

Conference Report

**Socio-Economic Profiles of the Municipalities
of the Gjilan Region**

March 12th, 2019

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INTRODUCTION

On March 12th, 2019, in Gjilan took place Regional Conference on the topic “Socio-Economic Profiles of the Municipalities of the Gjilan Region,” organized by the Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED), with the representatives of the leaderships of municipal assemblies and municipalities of this region. In this conference were presented and discussed the findings of the work of KIPRED “The Municipalities of the Gjilan Region: Socio-Economic Profiles,”¹ which did have an objective to be used as an inducement for opening of the public debate, and for facilitating municipal and national decision-makers for formulating and implementing policies which will address the needs of the young population of this region, and particularly of the group-age 15–29 years. From the findings of, and the discussions on, the work, the following issues were identified that require urgent treatment by municipal and national authorities:

- a) The unrealistic calculation of the population of the municipalities of the Region of Gjilan, according to which the governmental grants for the municipal budgets are allocated, is causing problems in the budgetary support of the fields of education, youth, culture, gender equality, as well as of capital investments. For this reason, it is necessary for the Government of Kosovo to conduct this calculation properly, and this has to be done in cooperation with municipal authorities, in order to reflect the genuine demographic condition in the municipalities of the Region of Gjilan.
- b) The next population census should include, as a particular entry, the large diaspora from these municipalities, and analytical studies should be initiated for this non-resident population, which is a very important resource for the development of this region.

¹ *Komunat e Rajonit të Gjilanit: Profilet Socio-Ekonomike*, KIPRED, Mars 2019.

(http://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/Profili_Socio-Ekonomik_-_Rajoni_i_Ferizajit_19397.pdf)

- c) The weak infrastructure for youth, cultural, and sport activities in the Municipalities of Kamenica and Vitia, should be addressed urgently by the Government of Kosovo, given that with their modest budgets the municipal governments will not be able to improve it in the medium term.
- d) The large migration of the youth is causing the shortage of workers in the labor markets of the municipalities of this region, and this shortage can have a negative impact in developmental capacities of these municipalities. For this reason, the municipal authorities, in cooperation with local businesses, should build a joint concept for mitigating the consequences of the shortage of workers in the local labour market, including here the importation of workers from the neighboring countries of the region.
- e) An immediate issue for the Government of Kosovo, and for the local authorities, should be the strengthening with resources of the Referring Mechanism in Gjilan, as well as of Municipal Councils for Security in the Community of the municipalities of the Region of Gjilan, for handling the cases of the families and children of the participants in foreign wars, respectively, of those in the Middle East, and for their reintegration in society.
- f) Inter-municipal cooperation, including here the cooperation between Municipal Councils for Security in the Community of the municipalities of the Region of Gjilan, should increase, for handling efficiently, and in close cooperation with parents, teachers, and other relevant actors, the potential cases of radicalization and violent extremism, of the increasing use of drugs, and of the increased smuggling.
- g) The Government of Kosovo should keep in full consideration the demand for direct access of the Municipality of Vitia in the Highway Prishtina–Gjilan–Dheu i Bardhë, which is of vital importance for the development of this Municipality.

For having the best relation between the work that was presented, and the discussions in the conference, we will summarize them according the respective municipalities of the Region of Gjilan.

The Municipality of Gjilan

The Mayor of the Municipality of Gjilan, Mr. Lutfi Haziri, expressed his high consideration for the work, by evaluating it as comprehensive and very useful, given that, according to his opinion, it reflects the real condition of the region. In his speech, he stressed a specific feature of this region, namely, a very large number of expatriates, of at least three generations, from this region. According to the documents that have remained from the UN, stressed Haziri, only Gjilan has 32% of its active population living outside of the country. This, according to him, is the non-resident population, or the non-permanent inhabitants of the municipality. And the issue is that they have a very large and direct impact in a large part of the developments in Gjilan, but which is commonly not taken into the consideration in the analyses that are made for this region.

According to Mayor Haziri, the problem of radicalism that leads to terrorism was treated by the Council for Security in Community, and, on the other hand, Gjilan is the first municipality in the region that has established the Referring Mechanism, which is a body that is piloted in Gjilan. And, based on the experiences which will be drawn from the Municipality of Gjilan, this Mechanism will spread in Kosovo, but, also in Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and in Albania. The program for the introduction of this Mechanism was supported by the US Embassy – through ICITAP, and by the Embassy of the Great Britain, as major financial supporters, then, by the Italian Embassy, and it is also supported by a technical program from the UNDP.

Up to now, the Referring Mechanism, according to Mayor Haziri, has treated eight cases. (He added that in the KIPRED's Profile there were seven cases mentioned, but he pointed out that the eighth case was added recently, when the KIPRED's work was in the final stages of its preparation.) From these cases, two have remained unsolved, one

of which was sent to the Prosecution, and meanwhile, the second is in the proceeding. The issue here, as Haziri stressed, is in the fact that there should be someone to initiate this process by notifying the cases, and particularly parents, given that the family is the one that should notify the radical dispositions at the moment when it becomes aware of them. Thus, the Referring Mechanism works on voluntary basis, which is an additional difficulty, given the existing mindset of some people. In Gjilan, for instance, most from the eight cases treated by the Referring Mechanism were notified by the family members, one case was notified by the school, and one by the Islamic Community. From these eight cases, one did require medical, psychiatric, treatment, meanwhile, the other cases were dispositions, and these were treated by psychologists, imams, other clerics, as well as by the mechanisms that this body has. But, according to Mayor Haziri, on this occasion, in the Municipality of Gjilan, until the creation of Referring Mechanism, the similar cases were handled by the Council on the Security in the Community, and not by the Municipal Assembly – given that there were no intentions to have Assembly treating these problems at the decision-making level.

Also, Mayor Haziri mentioned that two from the participants in the foreign wars from this region were in the higher commanding structures, and that both of them are now declared dead. Furthermore, he added, the Mechanism will treat the cases of the families and of the children of the participants in the foreign wars from this region, who have remained in the foreign territories. However, the handling of these cases is entangled, given that, as he mentioned, it is not known what has happened, and, therefore, it is very difficult to ascertain whether their stay in those foreign territories is voluntary or forced.

After this, Mayor Haziri stressed that as a consequence of large numbers of expatriates, the census does not provide a real expression of the population of Gjilan. On the other

hand, the allocation of the grant by the Government, for the Budget of the Municipality, is calculated according to the previous number of inhabitants. Related to this, Mayor Haziri took as an example the case of the municipal budget for education: he stressed that the Municipality of Gjilan should intervene with 3.2 million € in order to fill the budgetary gap in this sector. This insufficiency of the budget is caused by the fact that the Government determines the budget in accordance with the older numbers on the population, and Mayor Haziri stressed that this is happening not only for the Municipality of Gjilan, but also for all the other municipalities of Kosovo. He added that this causes problems not only for youth, but in all the sectors, such as gender equality, culture, capital investments, etc., given that the financial means which could have been used in these sectors, are being used for filling the insufficient funds caused by the unrealistic calculations of the population during the designation of the municipal budgets by the Government.

After this, Mayor Haziri focused on the impact that the building of the new highway will have in the building of social and economic cohesion of the region of Gjilan with the other part of Kosovo, and with the Preshevo Valley. He stressed that we are talking here for the connection of this region with the Tenth International Corridor, Nish–Skopje–Thessaloniki, in which Kosovo has yet another access, through the highway Prishtina–Skopje. There will be some 600,000 people who will have access to this Corridor through the connection of Gjilan in it, and here, the Municipality of Vitia will have a double-sided connection, given that it will have access in the road Gjilan–Klllokot, and, latter, in the road Klllokot–Ferizaj. Otherwise, according to Mayor Haziri, with these new roads, Dheu i Bardhë, which is the largest exit in Kosovo after Hani i Elezit, will have a connection with Prishtina Airport through a road, for which the calculation is that it will be passed in 24 minutes. Also, Haziri pointed out that this will

be extremely useful, not only for the inhabitants and the economy of the region and of Kosovo, but also for all the citizens of the Central and Western Europe who use the Tenth Corridor, as well as for those who use the Nation's Highway as connection to this Corridor. Furthermore, according to him, except that this Highway will have a very large impact in social and economic development of Anamorava, it will also be a very important facilitation for diaspora, given that it will shorten its time of travel.

The Commander of the Kosovo Police for the Region of Gjilan, the Colonel Elmina Mahmuti, stressed that the work of KIPRED is very useful, and that it will be used, among other things, in the planning of activities of the Police in the Region of Gjilan, as well as of the Municipal Police Stations in this region. She stressed that the Police in the Region of Gjilan has had adequate training for confronting, among others, with the problem of religious radicalisation. The Gjilan Region Police is continuously on the ground, in the schools, in the Councils of the Local Communities, with the action teams and in cooperation with citizens. In addition, Colonel Mahmuti emphasized that in all of the municipalities of the Region, the Police, at the level of the commanders of the municipal police stations, has a good cooperation with Islamic Community, as well as with the representatives of all the other religious communities, and she illustrated this with the lectures that were organized, in which the religious clerics were engaged to talk about religion.

The Chair of the Municipal Council of Gjilan, Mrs. Shpresa Kurteshi-Emini, stressed that data provided in this work of KIPRED will be very useful. She mentioned that the Municipality of Gjilan has sensed the problem of radicalisation earlier, and that it has established the Referring Mechanism, consisting of different actors, including here the Kosovo Police, which has an extraordinary role in fighting against this phenomenon. Also, included here are the Islamic Community of Kosovo, then the Municipal

Directorate of Education, indirectly the Municipal Council, etc. Otherwise, she added that the Municipal Council did not discuss this issue separately, but this Council was not indifferent towards it, given that there were several joint meetings with the Referring Mechanism, in which this problem was discussed together with the heads of the groups of political parties, and there were recommendations given, and the steps were taken to fight this phenomenon. Mrs. Kurteshi–Emini did put her emphasis on the chain-functioning of all the actors that should act within the municipalities for fighting radicalism and violent extremism, and, among other things, she mentioned the possibility of inter-municipal regional cooperation of all the municipalities in the region for fighting against this negative phenomenon.

In his word, the Deputy Director of the Regional Police of Gjilan, Lieutenant-Colonel Shaban Azizi, stressed that the fight against radicalism can not be conducted by only one institution, such as Kosovo Police, and he focused in the coordination of all the institutional and social activities for fighting all the negative phenomena, including here the religious radicalism. Thus, he mentioned as an example that when the problem of the religious radicalisation of a number of persons had emerged, and when Kosovo saw and understood the threat from this phenomenon, it initiated the joint and coordinated activities of all the state institutions, including here those of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance, Tax Administration of Kosovo, Kosovo Intelligence Agency, Kosovo Police, and of all the local institutions, as well as of all the other social factors. Consequently, the Government of Kosovo implemented the Strategy for the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalism that Leads to Terrorism (2015–2020), and, as a result of this, during the last four or five years, there was not even a single person who has left the country for joining the foreign wars, by adding here also the fact that the sanctions were imposed on the participants in the foreign wars from Kosovo, indeed,

once after this participation was put in the group of penal deeds. And, in the same way in which there was coordination in the activities for fighting this phenomenon, so there is a need for such a coordination right now, in the efforts to prevent its further spread, where there are programs for lectures, in which the Islamic Community of Kosovo is involved, for keeping in control its own imams and people, in order to increase through these lectures the awareness on the negative effects of that branch of belief. And, this coordination, according to Lieutenant-Colonel Azizi, is the reason why right now we have a considerably better condition than the one which we have had earlier.

The Municipality of Vitia

At the beginning of his speech, the Deputy Mayor of the Municipality, Mr. Hasan Aliu, stressed that most of the facts mentioned by Mayor Haziri apply for the Municipality of Vitia as well. For instance, he stressed that Vitia as well has a large number of immigrants, and that it is also damaged in terms of budget, for the same reasons as Gjilan.

Regarding the issue of the prevention of extremism, Mr. Aliu stressed that the Municipality of Vitia has a functioning Municipal Council for Security in Community, which handles these issues, despite of the fact that Vitia does not have a Referring Mechanism, as Gjilan. According to him, the issue of diaspora is also linked to violent extremism, given that from the thirteen persons who have participated in the wars in Syria and Iraq, one was living in the West, and this case has ended with fatality. The Deputy Mayor Aliu then added that in recent times there were no new cases in the Municipality of Vitia, and he attributed the merits for this to the Council for Security in the Community, The Islamic Community, to the other mechanisms acting in the Municipality of Vitia, among other to the OSCE, which has organized different round-tables in the secondary schools, then TV programs in local TV stations of the Municipality of Vitia and in the region. The objective of all these activities, and of all these mechanisms, was to prevent people from joining these wars, a phenomenon that does not belong to traditional religion that was preached here until quite recently.

After this, Mr. Aliu also stressed that a very important factor that has affected a large number of participants in the foreign wars from the Municipalities of Vitia and of Gjilan, is the presence of the border zone and the proximity of Macedonia. For this very fact, according to him, a great job was done in the border zone in cooperation with the

Police, and this is one from the reasons why now we have the situation under control. The Deputy Mayor Aliu also mentioned concrete examples, in which the support of the municipality is required for solving the problems caused by radicalism, such as, among other, the case of a parent of one from the participants in foreign wars, for helping him to return his child back, a case in which the Municipality, unfortunately, was not able to help until now.

Regarding the highway that is being build, the Deputy Mayor mentioned the problem that the Municipality of Vitia has for not being able to have acces in this highway in the place called Gërlica. This, according to the Deputy Major Aliu, has caused large discontentment among the citizens, which have made numerous and continuous demands for this access. Otherwise, according to him, the Municipality of Vitia has made everything that was possible institutionally for solving this problem, and if there will be no possibility to find any solution, this can cause the expression of the citizens' discontent in the streets. For this reason, the Deputy Aliu requested, from KIPRED, as well as from all the other factors that can have any impact, to provide contribution for overcoming this problem. He stressed that this point of access is the most natural road for the Municipality of Vitia to enter into the highway, given that all the other directions have problems with the difficult terrain.

In addition, the Deputy Mayor Aliu pointed out that during the year 2018 the Municipal Council for Security in Community has had seven meetings. According to him, all the meetings are finalized with recommendations and advices on further activites that should be undertaken by the respective directorates of the Municipality, for solving the security problems discussed in the Council. This Council, according to the Deputy Mayor Aliu, also prepares the Report, which is then delivered to the Assembly. As examples of the decisions of the Council, the Deputy Mayor Aliu has mentioned the

increase of the number of workers in the Registrars Office, during the period of the year when the compatriots come back from the foreign world in larger numbers, as well as the increase of the number of firefighters in the periods of the year when the danger of fire is larger.

The Chair of the Municipal Assembly of Vitia, Mr. Naim Pira, has stressed that the Municipal Assembly of Vitia did not hold any meeting which was focused only on the topic of radicalism and violent extremism, but this topic was discussed and treated in numerous other meetings and activities. He mentioned a meeting from the previous year, on the topic of security issues, that was organized by the Nongovernmental Organization SPRC, in which Xhabir Hamiti was present, and in which the issue of the violent extremism was discussed. Otherwise, in the municipalities these issues are handled by the Councils for Security in the Community, and such a Council is established by the Municipal Assembly of Vitia as well. Included in this Council are all the necessary mechanisms, together with those of the religious communities, and those on security. This Council, according to the Chair Pira, has treated the issues such as violent extremism, drugs, cooperation with the Kosovo Police, cooperation with the other bodies, activities in the elementary and secondary schools, etc., and he also expressed his opinion that all these activities were successful. In addition, Mr. Pira, also stressed his concern regarding the reintegration of the persons who have participated in the foreign wars, once after they finish their sentences, given that, according to him, if nothing is done in this direction, there is a serious danger for this phenomenon to be repeated.

The Municipality of Kamenica

Member of the Municipal Assembly of Kamenica, Mr. Afrim Dervishi, who mentioned that by profession he is a pedagogue at the elementary school at Koretin, at the beginning expressed his reserves regarding the findings that the level of education and the economic condition were not the determinants of departures of individuals to the war in the Middle East. He mentioned as an example the case of corruption, which, today, is being called as a type of culture by some international organizations; however, he added that if we focus on those who are getting corrupt, we will see that the high level of corruption is caused by the low level of education. Education, stressed Mr. Dervishi, is the foundation of knowledge, and when the knowledge is at low level, it causes the departures to the foreign wars, as well as the corruption.

Regarding this issue, Mr. Dervishi compared the number of schools and religious institutions, as well as their impacts on the youth. He said that, according to the research, the number of schools and religious institutions is approximately the same. However, each from the schools has dozens and hundreds of teachers, and from this, it follows that a single, or few religious clerics per mosque, have an impact to make dozens of people to depart to wars that are not ours, meanwhile, this cannot be prevented by hundreds of schoolteachers at our schools. Thus, the question posed by Mr. Dervishi is that, if the religious clerics are having such a great impact on the youth, and if, regarding the impact, they are defeating the schoolteachers in the schools, shouldn't we start thinking to involve the clerics within the educative system.

Meanwhile, regarding the economic condition, Mr. Dervishi stressed that, according to the research, approximately 10% of the inhabitants are in difficult economic condition, depending on pensions and social assistance. He also stressed that it can be taken that

this percentage is valid approximately for the entire Kosovo. And this, he emphasized, causes the migration mentioned earlier. However, if a large portion of people who migrate, because of difficult economic condition depart to the West, then, a portion of them will migrate towards East, and this is one from the reasons of the radicalization of a section of the youth.

Otherwise, Mr. Dervishi stressed all these things in a response towards the manner in which the notion of “Traditional Islam” was used by the Deputy Mayor of the Municipality of Vitia, Mr. Hasan Aliu. According to Mr. Dervishi, we should be careful on how we use the notions traditional and modern, and not only regarding the Islam. In our social life, and in our relations, we really had something traditional, something which enabled us to exist, regardless of other political and economic influences with which we were confronted for centuries. If there was something traditional, said Mr. Dervishi, that was here. And, everything that came after the war, is radical.

After this, Mr. Dervishi said that Kamenica is confronted with similar problems as Gjilan and Vitia. Furthermore, he said that the Municipality of Kamenica stands even worst than the other two. He said that he had heard that the Council for Security in the Community of Kamenica holds its meetings, but he added that he cannot say that it has treated something that has had any considerable impact. At least in the school in which he works, he stressed that he didn't hear anything. Thus, as a consequence of a very difficult condition in the Municipality of Kamenica, he mentioned that there was a very large number of people who have migrated only during the last two months from Koretin. After this, Mr. Dervishi focused on the issue of the use of drugs by the youth, and he stressed that this is a serious problem which has to be treated urgently.

After the word of Mr. Afrim Dervishi, Mr. Hasan Aliu, Deputy Mayor of the Municipality of Vitia replied, and he focused on several most important aspects mentioned by Mr. Dervishi. Mr. Aliu firstly mentioned the findings of a previous work of KIPRED [“What Happened to Kosovo Albanians: The Role of Religion on Ethnic Identity,” 2016], according to which around 3% of the respondents in a survey conducted throughout Kosovo answered that they consider themselves to be Muslims, not Albanians, and above 30% answered that they consider themselves, firstly as Muslims, and then as Albanians. Deputy Mayor Aliu used these figures to illustrate the difference between traditional and radical Islam. This very high percentage of people who doesn't feel, or who subject their national identity to the religious one, according to Mr. Aliu proves that there was a radicalization of a section of the population, and that there also happened a decrease of the impact of the traditional Islam, in which there was no such subjection of national identity to the religious one. The Deputy Mayor Aliu also expressed his disagreement with the opinion on the impact of the Muslim clerics, when compared with schoolteachers. For illustrating this, he mentioned that the number of participants in the foreign wars from Vitia was 13, meanwhile, the number of pupils in Vitia is above 11 thousand.

Mr. Burim Kryeziu, a Member of the Municipal Assembly, mentioned three elements related to socio-economic issues which characterize Kamenica. Firstly, he stressed that Kamenica is located in the border zone of Kosovo, and, consequently, smuggling is a frequent phenomenon in this municipality. Now, after the imposition of the tax towards Serbia, the smuggling is even more frequent, and this can be seen in the stores and markets of Kamenica, in which none from the products of Serbia are absent, furthermore, with the same prices as earlier. The second element characterizing Kamenica, according to Mr. Kryeziu, is the phenomenon of the use of drugs among

pupils. He said that, based on his personal contacts, he was surprised how high their level of organization and of their structure is. And, the third element, is the very negative impact caused in this municipality by the migration of the labor force. Otherwise, he stressed that this is a grave problem with which the entire Kosovo, not only Kamenica, is – or will be – confronted. Migration, he stressed, has already started to create a shortage for a large number of qualified professions, and he illustrated this with concrete examples from Kamenica, where private employers, despite of their efforts to employ people, cannot find workers who can do certain jobs. Furthermore, he added that he doesn't know where the agriculture will find qualified workers for using the grants that are now being donated by the Ministry of Agriculture. For the moment, Kamenica is being supplied with labor for a great number of jobs from Kukës (Albania), but this source is expected to exhaust in the near future.

After this, Mr. Burim Kryeziu stressed that the cooperation with all the religious communities in the Municipality of Kamenica is good, and that this is illustrated by the fact that in the Municipality of Kamenica, as well as in other municipalities, the representatives of religious communities are part of the Municipal Council for Security in the Community. He mentioned the contractual relation that they have with Islamic Community regarding the expenses of burials, according to which the Islamic Community took the responsibility to release families from all the expenses, and that municipality also participates in this. Here, according to Mr. Kryeziu, the relations are fair, without interference, either of the religion in politics, or of politics in religion. At the end he stressed that the cooperation could be better on the issue of the property managed by the Islamic Community, in which the Municipality does not have the right to invest, and the Islamic Community does not have capacities to invest.

Speaking on the issues raised, the Commander of the Kosovo Police for the Region of Gjilan, Colonel Elmina Mahmuti said that, in the situation that was created recently, the Police was expecting the increase of smuggling. She stressed that the first fight against smuggling is conducted by the units of the Border Police, which are the ones who have this responsibility, and that the units of the Police of Public Order come only after them. Otherwise, the Municipality of Kamenica, as a border region, according to her, has a situation which favors the smuggling, and the Kosovo Police is faced with this problem. Kosovo Police fights drugs as well, and she agreed that the drug dealers are organized very well and that they have a high level of structure. She acknowledged that, regarding the types of drugs, for the moment the biggest problem is marijuana, and that there are no cases of more dangerous drugs, such as heroin or cocaine. Otherwise, according to Colonel Mahmuti, the units of public order of the Kosovo Police achieve to catch only small amounts of drugs, meanwhile, larger quantities are fought by the specialized units, but their informations are secret.

At the end, the Deputy Director of the Regional Police in Gjilan, Lieutenant-Colonel Shaban Azizi, talked on this problem of the use of drugs, and he draw a paralel between the fight against religious radicalism and the fight against the use of drugs. In the same manner in which religious radicalization can be fought successfully only with a close cooperation and coordination of activities of all the institutions, actors, and of the entire society, the use of drugs by the youth cannot be fought only by Police. The Police, stressed Lieutenant-Colonel Azizi, can fight as much as it can, as much as it has capacities, as much as it is organized, and it cannot be said that it was not successful in this direction.

Nevertheless, he stressed that this is an alarming phenomenon, which touches the most vital and important section of the society, the youth, and it is required here that

everyone should provide its contribution, from parents, up to the President of the State. Kosovo Police cannot know everything that is happening, given that it cannot be everywhere. As long as people see this problem, as long as they hear things, but keep them in, and for themselves, and don't report them, this problem, stressed Azizi, will not be solved. For this reason, he concluded, one from the major objectives of the Kosovo Police is the strengthening of the partnership with citizens, with institutions, both, at the central, and regional level, in order to create a situation in which we will fight all together the negative phenomena, such as religious radicalization, and the use of drugs by the youth.

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