ec.europa.eu/isa2/eif\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/isa2/eif_en) (last accessed August 2025)

<sup>7</sup> European Commission . *Kosovo 2022 Report* . Brussels : European Commission , 2022, p. 23. [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/kosovo-report-2022\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/kosovo-report-2022_en) (last accessed August 2025)

### 2.3 Theories on administrative burden reduction and the “better” model regulation

Administrative burden is conceived as a burden that includes the time, financial and procedural costs that citizens and businesses have to face in contacts with public administration<sup>8</sup>. Modern models of state reform propose the “better” approach. regulation”, which is based on simplifying procedures and eliminating unnecessary steps through digital technology. Renda<sup>9</sup> emphasizes that “better” regulation “is not just a technical process of reducing bureaucracy, but a philosophy of governance that aims to increase the quality of policy-making by reducing costs for citizens and strengthening the accountability of institutions. In this sense, digitalization constitutes the central element of this model, as technology offers opportunities for automation, traceability and greater transparency.

### 2.4 Experience of EU and Western Balkan countries

International practices show that digitalization is closely linked to the success of public administration reforms. Estonia, as a leader in digital governance, has managed to provide over 99% of services digitally, saving an average of 2% of GDP per year due to the reduction of administrative burden<sup>10</sup>. Denmark and Finland have implemented similar models, combining digital platforms with high transparency in the use of data. In the Western Balkans, Serbia has built an integrated portal for public services, while North Macedonia has started implementing electronic registers and interactive systems. However, European Commission reports show that these countries, including Kosovo, face similar problems: lack of infrastructure, low use by citizens and legal gaps that hinder the full use of technology<sup>11</sup>. These experiences show that digitalization is not a linear and uniform process; it requires a sustainable strategy, investments in human capacities and a new administrative culture. For Kosovo, learning from these examples is vital to avoid fragmentation and build an administration that not only meets the technical standards of the European Union, but also earns the trust of citizens.

## III. CURRENT SITUATION IN KOSOVO

### 3.1 Current processes of digitalization of public services

The digitalization process in Kosovo has begun as part of reforms to modernize public administration and meet European integration criteria. However, this process has often been developed in a fragmented manner, supported mainly by international donor projects rather than by an integrated national strategy<sup>12</sup>. This piecemeal approach has meant that progress has been visible in some specific areas, but not coordinated and harmonized at the state level.

### 3.2 Existing initiatives and platforms

One of the most important developments is the creation of the e-Kosovo platform, which provides access to several electronic services such as civil status certificates, tax payments and applications for various documents. This platform is intended as a “one-stop-shop”, but currently does not cover all the needs of

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<sup>8</sup> Kaufmann, Daniel, and Art Kraay. “Governance Indicators: Where Are We, Where Shouldn't We Be Going?” *World Bank Research Observer* 30, no. 1 (2015): 1–28, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Renda, Andrea. “Too Good to Be True? A Quick Assessment of the European Commission's New Better Regulation Package.” *CEPS Special Report* No. 108 (2016): p. 5–7. <https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-publications/too-good-be-true/> (last viewed September 2025)

<sup>10</sup> Lember, Veiko, Rainer Kattel, and Piret Tõnurist. “Technological Capacity in the Public Sector: The Case of Estonia.” *International Journal of Public Sector Management* 31, no. 1 (2018): 62–80, p. 65. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPSM-07-2017-0194> (last accessed August 2025)

<sup>11</sup> European Commission. *Kosovo 2021 Report*. Brussels: European Commission, 2021, pp. 18–20. [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/kosovo-report-2021\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/kosovo-report-2021_en) (last accessed September 2025)

<sup>12</sup> European Commission. *Kosovo 2022 Report*. Brussels: European Commission, 2022, pp. 23–24. [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/kosovo-report-2022\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/kosovo-report-2022_en) (last accessed September 2025)

citizens and its functionality is often limited by the lack of inter-institutional integration. The Tax Administration of Kosovo (TAK) has made important steps in the digitalization of the tax reporting process. According to its annual report, the use of electronic services by businesses has increased significantly, saving time and reducing administrative costs <sup>13</sup>. Another initiative is e-procurement, which aims to increase transparency in tendering processes and reduce the scope for corruption. However, these platforms operate more as isolated systems than as part of an integrated infrastructure, which limits their real potential for modernizing the administration.

### 3.3 Main difficulties

The challenges of digitalization in Kosovo are numerous and complex. First, the digital infrastructure remains insufficient, especially in rural areas, creating a large digital gap between cities and suburbs. Second, there is a lack of interoperability between different public systems: institutions use databases that do not communicate with each other, creating barriers to the provision of integrated services <sup>14</sup>. Another major problem is the low level of use by citizens, due to a lack of awareness and distrust in the security of personal data <sup>15</sup>. On the other hand, legal challenges remain a serious obstacle: although electronic signature is recognized by law, it is not yet fully integrated into administrative practice <sup>16</sup>, and as such is not implemented.

### 3.4 Impact on reducing administrative burden

Despite the challenges, digitalization has had tangible effects in reducing the administrative burden. Through online services, citizens can avoid multiple trips to public institutions and save time in obtaining basic documents. This has significantly reduced operational costs, both for citizens and public institutions <sup>17</sup>. The main benefits of digitalization are the speed of procedures, the reduction of physical documentation and the saving of time and costs. For businesses, the use of electronic reporting has created great conveniences, while also increasing the level of legal compliance. More broadly, digitalization has the potential to reduce corruption through transparency and traceability of processes. Clear examples of reducing the administrative burden include obtaining civil status certificates through e-Kosova, online tax reporting by businesses and applying for public tenders through e-procurement. In all these cases, procedures have been simplified and processing times have been significantly reduced. However, challenges remain serious: The lack of full integration of systems means that citizens still have to submit physical documents. Bureaucratic obstacles continue to limit the full automation of processes. Traditional institutional culture, accustomed to manual and bureaucratic practices, often resists digital transformation. These challenges show that digitalization in Kosovo is still in a <sup>18</sup>transitional phase, where the potential is great, but real implementation is limited by technical, legal and cultural factors.

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<sup>13</sup> ATK (Tax Administration of Kosovo). *Annual Report 2020*. Prishtina: ATK, 2020, p. 34–36. <https://atk-ks.org> (last viewed September 2025)

<sup>14</sup> OECD. *Digital Government Index 2020*. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2020, p. 42. <https://doi.org/10.1787/4de9f5bb-en> (last accessed September 2025)

<sup>15</sup> Eurostat. *Digital Economy and Society Statistics : Use of ICT in Households and by Individuals*. Luxembourg : Eurostat, 2021, p. 8. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/> (last viewed September 2025)

<sup>16</sup> Law him Information Society Services. Law No. 04/L-145. Prishtina: Official Newspaper of the Republic of Kosovo, 2013, article 5. <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=8866> (last viewed September 2025)

<sup>17</sup> European Commission. *Kosovo 2021 Report*. Brussels : European Commission, 2021, p. 19. [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/kosovo-report-2021\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/kosovo-report-2021_en) (last viewed September 2025)

<sup>18</sup> Pollitt, Christopher, and Geer Bouckaert. *Public Management Reform : A Comparative Analysis – Into the Age of Austerity*. 4th ed. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 75



#### IV. DIGITALIZATION AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR APPROXIMATION TO EUROPEAN STANDARDS

##### 4.1 The role of digitalization in meeting EU criteria for governance and administrative reform

The European integration process for Kosovo is closely linked to the fulfillment of the Copenhagen criteria and the implementation of the principles of good governance. In this regard, the digitalization of public administration is seen as a necessary mechanism to ensure an efficient, transparent and accessible administration for citizens<sup>19</sup>. The EU requires candidate countries to build sustainable institutions, capable of implementing the law and providing quality services to citizens. Digitalization helps to achieve these objectives by simplifying procedures, eliminating bureaucratic barriers and ensuring equality of access. In Kosovo, the implementation of the e-Kosovo platform and the modernization of the e-procurement system have been considered by the European Commission as positive steps towards approximation with European standards, but are still considered insufficient to bring about the complete transformation of the administration<sup>20</sup>. This gap between partial reforms and EU standards shows the need for a more comprehensive strategy and continued institutional commitment.

##### 4.2 Contribution to transparency, anti-corruption and accountability

One of the most important benefits of digitalization is increased transparency and strengthened accountability. Digital platforms reduce direct contacts between citizens and officials, minimizing the scope for corruption and increasing the traceability of processes<sup>21</sup>. For example, the e-procurement system in Kosovo has allowed for the online publication of tender procedures, which has limited corrupt practices and increased transparency in the management of public funds. Furthermore, European Commission reports directly link digitalization to increased accountability. A digital administration is more obligated to publish data, report on performance and create stronger public control mechanisms<sup>22</sup>. However, implementing an open institutional culture remains a challenge in Kosovo, as traditional practices that often resist transparency and automation still dominate.

##### 4.3 Potential to increase citizens' trust in public administration

One of the biggest problems of the Kosovo administration is the lack of citizens' trust in institutions. Digitalization offers the opportunity to build a new citizen-state relationship, based on efficiency, equal access and reduced procedural burden. The experience of Estonia has shown that the widespread use of online services has not only improved efficiency, but has significantly increased citizens' perception of the credibility of institutions<sup>23</sup>. In Kosovo, although the use of online platforms remains limited, citizens who have applied for services through e-Kosova report that processes are faster and more transparent than traditional procedures. This shows that the increased use of digital services can have a direct impact on increasing trust in institutions, but only if security, data integrity and a user-friendly experience are guaranteed.

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<sup>19</sup> European Commission . *Kosovo 2022 Report* . Brussels : European Commission , 2022, p. 23. [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/kosovo-report-2022\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/kosovo-report-2022_en) (last accessed September 2025)

<sup>20</sup> European Commission . *Kosovo 2021 Report* . Brussels : European Commission , 2021, p. 19. [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/kosovo-report-2021\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/kosovo-report-2021_en) (last viewed September 2025)

<sup>21</sup> Heeks , Richard . *Implementation and Managing eGovernment : An International Text* . London : SAGE Publications , 2006, p. 61.

<sup>22</sup> European Union. *Quality of Public Administration – A Toolbox for Practitioners* . Luxembourg : Publications Office of the EU, 2019, p. 24. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8209> (last viewed September 2025)

<sup>23</sup> Drechsler , Wolfgang . " Paradigms of Public Administration : Comparative and Historical Observations him East and West ." *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 84, no. 3 (2018): 343–356, p. 349. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852318762308>

## V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusions

The analysis of the digitalization of public services in Kosovo shows a transition process that, although it has produced some notable achievements, remains fragmented and far from its full potential. The **e-Kosovo platform**, the **e-procurement system** and the digitalization of fiscal services through the Kosovo Tax Administration have proven that digitalization has a tangible impact on reducing the administrative burden, reducing time and costs for both citizens and institutions<sup>24</sup>. However, these reforms often remain isolated and without strategic coherence. **The lack of interoperability** between systems, **legal gaps** on electronic signature and data protection, as well as **the traditional bureaucratic culture**, limit the real potential of digital transformation<sup>25</sup>.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the low level of use by citizens due to mistrust and lack of awareness shows that digitalization is not only a technical challenge, but also a cultural and institutional one<sup>27</sup>. From a European perspective, digitalization for Kosovo is not an optional choice, but a **structural obligation** to meet EU criteria on good governance, transparency and accountability<sup>28</sup>. The experience of countries like Estonia or Denmark proves that only a comprehensive approach based on integrated strategies can transform digitalization into a real instrument of state modernization<sup>29</sup>.

### 5.2 Recommendations

From the above critical analysis, several key recommendations for Kosovo emerge:

1. **Drafting an integrated national strategy for digitalization** – The strategy should have a dedicated budget, monitoring mechanisms, and not rely solely on temporary donor projects. Without a clear roadmap, reforms will remain fragmented and without long-term effect<sup>30</sup>.
2. **Improving digital infrastructure and cybersecurity** – Investments in infrastructure should extend across the entire territory, especially in rural areas, while a clear data security strategy is essential to gain the trust of citizens<sup>31</sup>.
3. **Harmonization of legislation with EU directives** – The Law on Information Society Services and on Electronic Signature must be implemented in reality, not just exist on paper. Without a strong legal basis, online services do not gain legitimacy and credibility<sup>32</sup>.
4. **Building human capacity** – Public administration needs staff trained in the management of digital systems. Training should be continuous and oriented towards developing an innovative institutional culture<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> ATK (Tax Administration of Kosovo). *Annual Report 2020*. Prishtina: ATK, 2020, p. 34–36. <https://atk-ks.org> (last viewed September 2025)

<sup>25</sup> Law on Information Society Services. Law No. 04/L-145. Pristina: Official Newspaper of the Republic of Kosovo, 2013, article 5. <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=8866> (last viewed September 2025)

<sup>26</sup> OECD. *Digital Government Index 2020*. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2020, p. 42. <https://doi.org/10.1787/4de9f5bb-en> (last accessed September 2025)

<sup>27</sup> Eurostat. *Digital Economy and Society Statistics: Use of ICT in Households and by Individuals*. Luxembourg: Eurostat, 2021, p. 8.

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/>

<sup>28</sup> European Commission. *Kosovo 2022 Report*. Brussels: European Commission, 2022, p. 23. [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/kosovo-report-2022\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/kosovo-report-2022_en) (last viewed September 2025)

<sup>29</sup> Lember, Veiko, Rainer Kattel, and Piret Tõnurist. "Technological Capacity in the Public Sector: The Case of Estonia." *International Journal of Public Sector Management* 31, no. 1 (2018): 62–80, p. 65. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPSM-07-2017-0194>

<sup>30</sup> European Commission. *Kosovo 2021 Report*. Brussels: European Commission, 2021, p. 19. [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/kosovo-report-2021\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/kosovo-report-2021_en) (last viewed September 2025)

<sup>31</sup> World Bank of Kosovo. *Digital Economy Assessment Report*. Washington DC: World Bank, 2020, p. 17.

<https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/406671591368408008/kosovo-digital-economy-assessment>

<sup>32</sup> Law on Information Society Services. Law No. 04/L-145. Pristina: Official Newspaper of the Republic of Kosovo, 2013, article 5. <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=8866> (last viewed September 2025)

<sup>33</sup> Margetts, Helen, and Patrick Dunleavy. "The Second Wave of Digital -Era Governance: A Quasi-Paradigm for Government on the Web." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A* 371, no. 1987 (2013): 20120382, p. 8. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsta.2012.0382> (last accessed September 2025)

5. **Citizen and business awareness** – Information campaigns and user-friendly interfaces are essential to encourage the use of online services . For businesses, platforms that reduce compliance costs and increase competitiveness should be created .

In conclusion, digitalization in Kosovo is a process that requires **long-term vision, political consensus and broad societal involvement** . Only by overcoming structural challenges and making digitalization an integral part of state reforms can Kosovo turn its potential into reality and accelerate the path towards European integration.

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