

Prevention of Radicalization and Violent Extremism:

Lessons from the Positive Cases of Podujevo and Suhareka Municipalities

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Table of Contents:

Executive Summary	5
Introduction	10
Comparison of Socio-Economic Characteristics	13
Analysis: Why there is no Violent Extremism in the Municipalities of Podujevo and Suhareka?	34
Conclusions and Recommendations	53

Executive Summary

After terrorist attacks in several cities across Europe, prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism has become a priority in the political agendas of most governments in the world. In 2011, Kosovo was ranked as one of the countries with the highest number of foreign fighters per capita in wars in Syria and Iraq. Meanwhile, extensive research also speaks of a relatively high level of radicalism and violent extremism in certain regions of the country. While in some municipalities, such as those of Kaçanik and Hani i Elezit, a relatively high number of foreign fighters has been identified, the number in the municipalities of Podujevo and Suhareka was rather small or non-existent. Such a reality is more or less the same with regards to the level of radicalisation and violent extremism. Consequently, the main aim of this paper was to identify factors that have contributed to the prevention of radicalism and violent extremism in these two municipalities.

For years, socio-economic factors have been considered among the major causes of radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo. In order to analyse the impact of socio-economic factors on the emergence of radicalisation and violent extremism, during the research a comparison of these data has been conducted for the municipalities of Podujevo and Suhareka with the low level of radicalisation and violent extremism and those of Kaçanik and Hani i Elezit, where the level of these negative phenomena is quite high. In addition to verifying whether there are significant differences in these characteristics between these two groups of municipalities, such research also tried to confirm whether there is a correlation between these characteristics and the emergence of radicalisation and violent extremism. For this purpose, in both municipalities the data for the following categories were analysed: population and demographic movements; level of education in municipalities; religion including religious objects and religious clerics; persons who participated in the wars in Syria and Iraq; criminality level; economic situation as well as the municipal budget, with special emphasis on capital expenditures and spending and subsidies for youth. Special attention has been given to the age group 15–29 years because it is precisely the young people of this age who have been mostly affected by the phenomenon of radicalisation and violent extremism.

The comparison of all these socio-economic data for the four municipalities has shown that there are no major differences in any of the analysed categories between the municipalities of Podujevo and Suhareka on one side, and those of Kaçanik and Hani i Elezit, on the other. Consequently, it has been concluded that there is no clear correlation between these socio-economic characteristics and the level of emergence of radicalisation and violent extremism in these four municipalities. These results have clearly challenged the socio-economic paradigm of explaining the appearance of religious intolerance and violent extremism, but they did not answer the question - why is the level of violent radicalisation and extremism much lower in the municipalities of Podujevo and Suhareka than in some other municipalities? To answer this question, there was a need for a deeper analysis that takes into account the specific circumstances of these two municipalities.

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that the main factor contributing to the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism in these two municipalities is the appropriate and correct action by the Islamic Community Council (KBI). In both cases, the KBIs in question from the beginning have resisted the installation of organisations and individuals who have insisted on preaching the radical forms of Islam. Representatives of KBIs have constantly interacted with the citizens, not only in mosques during the prayer, but also during different meetings, including schools and media. Such radical ideologies have been unmasked as foreign and harmful to Albanians in Kosovo. Consequently, in these two municipalities, such associations have failed to find suitable ground for promoting radical forms of Islam despite continuous efforts, especially during the early post-war years.

At the same time, in these two municipalities, these organisations have failed to find sufficient numbers of internal collaborators, as it has happened in other municipalities in Kosovo. In addition, it can be concluded that KBIs in both municipalities have shown special attention and courage during the process of appointment of the local Imams. Despite objections and disapproval by the Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK), and even serious tensions in the KBI-BIK direction, KBIs in both municipalities have rejected the appointment of any Imam or employee for whom there was evidence that they were involved in preaching the radical forms of Islam. Furthermore, KBIs in Podujevo and Suhareka have repeatedly rejected numerous offers from foreign organisations for the

construction of new mosques or reconstruction of mosques destroyed during the war, if such a (re)construction process has been conditioned with the appointment of certain Imams in these mosques or by insisting on preaching the radical forms of Islam in these religious objects.

It can be concluded that a larger number of newly built mosques is not a barometer for measuring the level of radicalisation and violent extremism. In this regard, it is much more important which of the organisations have financed the construction of these new mosques, whether this construction was made with the permission of the municipal KBI, and whether these organisations have conditioned the construction of mosques with the appointment of certain Imams, or have insisted on preaching radical forms of Islam in these religious objects. At the same time, a very important element is the fact whether the KBIs at the municipal level have cooperated with representatives of radical "religious civil society" or have opposed such associations and have refused any cooperation with them. On the other hand, it can be concluded that the analysis has refuted the explanation put forward from some circles that the reason why radicalisation and violent extremism has failed to take root in the Llap region has to do with the fact that the population in that part of Kosovo has always been more religious than citizens in other parts of the country. Having this in mind, one should look for other reasons for explaining why radicalisation and violent extremism have not emerged in the municipality of Podujevo, but also that of Suhareka, whose inhabitants have traditionally been less religious.

Based on the research, it can be concluded that another important factor for preventing radicalisation and violent extremism in these two municipalities has been the successful cooperation between local religious authorities, local government, and police. There are numerous examples where, through the joint coordination of KBI, local authorities and police, the illegal construction of a new mosque was blocked, the actions of groups preaching radical Islam were prevented, or the members of such groups were imprisoned. Regarding the role of political parties in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism, the situation in the two municipalities is somewhat different. In the Municipality of Podujevo, apart from some small exceptions, political parties have hardly acted in preventing these negative phenomena and during election campaigns, in order to secure additional votes, some of them have even flirted and collaborated

with certain groups and individuals who have been involved in the promotion of the radical forms of Islam. On the other hand, in the Municipality of Suhareka, political parties have not flirted with groups and individuals promoting radical forms of Islam in order to secure additional votes. Rather, they have often been actively engaged in promoting religious tolerance and Western values either individually or through meetings at the Municipal Council for Community Safety and discussions on these topics. At the same time, it can be concluded that co-operation related to the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism has been at a satisfactory level when it comes to relations between the local media and KBIs in both municipalities. Often, KBI representatives have appeared in local media to clarify the danger of radical forms of Islam that attempted to infiltrate the territory of the municipality. Through debates and lectures, such representatives have provided sound knowledge about Islam and have also explained the real truth behind the new movements with radical character.

However, there are indications that the situation regarding radicalisation and religious extremism in the Municipality of Suhareka, and especially the one of Podujevo, has been worsening lately. Such reality is mainly related to the changes that have been made within municipal KBIs, as well as changes to the BIK Regulation regarding the appointment of Imams in all municipalities of Kosovo. While prior to these changes in the Regulation, Imams within the specific municipality were nominated by direct proposal of the KBI Presidency, with the latest changes, the appointment of Imams in different municipalities is now under strict jurisdiction of BIK Presidency. Having in mind that there are already radical members within the BIK Presidency, there is a risk that Imams who preach radical forms of Islam, different from traditional tolerant forms characteristic for Kosovo, might be appointed in the two municipalities, as well as across Kosovo. As a result, despite the objections of the municipal KBIs, some Imams who propagate the radical ideologies of Islam have already been appointed in both municipalities. The continuation of such a practice by BIK of appointing radicalized Imams can undoubtedly lead to increased levels of radicalisation and violent extremism in these municipalities. One hope in this regard is that citizens in both municipalities did not support attempts for activities leading to radicalisation, and have even directly helped in identification of groups and individuals who have attempted to preach radical forms of Islam. However, it remains questionable how the local population

would behave if KBI representatives in both municipalities had not been maximally engaged in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism from the beginning.

Recommendations:

- The government institutions, as well as political and religious leaders should re-introduce a joint public discourse that will promote traditional tolerant forms of Islam, and will condemn foreign radical forms that undoubtedly lead to radicalisation and violent extremism.
- The Islamic Community of Kosovo should stop the appointment of radical Imams in its mosques. During the appointment of Imams, BIK should closely cooperate with representatives of municipal KBIs, especially in such municipalities as Podujevo and Suhareka that until now have shown low levels of radicalisation and violent extremism.
- An intensive and ongoing co-operation between local religious authorities, local government representatives, and the police to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism at the level of each municipality needs to be ensured.
- Authorities of the local government in cooperation with the central government should considerably increase capital investments and support for culture, youth and sports, especially those related to youth activities and infrastructure.
- Political parties, both at central and local levels, should act jointly in unmasking the preaching of radical forms of Islam, and in fighting groups and individuals that promote such forms, while respecting the freedom of speech and the indispensable right to religious belief, as fundamental human rights.
- The Justice System of Kosovo should swiftly implement the Legal Framework (Penal Code) regarding religious and ethnic hatred, as well as extremist preaching.
- Electronic media in Kosovo, both at the central and local level, should offer program schemes that promote tolerance and religious coexistence and not provide space to individuals who use the language of inter-religious and inter-ethnic hatred.

1. Introduction

The issue of violent extremism and radicalisation has become central in Europe and worldwide since the attacks in Madrid (2004), London (2005), Glasgow (2007), and Paris (January and November 2015), among others.¹ As a result, prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism runs high on political agenda of almost every country and represents the most efficient way in coping with these negative phenomena of every society. Most notably because in that way one addresses the key causes of these phenomena, rather than dealing with their consequences. Consequently, a recent plethora of inter-state and intra-regional projects has been developed in Europe and worldwide to explore and develop strategies for prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism.

Nowadays, the concept of radicalisation and violent extremism is mainly linked to an anti-liberal, fundamentalist, anti-democratic and regressive agenda, and is more and more associated with radical Islamism. According to Schmid, the concept of radicalism can be best described as something advocating sweeping political change, based on a conviction that the status quo is unacceptable while at the same time a fundamentally different alternative appears to be available.² In terms of means advocated to bring about the system-transforming radical solution for government and society, some authors argue that radicalism favours violent and non-democratic ones that are best achieved through coercion and revolution.³ It should be mentioned that radical attitudes do not necessarily always result in violent behaviours. However, lately there has been an increasing link between radicalisation and violent extremism, with the two terms often being used interchangeably as synonyms.

Unfortunately, in the last years such negative phenomena have not bypassed Kosovo either. For the most part of its history, Kosovo has been characterised by a high level of religious tolerance and cohabitation. In the past, radicalisation and violent extremism in

¹ The Madrid train bombings occurred on 11 March 2004; the London bombings happened on 7 July 2005; the Glasgow International Airport attack happened on 30 June 2007; the Charlie Hebdo shootings occurred in Paris on 7 January 2015; the Bataclan attacks happened in Paris on 13 November 2015.

² See A. P. Schmid (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*, London: Routledge, 2011, 679-80.

³ See Scruton, R., *A Dictionary of Political Thought*, London: Macmillan, 1996, 462.

Kosovo was mostly related to ethnicity rather than religion. This has especially been true for the Kosovo Albanians belonging to different religions. Since the process of the Albanian national awakening, Albanians in Kosovo have greatly prioritized ethnicity over their religious affiliation. As a result, Albanianism accompanied with religious cohabitation, represented the key feature of the Albanian nationalism in Kosovo. The process of disintegration of former Yugoslavia and struggle for independence (1989-1999) marked the strongest social homogenization of Kosovar Albanians. The key features of the Albanian nationalism during this time were pro-Western orientation and general unification of Albanians regardless of their religious and social background.⁴

After the liberation and instalment of the UN Administration in 1999, Kosovo saw the resurgence of religiosity similarly to other post-communist countries. The new circumstances have inevitably triggered a process of radical transformation and redefinition of the place of religion. The presence of both Islam and Christianity became visible and pronounced in all public spheres, from personal lives to society at large, including politics. The consequences of war created multiple conditions that were at play during the first years after 1999, which provided fruitful bases for the religiosity of the society. The societal disorientation, high poverty, weak economy, and political void made Kosovo fertile ground for the resurgence of religion.⁵ The entire Kosovar society was rapidly exposed to a variety of competing ideas, which were simultaneously more liberal, as well as more conservative.

During this period, the Kosovo war-ravaged population was exposed to different international faith-based organisations that have mushroomed throughout the country after the war. Under the guise of humanitarian aid, such organisations have ruthlessly exploited the poverty and fragmented social conditions of Kosovar Albanians, especially in rural areas, and seriously disrupted the cultural traditions of these communities. As a result, different organisations from the Gulf States, and later Turkey as well, managed to introduce and strengthen new radical Islam religious doctrines

⁴ For a detailed explanation of this issue see Demjaha, Agon, Peci, Lulzim, "What happened to Kosovo Albanians: The impact of religion on the ethnic identity in the state building-period." Policy Paper No. 1/16, Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED), June 2016.

⁵ Kursani, Shpend, "Report inquiring into the causes and consequences of Kosovo citizens' involvement as foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq," Kosovar Center for Security Studies. April 2015, p. 59.

throughout Kosovo. In this way, the loyalty of Kosovar Albanians has during these years slowly shifted from Albanianism and Kosovo state, to a religious identity, with the emergence of elements of radical Islam.⁶ Therefore, it was not a surprise that in 2014 an enormous number of foreign fighters from Kosovo joined the wars in Syria and Iraq. At a certain point, Kosovo had around 300 fighters participating in these wars that actually represented the highest number of foreign fighters per capita in Europe. While Municipalities of Kaçanik and Hani i Elezit were the ones with the highest number of foreign fighters, two municipalities - Podujevo and Suhareka – had very low or no foreign fighters at all, and had shown no signs of radicalisation and violent extremism that has been witnessed in other parts of the country.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the reasons that contributed to the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism in these two municipalities. It is hoped that in doing so, the paper will offer useful insights related to the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism in these two municipalities that could then be used for applying similar approaches to other municipalities in Kosovo that have witnessed relatively high levels of radicalisation and violent extremism. After the introductory chapter, the paper continues with a chapter that discusses the socio-economic data of the Municipalities of Podujevo and Suhareka. The same chapter also offers a comparative analysis of the socio-economic data of these two municipalities with the Municipalities of Kaçanik and Hani i Elezit that have seen the highest number of foreign fighters as well as high levels of radicalisation and violent extremism in general. The next chapter then engulfs in the task of explaining why there are no high levels of radicalisation and violent extremism in the Municipalities of Podujevo and Suhareka in comparison to some other municipalities in Kosovo. Finally, the paper draws conclusions on key identified factors that have prevented the emergence of radicalisation and violent extremism in the Municipalities of Podujevo and Suhareka, and it also provides a number of recommendations on how to adopt these findings in other municipalities of Kosovo.

⁶ Demjaha and Peci, 2016, p. 59.

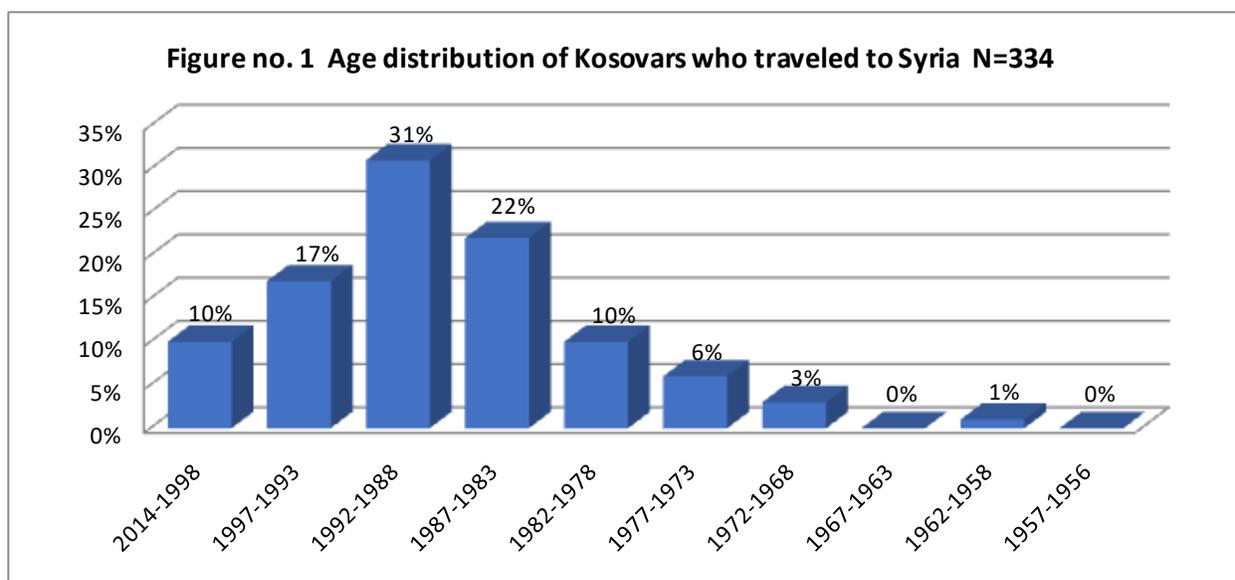
2. Comparison of Socio-Economic Characteristics

Until recently, socio-economic factors have served as the mainstream argument for explaining the emergence of radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo. The findings of the paper “What happened to Kosovo Albanians: The impact of religion on the ethnic identity in the state building-period” published by KIPRED in June 2016 have for the first time seriously challenged such socio-economic paradigm of explaining religious intolerance and violent extremism.⁷ The aim of this section is to make a comparative analysis of different socio-economic characteristics between the two municipalities (Podujevo and Suhareka) that have not shown signs of radicalisation and violent extremism and the two municipalities with relatively high level of radicalisation and violent extremism (Kaçanik and Hani i Elezit). Such a comparative analysis should show whether there are significant differences of these characteristics between these two groups of municipalities and whether there is a correlation between these characteristics and the emergence of radicalisation and violent extremism.

Available statistical data have shown that the (15-29) year age group represents the most exposed age group to radicalisation and violent extremism. On the other hand, according to a recent report commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the majority of Kosovo foreign fighters or those travelling to Syria and Iraq were between 21 and 30 (see Figure no.1).⁸ For this reason, the primary focus of this analysis is specifically young people of this age.

⁷ See Demjaha, Agon, Peci, Lulzim, “What happened to Kosovo Albanians: The impact of religion on the ethnic identity in the state building-period.” Policy Paper No. 1/16, Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED), June 2016.

⁸ Xharra, Behar and Gojani, Nita, “Understanding Push and Pull Factors in Kosovo: Primary Interviews with Returned Foreign Fighters and their Families,” Pristina, Kosovo: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2017. http://unckt.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/UNDP_Push-and-Pull-Factors_ENG.pdf



For this purpose, KIPRED has summarized data on the structure of the population and demographic shifts, on the level and structure of education, culture and sport, on the spread of information technology, religious structure, including the number of religious facilities and of clerics, violent extremism, the level of criminality, the structure of population according to economic activities, municipal budgets, and the support they provide for youth activities.

2.1. Socio-Economic Data: Municipality of Podujevo

- **The structure of the population and the demographic shifts**

In terms of the size of its population, Podujevo is considered a mid-size municipality at the Kosovo level. The data of the population census of the year 2011 show that this municipality has had 88.499 inhabitants, of which 39.20% were living in the city and 60.80% in the villages.⁹ In terms of ethnic background, 98.89% of the inhabitants of

⁹ Popullsia Kosovës dhe shtimi natyror për vitin 2017 [The population of Kosovo and the natural growth for the year 2017], Platforma Online [Online Platform] ASK Data, Agjencia e Statistikave të Kosovës [The Kosovo Agency of Statistics].

Podujevo are Albanians, around 1% are Ashkalis, and the rest belong to other ethnic groups. The gender ratio of the population is 50.8% male and 49.2% female.

As mentioned already, the focus of this analysis is on youth, specifically on the (15-29) year age group, which constitutes 27.40% of the total population. On the other hand, the age group (0-14) years constitutes 30.30% of the total population, while the one (30-80) years makes up 42.30%.¹⁰ According to the population census of the year 2011, the largest number of young people in the Municipality of Podujevo (73.70%) lives in 78 villages of the municipality, meanwhile, the other part (26.30%) lives in the city. An analysis of the demographic movements of the members of this age group shows that there is a continuous movement of young people from villages into the city.¹¹

- **The level and the structure of education, culture, and sport**

The data about the population of the Municipality of Podujevo above 10 years of age, according to the level of education and literacy, show that out of 1,000 inhabitants in this municipality, 48 are illiterate, 112 have not obtained any education, 527 have finished only the elementary school, 304 have finished the secondary school, and 55 have finished university and post-university studies.¹²

According to the statistics for education in Kosovo for the academic year 2017/2018, the Municipality of Podujevo has 62 educational institutions, with 1,166 teachers and 19,732 pupils, with a 1.75 ratio of schools per 1,000 inhabitants of the age up to 19 years. Of the total number of educational institutions, 57 are elementary schools, four are high schools, and one functions as a centre of pre-school education.¹³ It is worth mentioning that in the Municipality of Podujevo there is no functioning institution of higher education either in the public or in private sector.

¹⁰ Popullsia sipas moshave dhe llojit të vendbanimit [The population according to age and the type of habitat], Platforma Online [Online Platform] ASK Data, Agjencia e Statistikave të Kosovës.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Popullsia e moshës 10 vjeçe e mbi sipas nivelit të arsimit (2011) [The population of the age above 10 years according to the level of education (2011)], Platforma Online ASK Data, Agjencia e Statistikave të Kosovës.

¹³ Statistikat e Arsimit në Kosovë 2017/2018 [The statistics of the education in Kosovo 2017/2018], Agjencia e Statistikave të Kosovës, Ministria e Arsimit, Shkencës dhe Teknologjisë [The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology]. The link: <http://ask.rks-gov.net/media/4145/stat-e-arsimit-2017-2018-shqip.pdf>.

On the other hand, in the Municipality of Podujevo there are 18 sport clubs and six sport schools that utilize three soccer fields, 17 small soccer fields with synthetic grass, one sport hall and two sports complexes. On the other hand, within the municipality, there is one functional library, a youth centre and a theatre. It should be mentioned, though, that the amount of capital investments is not sufficient for the youth engaged in these fields to fulfil the needs for exercising their free activities.¹⁴

- **The religious structure**

In terms of religious background, 99.7% of the population of the Municipality of Podujevo have declared themselves to be of Islamic belief, 0.01% were declared as members of the Catholic religion, 0.01% as Orthodox, while 0.25% include individuals without a religious affiliation, as well as those who have preferred not to answer.¹⁵

It is worth mentioning that in the territory of the Municipality of Podujevo there are 41 functional mosques, three of which are in the city, and the other 38 are in the villages. The overall number of Islamic clerics serving in the municipality is 43.¹⁶ After the war in 1999, four mosques that were destroyed during the war were renovated, while another 18 new mosques were built after the war.¹⁷ The ratio of mosques per inhabitants is 0.61 mosques per 1,000 inhabitants in the villages, and 0.134 mosques per 1,000 inhabitants in the city. Within the municipality, there are also three functioning associations that operate under the authority of the Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK), of which one is humanitarian, the second is for youth, and the third is for women.¹⁸ The Catholic believers do not have in their service any Catholic church and no cleric of the Kosovo's Eparchy, although there is a church that is not functional.¹⁹ On the other hand,

¹⁴ Cultural and Sport Infrastructure in the Municipality of Podujevo. Data received from the Directorate of Culture in the Municipality of Podujevo, 2 August 2018.

¹⁵ Popullsia sipas gjinisë, religjionit dhe komunës 2011 [The population according to gender, religion and municipality 2011], Platforma Online ASK Data, Agjencia e Statistikave të Kosovës.

¹⁶ Data from the Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK), 7 July, 2018.

¹⁷ Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Municipal Profile of Podujevë/Podujevo (2018) <https://www.osce.org/kosovo/13126?download=true>.

¹⁸ Data from the Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK), 7 July, 2018.

¹⁹ Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Municipal Profile of Podujevë/Podujevo (2018) <https://www.osce.org/kosovo/13126?download=true>.

Protestant believers have one cleric and a humanitarian association related to the religious community, but they do not have any Protestant churches.²⁰ Orthodox believers currently have no clerics or Orthodox churches except a non-functional church renovated in 2010 that is protected by the Kosovo Police.²¹

- **Violent Extremism**

The Municipality of Podujevo is among the municipalities in Kosovo with the lowest level of radicalisation and violent extremism. According to the data provided by the Police of Kosovo, only one individual from the municipality of Podujevo has joined terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq.²² At present, the police has no information about this person, except that currently he is not in the territory of the Municipality of Podujevo. According to the same sources, two other people have tried to join the groups fighting in Syria, but they were prevented by the Kosovo Police.²³

Based on the interviews with representatives of the municipality, as well as those of KBI and Kosovo Police at the municipal level, it can be concluded that there is satisfactory cooperation and coordination between these institutions in terms of preventing radicalisation and violent extremism in this municipality.²⁴ Within the Municipality of Podujevo there are also three other councils operating in the field of security, namely the Municipal Council for Community Safety, the Local Community for Public Safety, and the Community Safety Action Team. Meetings in these three councils are held regularly, and all relevant actors actively take part in them.²⁵ It is worth mentioning that according to the interviewees, the population in the entire territory of the municipality has played an important role in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism in this

²⁰ Data from the Community of the Protestant Church of Kosovo, 20 July 2018.

²¹ Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Municipal Profile of Podujevë/Podujevo (2018) <https://www.osce.org/kosovo/13126?download=true>.

²² Data from the Office for Information and Public Relations, Kosovo Police, 27 July 2018.

²³ Interview with Mr. Bekim Bislimi, the Commander of Kosovo Police in the Municipality of Podujevo, 19 October 2018.

²⁴ Interviews with Mr. Agim Veliu, the Mayor of the Municipality of Podujevo (9 August 2018), Imam 1 in the Municipality of Podujevo (9 August 2018) and Mr. Bekim Bislimi, the Commander of Kosovo Police in the Municipality of Podujevo (19 October 2018).

²⁵ Interview with Mr. Bekim Bislimi, the Commander of Kosovo Police in the Municipality of Podujevo, 19 October 2018.

municipality, since it has, in general, not supported activities that lead to radicalisation and did not accept individuals who have tried to engage in such actions. At present, no NGO actively promotes the radical forms of Islam within the municipality. There have been such attempts in the past, mainly from organisations that have been distributing aid or financial assistance, but representatives of these organisations have been expelled at the request of the municipal KBI since they were acting outside of BIK regulations.²⁶

- **The level of criminality**

The statistics on the level of criminality in the Municipality of Podujevo show that during the previous year (2017), there were 825 penal deeds committed in this municipality,²⁷ that is, 9.9 penal deeds per 1,000 inhabitants, which presents a medium level of criminality. The largest number of the committed penal deeds belong to the category of deeds against the wealth (474), and against the life and body (182).²⁸

- **The structure of the population according to economic activity**

Statistical data for the Municipality of Podujevo (for the year 2011) show that from 58,700 people above 15 years of age, only 36% are economically active, while 64% of the above population were declared economically inactive. On the other hand, from the active population above 15 years of age, only 50.4% are employed.²⁹ The structure of the employed for the entire population and the age group (19-29) years according to the level of education is presented in Figures no.2 and no.3.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Data from the Office of Information and Public Relations, Kosovo Police, 3 August 2018.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Popullsia e moshës 15 vjeç e mbi sipas statusit të aktivitetit aktual (2011) [The population of age above 15 according to the status of actual activity (2011)], Online Platform ASKDATA, Kosovo Statistics Agency.

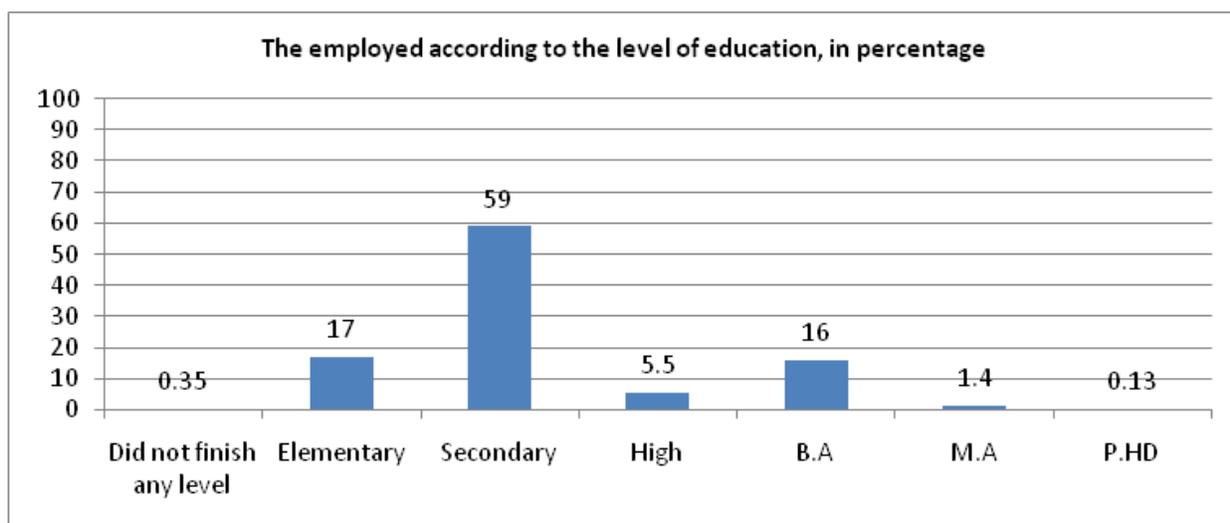


Figure no.2: Structure of the employed for the entire population according to the level of education

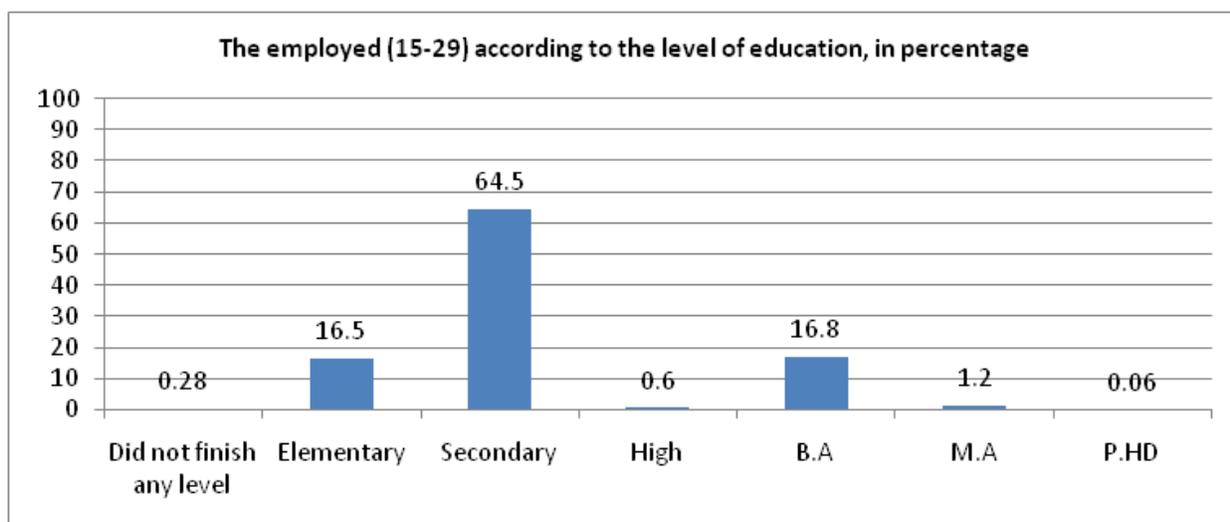


Figure no.3: Structure of the employed for age group (15-29) according to the level of education

As far as the economically inactive citizens are concerned, 22.38% of them have declared the continuation of education as a reason for this, and 40.82% have declared that they are taking care of their family and household, while 3.46% have mentioned other reasons. It should be noted that 3.38% of the population is in a hard economic

condition, living from social assistance, while 5.92% have mentioned pensions as their major source for living.³⁰

- **The Municipal Budget and the support of youth activities**

In terms of the size of the total budget, the Municipality of Podujevo is ranked as the seventh in Kosovo (after Prishtina, Prizren, Ferizaj, Peja, Gjilan and Gjakova), and its budget for the fiscal year 2018 amounts to 21.372 million Euros. Budget revenues are predominantly from government allocations that account for about 91.56%, while the remaining 8.4% is generated by the municipality from its own revenues. Similarly with other municipalities, in the Municipality of Podujevo, wages and salaries remain the highest category with about 56% of the total budget. The category of goods and services takes part with 9%, while, the part dedicated to capital investments represents 30.36% of the total amount.³¹

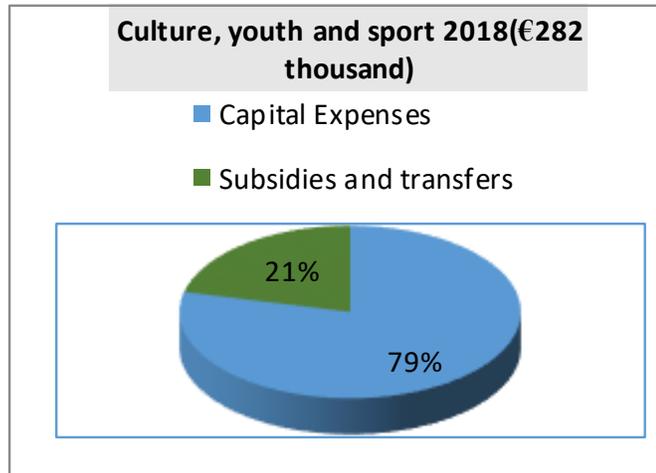
If we analyse the relation of the budget to capital investments, and to the support of culture, youth and sports, more specifically, to infrastructure and activities related to youth, we will see that this portion of the budget does not represent in any meaningful way the needs of this group of population (age group 15-29 years), which constitutes 27.40% of the total population of the Municipality of Podujevo.

For instance, in the budget for the year 2018, only 1.3% (282,047 Euros) of the total budget is foreseen to be spent in a way that will have an impact on young people, and this is categorized fully within the capital expenses, by representing 4% of their total value. It should be noted that most of these funds (79%) are dedicated for subsidies and transfers, and 21% for capital expenses.³²

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ligji për Buxhetin e Republikës së Kosovës për vitin 2018 [The Law on the Budget of the Republic of Kosovo for the year 2018], Ministry of Finance, <https://mf.rks-gov.net/desk/inc/media/668E7D87-490C-4229-881B-E66CE614F4C1.pdf>.

³² Ibid.



2.2. Socio-Economic Data: Municipality of Suhareka

- **The structure of the population and the demographic shifts**

In terms of the size of its population, Suhareka is considered a mid-size municipality at the Kosovo level. The data of the population census of the year 2011 show that this municipality has had 59.722 inhabitants, of which only 17.45% were living in the city and 82.55% in the villages.³³ In terms of ethnic background, 96.56% of the inhabitants of Suhareka are Albanians, around 0.8% are Ashkalis, and the rest belong to other ethnic groups.³⁴ The gender ratio of the population is 49.36% male and 50.64% female.

Since the age group (15-29) years represents the age group that is mostly exposed to radicalisation and violent extremism, it is logical that the primary focus of this analysis is precisely on young people of this age. Within the general population, this group is represented by 28.10%, while the age group (0-14) years includes 29.20%, and the one with (30-80) years includes a total of 42.70%.³⁵ On the other hand, the population census

³³ Popullsia e Kosovës dhe shtimi natyror për vitin 2017 [The population of Kosovo and the natural growth for the year 2017], Platforma Online [Online Platform] ASK Data, Agjencia e Statistikave të Kosovës [The Kosovo Agency of Statistics].

³⁴ Popullsia sipas përkatësisë etnike 2011 [The population according to ethnic background, 2011], Platforma Online [Online Platform] ASK Data, Agjencia e Statistikave të Kosovës.

³⁵ Popullsia sipas moshave dhe llojit të vendbanimit [The population according to age and the type of habitat], Platforma Online [Online Platform] ASK Data, Agjencia e Statistikave të Kosovës.

of the year 2011 shows that the largest number of young people in the Municipality of Suhareka (82.40%) live in 42 villages of the municipality, while only a small part (17.60%) live in the city. An analysis of the demographic movements of the members of this age group shows that there is a continuous movement of young people from villages into the city.³⁶

- **The level and the structure of education, culture, and sport**

The data about the population of the Municipality of Suhareka above 10 years of age, according to the level of education and literacy, show that out of 1,000 inhabitants in this municipality, 41 are illiterate, 94 have not obtained any education, 613 have finished only the elementary school, 230 have finished the secondary school, and 61 have finished university and post-university studies.³⁷

According to the data from the Directorate for Education of the Municipality of Suhareka, within the municipality there are 45 functional educational institutions, with 839 teachers and 12,699 pupils, with a 1.88 ratio of schools per 1,000 inhabitants of the age up to 19 years. Of the total number of educational institutions, 41 are elementary schools, three are high schools, and one functions as a centre of pre-school education.³⁸

Similarly to the Municipality of Podujevo, in Suhareka there is also no institution of higher education either in the public or in the private sector. On the other hand, in the municipality of Suhareka there are 21 sport clubs, a library, 3 cultural houses, 4 cultural-artistic societies and a youth centre. However, as it will be shown later, the amount of capital investments is not sufficient for the youth engaged in these fields to fulfil the needs for exercising their free activities.³⁹

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Popullsia e moshës 10 vjeçe e mbi sipas nivelit të arsimimit (2011) [The population of the age above 10 years according to the level of education (2011)], Platforma Online [Online Platform] ASK Data, Agjencia e Statistikave të Kosovës.

³⁸ Directorate for Education, Municipality of Suhareka, 15 November 2018.

³⁹ Information from the Directorate for Culture, Youth, Sports and Diaspora, Municipality of Suhareka, 15 November 2018.

- **The religious structure**

In terms of religious background, 98.3% of the population of the Municipality of Suhareka have declared themselves to be of Islamic belief, 0.6% were declared as members of the Catholic religion, 0.01% as Orthodox, while 1% include individuals without religious affiliation, as well as those who have preferred to not answer. It is interesting to note that in the Municipality of Suhareka there are a larger number of people who prefer not to answer about their religious affiliation, i.e. 467 persons or 0.8% of citizens belong to this category.⁴⁰

On the other hand, in the territory of the Municipality of Suhareka there are 24 functional mosques, one of which is in the city, and the other 23 are in the villages. The overall number of Islamic clerics serving in the municipality is 26.⁴¹ It should be mentioned that after the war in 1999, 14 mosques destroyed during the war were renovated, while another five new mosques were built after the war.⁴² The ratio of mosques per inhabitants is 0.47 mosques per 1,000 inhabitants in the villages, and only 0.096 mosques per 1,000 inhabitants in the city. Within the municipality, there are also three functioning associations that operate under the authority of the Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK), of which one is humanitarian, the second is for youth, and the third is for women.⁴³ The catholic believers have in their service one Catholic church in the village of Sallagrazhde that functions regularly. On the other hand, Protestant believers have one church and one cleric in their service, as well as a humanitarian association related to the religious community.⁴⁴ Orthodox believers currently have no clerics or Orthodox churches since the existing six churches before the war have all been destroyed in June 1999 and have never been renovated.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Popullsia sipas gjinisë, religjionit dhe komunës 2011 [The population according to gender, religion and municipality 2011], Platforma Online ASK Data, Agjencia e Statistikave të Kosovës.

⁴¹ Data from the Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK), 7 July 2018.

⁴² Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Suharekë/Suva Reka Municipal Profile (2018), 10 October 10 October 2018, <https://www.osce.org/kosovo/13131?download=true>.

⁴³ Data from the Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK), 7 July, 2018.

⁴⁴ Data from the Community of the Protestant Church of Kosovo, 20 July 2018.

⁴⁵ Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Municipal Profile of Podujevë/Podujevo (2018) <https://www.osce.org/kosovo/13126?download=true>.

- **Violent Extremism**

The Municipality of Suhareka is among the municipalities in Kosovo with the lowest level of radicalisation and violent extremism. According to the data provided by the Police of Kosovo, no individual from the municipality of Suhareka has joined terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq.⁴⁶ There is also no data about individuals who have in the past attempted to join such groups in Syria and Iraq and were eventually prevented from doing so.⁴⁷

Based on the interviews with representatives of the municipality, as well as those of KBI and Kosovo Police at the municipal level, it can be concluded that there is a satisfactory cooperation and coordination between these institutions in terms of preventing radicalisation and violent extremism in this municipality.⁴⁸ It worth noting that within the Municipality of Suhareka, there are also two councils operating in the field of security, namely the Municipal Council for Community Safety and the Council that functions as coordinative body among the Mayor and the police at municipal level on one hand, and the representatives of KFOR and OSCE, on the other. Meetings of these two councils are held regularly, and all relevant actors actively take part in them.⁴⁹ It is worth mentioning that similarly to the Municipality of Podujevo, in the one of Suhareka, the population in the entire territory of the municipality has also played an important role in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism in this municipality. Local population has in general not supported activities that lead to radicalisation and did not accept individuals who have tried to engage in such actions. At present, no NGO actively promotes the radical forms of Islam within the municipality. There have been such attempts in the past, mainly from organisations coming from Prizren, but

⁴⁶ Data from the Office for Information and Public Relations, Kosovo Police, 27 July 2018.

⁴⁷ Interview with Mr. Milazim Lumi, the Commander of Kosovo Police in the Municipality of Suhareka, 18 October 2018.

⁴⁸ Interviews with Mr. Bali Muharremaj, the Mayor of the Municipality of Suhareka (30 August 2018), Imam 1 in the Municipality of Suhareka (30 August 2018) and Mr. Milazim Lumi, the Commander of Kosovo Police in the Municipality of Suhareka (18 October 2018).

⁴⁹ Interview with Mr. Milazim Lumi, the Commander of Kosovo Police in the Municipality of Suhareka, 18 October 2018.

representatives of these organisations have been expelled at the request of the municipal KBI since they were acting outside of BIK regulations.⁵⁰

- **The level of criminality**

The statistics on the level of criminality in the Municipality of Suhareka show that during the previous year (2017) there were 603 penal deeds committed in this municipality. The largest number of the committed penal deeds belong to the category of deeds against the wealth (340), and against the life and body (158).⁵¹

- **The structure of the population according to economic activity**

Statistical data for the Municipality of Suhareka (for the year 2011) show that from 42,313 people above 15 years of age, only 35.48% are economically active, while 64.52% of the above population were declared economically inactive. On the other hand, from the active population above 15 years of age, only 50.4% are employed.⁵² Structure of the employed for the entire population and the age group (19-29) years according to the level of education is presented in Figures no.4 and no.5.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Data from the Office of Information and Public Relations, Kosovo Police, 7 November 2018.

⁵² Popullsia e moshës 15 vjeç e mbi sipas statusit të aktivitetit aktual (2011) [The population of age above 15 according to the status of actual activity (2011)], Online Platform ASKDATA, Kosovo Statistics Agency.

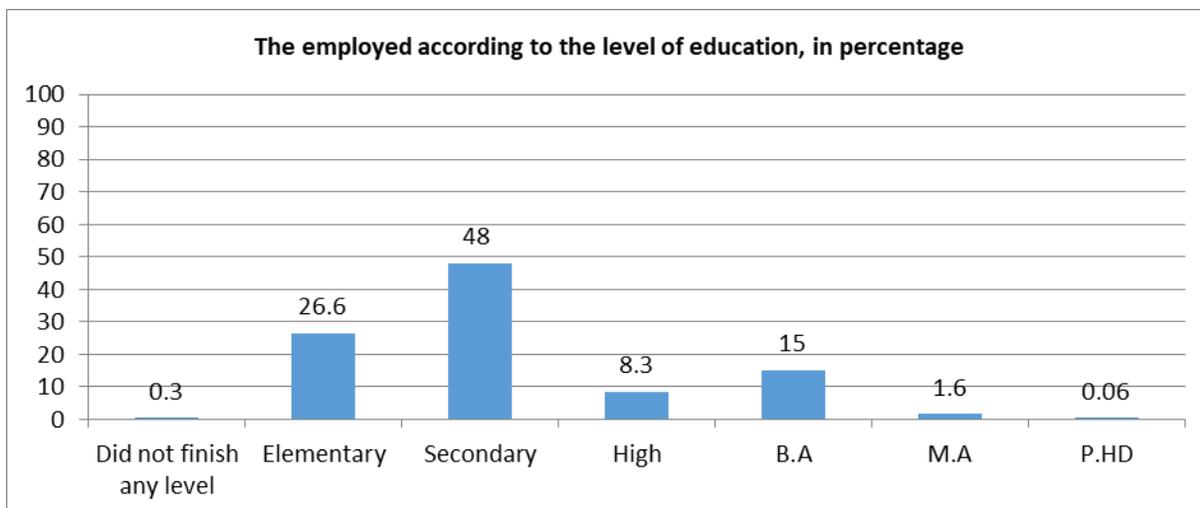


Figure no.4: Structure of the employed for the entire population according to the level of education

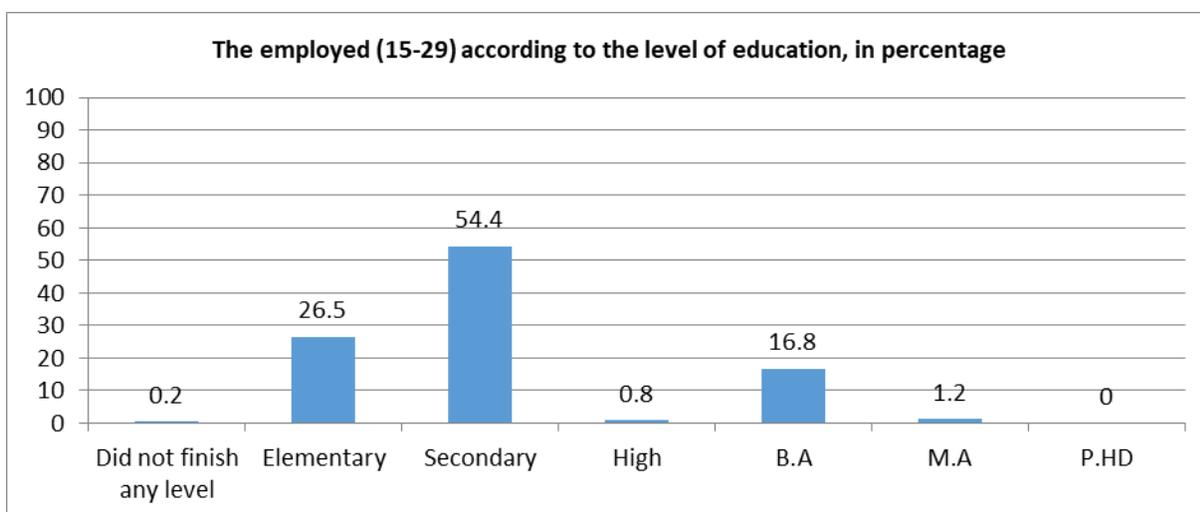


Figure no.5: Structure of the employed for age group (15-29) according to the level of education

As far as the economically inactive citizens are concerned, 21.40% of them have declared the continuation of education as a reason for this, 42.76% have declared that they are taking care of their family and household, while 2.87% have mentioned other reasons. Again, similarly to the Municipality of Podujevo, it should be noted that 3.92%

of the population is in a hard economic condition, living from social assistance, while 5.83% have mentioned pensions as their major source for living.⁵³

- **The Municipal Budget and the support of youth activities**

In terms of the size of the total budget, the Municipality of Suhareka belongs to the group of municipalities with an average budget, and its budget for the fiscal year 2018 amounts to 13.78 million Euros. It should be noted that Municipality of Suhareka is among the three municipalities that have not approved the budget in their Municipal Assemblies in accordance to the budget limits, however, based on the available data it can be concluded that budget revenues are predominantly from government allocations that account for about 85.96%, while the remaining 14.04% is generated by the Municipality from its own revenues. Similarly to other municipalities, in the Municipality of Suhareka, wages and salaries remain the highest category with about 58% of the total budget. The category of goods and services takes part with 7.8%, while, the part dedicated to capital investments is around 30% of the total amount.⁵⁴

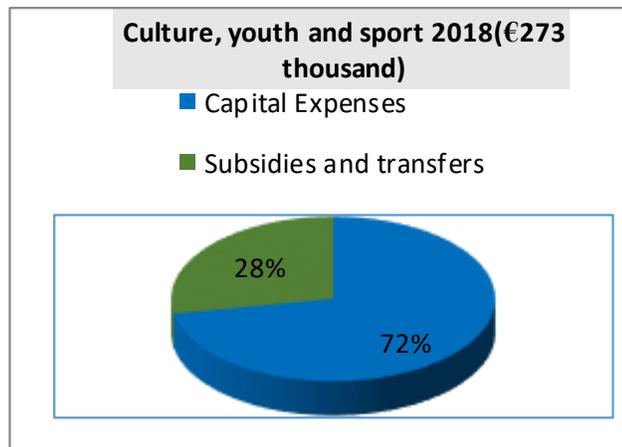
If we analyse the relation of the budget to capital investments, and to the support of culture, youth, and sports, more specifically, to infrastructure and activities related to youth, we will see that this portion of the budget does not represent in any meaningful way the needs of this group of population (age group 15-29 years), which constitutes 28.10% of the total population of the Municipality of Suhareka.

Thus, in the budget for the year 2018, only 1.98% (273,000 Euros) of the total budget is foreseen to be spent in a way that will have an impact on young people, and this is categorized fully within the capital expenses, by representing 6% of their total value. It should be noted that most of these funds (72%) are dedicated for subsidies and transfers, and 28% for capital expenses.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ligji për Buxhetin e Republikës së Kosovës për vitin 2018 [The Law on the Budget of the Republic of Kosovo for the year 2018), Ministry of Finance, <https://mf.rks-gov.net/desk/inc/media/668E7D87-490C-4229-881B-E66CE614F4C1.pdf>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.



Among others, according to the budget it is foreseen that 44,107 Euros will be spent on subsidies for sports competitions, 25,746 Euros for the support of cultural-artistic societies, while only 4,950 Euros for book exhibitions and publications. On the other hand, within the framework of capital investments, 27,000 Euros are foreseen for arranging facilities for cultural and festive activities, 45,000 Euros for the construction and renovation of sports and cultural facilities, 108,000 Euros for the construction of the Sports Centre in Studenqan and only 9,500 Euros for capacity building of the youth action council.⁵⁶

2.3. Comparative Analysis of Socio-Economic Data

In this section we will compare different socio-economic data between Municipalities of Podujevo and Suhareka on the one hand, and Municipalities of Kaçanik and Hani i Elezit, on the other. Clearly, by comparing the data of two municipalities that have not shown signs of radicalisation and violent extremism and those of the two municipalities with relatively high level of radicalisation and violent extremism, this section aims to show whether there are significant differences in these characteristics between these two groups of municipalities and whether there is a correlation between these characteristics and the emergence of radicalization and violent extremism. For this

⁵⁶ Information from the Directorate for Culture, Youth, Sports and Diaspora, Municipality of Suhareka, 15 November 2018.

purpose, a comparative table of key socio-economic data for the four municipalities under discussion is given below.

	Podujeva	Suhareka	Kacaniku	Hani i Elezit
Population	84223	61181	34409	10009
City	26.5%	17.45%	31.10%	*
Village	73.5%	82.55%	68.90%	100%
Age group 0-14	30.30%	29.20%	28.60%	29.50%
Age gorup 15-29	27.40%	28.10%	27.60%	26.40%
Age group 30+	42.30%	42.70%	43.80%	44.10%
The level of education				
Illiterate (per 1000 inhabitants)	48	41	36	39
Without elementary education (per 1000 inhabitants)	112	94	85	92
Elementary education (per 1000 inhabitants)	527	613	523	577
Secondary education (per 1000 inhabitants)	304	230	338	290
High education (per 1000 inhabitants)	55	61	53	39
Elementary and secondary school institutions	62	45	27	7
Religion				
Mosques	41	24	18	10
Islamic clerics	43	26	21	13
Catolic churches	1	1	0	0
Catolic clerics	0	0	0	0
Protestant churches	0	1	0	0
Protestant clerics	2	1	2	2
Orthodox churches	1	6	0	0
Foreign Terrorist Fighters	1	0	32	10
Average age	*	*	33.6	36.8
The level of education	*	*	Medium/High	*
Economic condition	*	*	Average/Poor	Poor/Average
Criminal background	*	*	80%	0%
Criminality (penal deeds/per 1000 inhabitants)	9.9	10	13.5	6.1
Economic condition				
Economically active population	36%	35.50%	35.30%	37.60%
Employed	50.4%	53.50%	50.50%	46.80%
With social assistance	3.38%	3.92%	5%	5%
Dependant on pensions	5.92%	5.83%	5%	6%
Municipal budget (EUR)	21.37 milion	13.78 milion	7.7 milion	2.8 milion
Capital investments and subsidies	33%	30.00%	21.45%	36.20%
Capital investments and subsidies for youth	4.00%	6.10%	4.50%	0%

Based on socio-economic data from the comparative table between the four municipalities in question, it can be concluded that the Municipalities of Podujevo and Suhareka are larger municipalities in terms of the number of inhabitants compared to the Municipalities of Kaçanik and Hani i Elezit. The most significant difference is between the Municipality of Podujevo with a population of 84,223 and that of Hani i Elezit with only 10,009 inhabitants.

Concerning the ethnic structure of the population it can be concluded that the absolute majority of the inhabitants in these municipalities (96.5%>) are Albanians. The situation is similar in terms of the religious structure, as the absolute majority of the inhabitants in these municipalities (98%>) have declared to belong to the Islamic faith. As for the number of mosques per 1000 inhabitants, it is noted that in the Municipality of Kaçanik this ratio is 0.65 mosques per 1000 inhabitants in villages and 0.3 mosques per 1000 inhabitants in the town, whereas in the rural Municipality of Hani i Elezit this ratio is 1 mosque in 1000 inhabitants. On the other hand, in the Municipality of Podujevo, such ratio is 0.61 mosques per 1000 inhabitants in villages and 0.134 mosques per 1000 inhabitants in the town, whereas in the Municipality of Suhareka this ratio is 0.47 mosques per 1000 inhabitants in villages and only 0.096 mosques per 1000 inhabitants in the city.

It has already been mentioned that there is a big difference between the Municipalities of Podujevo and Suhareka and those of Kaçanik and Hani i Elezit regarding the number of individuals that have joined the foreign wars, namely terrorist organisations in Iraq and Syria. Thus, while in the entire Podujevo Municipality there was only one such case and in that of Suhareka none, in the Municipality of Hani i Elezit 10 such individuals or 1 in 1000 inhabitants have been identified, while in the Municipality of Kaçanik this number reaches 32 or 0.94 individuals per 1000 inhabitants. However, from the above data for these four municipalities, it can be concluded that in terms of ethnic and religious structure, there is no difference between the Municipalities of Podujevo and Suhareka with a very low degree of radicalisation and violent extremism, and the Municipalities of Kaçanik and Hani i Elezit that have an extremely high level of these phenomena.

There is a symbolic difference regarding the number of mosques per 1000 inhabitants in these four municipalities, as this ratio is highest in the rural Municipalities of Hani i Elezit, and the lowest in the Municipality of Suhareka. There are also differences in the number of new mosques built after the war in 1999. However, the higher ration of mosques per 1000 inhabitants and the larger number of newly constructed mosques does not automatically mean an increased level of radicalisation and violent extremism in any municipality. In this regard, as it will be analysed in the following chapter, much more important is which of the organisations have financed the construction of these new mosques, whether this construction was made with the permission of the municipal KBI, and whether these organisations have conditioned the construction of mosques with the appointment of certain Imams or have insisted on preaching radical forms of Islam in these religious objects.

On the other hand, even with regards to the number of criminal offenses per 1000 inhabitants, there are no significant differences and therefore these data do not present any significant indicator that could explain the major differences in the level of radicalisation and violent extremism in these four municipalities. Thus, the number of criminal offenses per 1000 inhabitants is the highest in the Municipality of Kaçanik (13.5) and the lowest in the Municipality of Hani i Elezit (6.1), although the number of individuals per 1000 inhabitants that have joined the foreign wars is approximately the same in both municipalities. In the Municipalities of Podujevo and Suhareka this number is 9.9 respectively 10 criminal offenses per 1000 inhabitants, that is larger than in the Municipality of Hani i Elezit, which has a very high degree of radicalisation and violent extremism. It is also interesting to note that while out of 32 individuals in Kaçanik Municipality who have joined the foreign wars, even 80% had a criminal record, in the Municipality of Hani i Elezit this percentage was 0%.

Among the socio-economic factors that have been highlighted in many studies as extremely important for the emergence of radicalisation and violent extremism, one must obviously include the economic situation and the level of education. Regarding the level of education, it can be concluded that the four municipalities under discussion have a relatively similar level in this regard. Thus, from the aspect of the number of those who have completed undergraduate and postgraduate studies per 1000 inhabitants, the highest level of education is in the Municipality of Suhareka, while the

lowest is the Municipality of Hani i Elezit. However, in terms of the number of those who have completed high school in 1000 inhabitants, the highest level of education is the Municipality of Kaçanik, while the lowest is in Suhareka.

Regarding the economic situation of the inhabitants in these four municipalities, it should be noted that in the Municipality of Kaçanik, 5.00% of the population is living from social assistance and 5.00% have mentioned pensions as their major source for living. Similarly, in the Municipality of Hani i Elezit, 5.00% of the population is living from social assistance, and 6.00% of the pensions. In the Municipalities of Suhareka and Podujevo, the situation is slightly better because only 3.38%, respectively 3.92% of the population is living from social assistance, while 5.92% respectively 5.83% from the pensions. However, these differences regarding the level of education and the economic situation among the four municipalities are small, and consequently irrelevant to explain the enormous differences in the level of radicalisation and violent extremism among these municipalities.

Undoubtedly, during the analysis of socio-economic data for the four municipalities in question, special attention should be paid to the age group 15-29 years, as this age group is certainly the most vulnerable to radicalisation and violent extremism. In this regard, first of all it can be concluded that the percentage of this age group in the total number of residents is approximately the same in all municipalities, although it is the highest in the Municipality of Suhareka (28.10%) and the lowest in that of Hani i Elezit (26.40%). It can also be concluded that the absolute majority of the population of the age group 15-29 years live in rural areas of these four municipalities.

In terms of primary and secondary education, from the aspect of the number of schools per 1000 inhabitants of the age up to 19 years, in the Municipality of Kaçanik this ratio is 2.08, in Hani i Elezit is 1.9, in Podujevo is 1.75 and in Suhareka that number is 1.88. These figures clearly show that the differences among the four municipalities in this direction are relatively small. Moreover, the Municipalities of Kaçanik and Hani i Elezit have a higher number of schools per 1000 inhabitants compared to the municipalities of Podujevo and Suhareka, although the number of individuals who have joined foreign wars and the level of radicalisation and violent extremism in these first two municipalities is much higher. Consequently, we can conclude that data for the age

group 15-29 years in the four municipalities under discussion are quite similar and as such cannot explain the enormous differences in the level of radicalisation and violent extremism among these municipalities.

From the aspect of the percentage of employees according to the level of education, it can be concluded that the situation for the age group 19-29 years is quite similar in all four municipalities. Thus, in Podujevo Municipality, 64.5% of employees aged 15-29 years are with high school, 16.8% have completed university studies and 1.2% the post-graduate ones. In the Municipality of Suhareka, the percentage of young employees with undergraduate and postgraduate studies is identical to that of Podujevo, while the percentage of high school students is smaller and reaches 54.4%. In the Municipalities of Kaçanik and Hani i Elezit these percentages are roughly the same and do not differ much from the other two municipalities.

One of the problems in all four municipalities is about cultural and sports infrastructure for young people. Such infrastructure is extremely poor and does not even closely meet the needs of this age group of the population. It should be noted that in all municipalities there are clubs and sports schools, while there is also a number of football fields, gyms, and sports complexes available to youth. Within these four municipalities, there are also a number of libraries, youth centres, and cultural centres. However, it is clear that in all four municipalities the existing cultural and sports infrastructure does not meet the needs of extracurricular activities for young people of these municipalities. This is noticeable from capital expenditures and subsidies for culture, sports, and youth budgeted in these four municipalities. Thus, in Podujevo Municipality, these expenditures represent 4.00% of the total capital expenditures, in Suhareka 6.10%, and Kaçanik 4.50%, whereas in the Municipality of Hani i Elezit, such expenditures are not foreseen at all (0.00%).

Consequently, it can be concluded that, in general, the youth of the ages 15-29 years in these municipalities have access to a very poor infrastructure, often even non-existent one, in the field of sports, culture, and other extracurricular activities. These data suggest that youth in all four municipalities live approximately in similar conditions with regard to the cultural and sports infrastructure that is available for their activities. Accordingly, it can be concluded that even these socio-economic indicators cannot

explain the big differences regarding the number of individuals who joined the foreign wars as well as the general level of radicalisation and violent extremism between Municipalities of Podujevo and Suhareka and those of Kaçanik and Hani i Elezit.

3. Analysis: Why there is no Violent Extremism in the Municipalities of Podujevo and Suhareka?

As shown above, the comparative analysis of socio-economic data conducted for the four municipalities has not shown significant differences between the Municipalities of Podujevo and Suhareka that had no record of radicalisation and violent extremism, and those of Kaçanik and Hani i Elezit, that have witnessed the highest levels of radicalisation and violent extremism in the entire Kosovo. While such analysis has again challenged the socio-economic paradigm of explaining religious intolerance and violent extremism, it has left open the most important question of this research - why there has not been radicalisation and violent extremism in the municipalities of Podujevo and Suhareka? In order to answer that question, a number of interviews in both municipalities have been conducted. These included interviews with mayors of municipalities, representatives of main political parties, representatives of local Kosovo Islamic Community, renowned imams in both municipalities, as well as representatives of police, civil society, and media.

In order to find the answer for a very low level of radicalisation and violent extremism in these two municipalities, during the interviews, attention was given to a range of issues related to this topic. An important issue that has been researched were religious relations between Albanians in these municipalities, starting with the period 1989-1999 that coincides with the peaceful and armed resistance of Kosovar Albanians, and was characterized by a high degree of social homogenization. The period during the years 1999-2008, i.e. the period of international administration when the social fragmentation and the increase of the religiosity of the entire society in Kosovo actually began, was also analysed. Lastly, special attention has been given to the period after the declaration of independence in 2008, when we witness the rise of religious radicalisation and the emergence of violent extremism.

Surely, factors that have influenced the emergence of public agendas of religious character as well as radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo are of particular importance when analysing this issue. Consequently, a careful analysis has been conducted about the role of religious communities, both at the level of the whole country and within the municipalities under discussion, regarding the Albanian identity as well as a series of other elements related directly to the activity of BIK with the believers of the Islam religion.

Accordingly, during the research, attempts have been made to understand what forms of Islamic interpretation are preached in these two municipalities, whether there is a control of the preaching of imams, and in which places have imams preaching in these municipalities completed their studies. In this regard, special attention has been given to the number of mosques that were rebuilt and built after the war in both municipalities, and how many of them were eventually built by organisations from Middle East that were linked to Wahhabism, Salafism, and Muslim Brotherhood. In cases where there were mosques built by such organisations, it was important to understand whether these organisations have conditioned the construction of mosques with the appointment of certain imams or have insisted on preaching radical forms of Islam. In the final part of the research, particular attention has been paid to the cooperation between the Councils of the Islamic Community (KBI) with local government and the police, but also with local media and civil society. At the same time, an analysis of the role of the various political parties active in these municipalities in the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism has been conducted.

3.1. Analysis: The Municipality of Podujevo

The inhabitants of the Municipality of Podujeva and of the Llap region in general have traditionally been more religious than citizens in other parts of Kosovo. The fact that the population in these areas was largely homogeneous, both in ethnic and religious terms, has in the past contributed to a satisfactory level of religious relations for a long time. Especially during the period 1989-1999 - the period of peaceful and armed resistance of Albanians to Milosevic's discriminatory regime, the homogenization of the population in this municipality was at the highest level. All respondents agree that during this

period, all citizens of the municipality have been deeply committed to the national cause, leaving the religious issues completely aside. Even all the imams that served within the municipality during this period have conducted activities and supported efforts related to national liberation.⁵⁷

After the conflict in 1999, the situation has gradually changed throughout Kosovo, but also in the Municipality of Podujevo. Firstly, there was a resurgence of the religiosity among the entire population and an enormous increase of the number of practitioners of the religion. At the same time, the young people's interest for understanding and learning about the Islamic religion has increased significantly.⁵⁸ On the other hand, immediately after the war, various organisations, mainly from the Gulf States, came to Kosovo, and many of them clearly had religious agendas camouflaged under a humanitarian veil. In this way, the citizens of Kosovo were for the first time faced with radical forms of Islamic preaching that had so far been unknown to them.⁵⁹ Representatives of the Wahhabi, Salafist, or Muslim Brotherhood movements, apart from distributing aid to the people who were exhausted by the Kosovo war, also began preaching their forms of Islam that were in opposition to traditional Islam practiced in Kosovo for centuries.⁶⁰ Such associations also engaged in the renovation of war-damaged mosques, but also in the construction of a great number of new mosques. Often, these activities were conditioned by the preaching of their forms of Islam in renovated and newly built mosques.⁶¹ At the same time, these associations began recruiting imams who would study in the Arabic Gulf countries, and who after returning from their studies would engage in preaching the radical forms of Islam characteristic for the countries where they had completed their studies.⁶² All these activities took place in front of the eyes of UNMIK's international administration, which not only did not take any concrete steps in hindering the activities of such

⁵⁷ Such attitudes have been unanimously confirmed during the eight interviews conducted with representatives of the municipality, political parties, Councils of Islamic Community, police, media, and civil society.

⁵⁸ Interview with Imam 3 of the Municipality of Podujevo, 30 August 2018.

⁵⁹ Interview with Mr. Rafet Llapashtica, President of the PDK branch in Podujevo, 14 September 2018.

⁶⁰ Interview with Imam 1 of the Municipality of Podujevo, 9 August 2018.

⁶¹ Interview with Imam 3 of the Municipality of Podujevo, 30 August 2018.

⁶² Interview with Imam 1 of the Municipality of Podujevo, 9 August 2018.

organisations, but has sometimes even favoured such actions.⁶³ The negative trends of these organisations have been noticed in time by the KBI leadership of the Municipality of Podujevo. As a result, KBI has in cooperation with the local Imams, immediately mobilized to prevent such phenomena and to preserve and cultivate the traditional religious values of Albanians in these areas that have always been embodied in the Albanian national cause. Still, during this period it came to clear polarisation in the territory of the municipality in practicing and interpretation of the Islamic religion, in some of the mosques, but among the believers as well, thus resulting in the social fragmentation of Albanians in the name of religion.⁶⁴

After the declaration of independence in 2008, although most of these organisations were either closed or expelled from Kosovo, the consequences of their activities were evident because the radical Albanian groups had already started to appear in the Albanian society itself. In this period, we have witnessed the violation of national symbols of Albanians and the desecration of the most prominent figures of the Albanian national history, including as well as their public insulting due to certain religious agendas.⁶⁵ Despite the permanent engagement of KBI, the first cells of a radical practice and interpretation of the Islamic religion have started to appear in the Municipality of Podujevo as well. This new reality in the Municipality of Podujevo was a result of the immense engagement of some Imams from the central BIK in Prishtina who were constantly carrying out activities to deepen the roots of the Wahhabi ideology, in which the foundation of radicalisation and violent extremism is undoubtedly rooted.⁶⁶ During this period, there have been tendencies of some small groups even to violently enter certain mosques in order to get them under control. There have also been cases when such individuals have attempted to disrupt the atmosphere during the prayers by spreading their radical ideas and non-traditional forms of praying.⁶⁷

⁶³ Interview with Imam 3 of the Municipality of Podujevo, 30 August 2018.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Interview with Imam 1 of the Municipality of Podujevo, 9 August 2018.

⁶⁶ Interview with Imam 3 of the Municipality of Podujevo, 30 August 2018.

⁶⁷ Interview with Mr. Agim Veliu, the Mayor of the Municipality of Podujevo, 9 August 2018.

From a number of factors that have influenced the emergence of public agendas of religious character of radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo, the essential factor is the activity of certain Imams from Kosovo. These individuals, for personal financial interests, embraced these radical forms of interpretation and practice of the Islamic religion that originate from the Persian Gulf states.⁶⁸ Moreover, these Imams have been operating freely for a long-time all-over Kosovo without being hampered either by state institutions or by religious ones. Actually, they were acting with the blessing of the head of BIK who somehow turned out to be in coalition with these Imams in order to extort funds from these countries.⁶⁹ Unfortunately, the alarm for such negative phenomena arose in the entire country only when Kosovar Albanian youth started going to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS fighters and other groups involved in the fighting. Up to that moment, regretfully, it can be concluded that all state and religious institutions at the central level that were supposed to prevent such phenomena on the country level were caught asleep.⁷⁰

All respondents within the municipality are unanimous that the main reason why radicalisation and violent extremism has failed to infiltrate to a greater extent in the Municipality of Podujevo is due to the vigorous work of the KBI and a number of local Imams. First of all, representatives of the KBI have from the very beginning resisted the installation of organisations and individuals who have insisted on preaching the radical forms of Islam. They have constantly interacted with the citizens, not only in mosques during the prayer, but also during different meetings, including schools, and in the media. Such radical ideologies have been unmasked as foreign and harmful to Albanians in Kosovo.⁷¹ KBI has also been alert during the process of reconstruction of mosques destroyed during the war or construction of the new ones. In the Municipality of Podujevo in total, there were 23 mosques before the war, while today their total number is 41 and all are functional. Despite numerous offers from foreign organisations for the construction of new mosques or reconstruction of mosques destroyed during the war, KBI has repeatedly rejected such offers. Consequently, out of 18 new mosques built after the war in Podujevo Municipality, only one was built by an organisation

⁶⁸ Interview with Imam 2 of the Municipality of Podujevo, 9 August 2018.

⁶⁹ Interview with Imam 3 of the Municipality of Podujevo, 30 August 2018.

⁷⁰ Interview with Imam 1 of the Municipality of Podujevo, 9 August 2018.

⁷¹ Interview with Imam 2 of the Municipality of Podujevo, 9 August 2018.

from Kuwait - Kosovo Aid and Development (KAD), and none were funded by organisations from Saudi Arabia.⁷² In the whole municipality, there was only one mosque, the construction of which started irregularly, by a person who is a resident of the municipality, but works as an Imam in Prishtina and has a Wahhabi orientation. This mosque was built without the management and supervision of the KBI precisely because the criteria set by the KBI and BIK regulations for the construction of mosques were disregarded. Later, however, this mosque was taken under the jurisdiction of the KBI and today an Imam appointed by the KBI Presidency in Podujevo works there and it functions within the Council.⁷³

It should be noted that the KBI in Podujevo has timely drafted and approved a platform for preventing and combating tendencies of preaching the radical forms of Islam. Consequently, the Imams that operated within KBI in Podujevo were obliged to act in accordance with this platform, i.e. none of the Imams in Podujevo have publicly appeared in support of such ideological movements, though there have been such cases with Imams in Prishtina and other municipalities.⁷⁴ Unfortunately, such action was never undertaken by the BIK leadership in Prishtina, which had remained indifferent to these negative phenomena. Consequently, the central BIK in one way or another, can be considered to be one of the main culprits for the creation of such a reality.⁷⁵

The leadership of KBI in Podujevo has shown determination and wisdom during the process of appointment of the local Imams in different mosques within the municipality. During these appointments, the KBI has rejected the appointment of any Imam or employee within the institution for whom there was evidence that they have been involved in preaching the radical forms of Islam or have been supportive of these movements. Often, such policy has been objected and disapproved by the Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK), and has even created serious tensions in the KBI-BIK direction.⁷⁶ In addition to special attention during the appointment, the leadership of the KBI has also regularly controlled the preaching of its Imams within the municipality

⁷² Interview with Imam 1 of the Municipality of Podujevo, 9 August 2018.

⁷³ Interview with Imam 3 of the Municipality of Podujevo, 30 August 2018.

⁷⁴ Interview with Imam 2 of the Municipality of Podujevo, 9 August 2018.

⁷⁵ Interview with Imam 3 of the Municipality of Podujevo, 30 August 2018.

⁷⁶ Interview with Imam 1 of the Municipality of Podujevo (9 August 2018) and Interview with Imam 3 of the Municipality of Podujevo (30 August 2018).

to make sure that this preaching is not contradictory to the traditional Islam practiced in Kosovo and preferred by the KBI. At the same time, the leadership of the KBI and the Imams engaged within the Council have refused any kind of cooperation with associations or individuals who were propagating radical forms of Islam.⁷⁷

It is worth mentioning that the Presidency of the KBI in Podujevo has been careful in preventing the installation of associations from the Middle East with Wahhabi and Salafist character. Consequently, in this municipality, despite continuous efforts, especially during the early post-war phase, such associations have failed to find local collaborators as it has happened in other areas of Kosovo, where they have acted for a long time without any prevention from anyone.⁷⁸ During a certain period, there was an active branch of the "Association for Culture, Education and School" (AKEA) in the municipality, which was ideologically close to Muslim Brotherhood. In addition, there was a local association "Devotion" that functioned for a while and was involved in preaching radical forms of Islam. However, KBI has never cooperated with such organisations, it has not implemented even a single joint activity, and has simply ignored them.⁷⁹ Therefore, although some of these associations have also operated within the Podujevo Municipality by distributing aid, organising different courses with young people, as well as excursions and camping, their ideological influence has been symbolic. In fact, the KBI in Podujevo has from the outset taken a firm decision for non-cooperation with such associations or individuals. The negative consequences of such activities were ascertained and analysed in a timely manner, and through an earlier approved platform, the concrete commitments of all members of the KBI and the local Imams for the preservation of the traditional religious and national values characteristic for this area have been specified.⁸⁰

In this direction, cooperation between local religious authorities and local government has also been at a satisfactory level. The local authorities have declined to grant an approval for construction of new religious objects if prior permission was not given by the municipal KBI. Also, there were regular contacts between local authorities and the

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Interview with Imam 3 of the Municipality of Podujevo, 30 August 2018.

⁷⁹ Interview with Imam 1 of the Municipality of Podujevo, 9 August 2018.

⁸⁰ Interview with Imam 3 of the Municipality of Podujevo, 30 August 2018.

KBI in order to combat radical forms of Islamic preaching. The KBI Imams have been invited by local government to various activities in schools, but also with the families to clarify the main elements of traditional Islam.⁸¹ The cooperation was also on a satisfactory level with the Kosovo Police, which has intervened in preventing the activities of radical groups every time KBI or municipal authorities requested this. There are even opinions that the police has played a key role in this direction, since after certain actions and imprisonment of some individuals with radical activities, others were discouraged and have gradually left the territory of the municipality.⁸² It should be emphasized that such cooperation has been ongoing and among others, it has been expressed through regular meetings of the Municipal Council for Community Safety, where issues related to these negative phenomena were often discussed. In fact, it can be concluded that one of the important preconditions for prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism is the successful cooperation between local religious authorities, local government, and the police. At the same time, it is a joint conclusion of all respondents that in general, in addition to being opposed by the KBI, the local government, and the police, the activities of such associations and individuals were not supported by the local population either.

Regarding the role of political parties in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism in Podujevo Municipality, the opinions of the respondents were divided. Representatives of local government and political parties believe that political parties have played an important and positive role in this regard.⁸³ However, the opinion of the interviewees from KBI, media and civil society is that, apart from some small exceptions, political parties have hardly acted in preventing these negative phenomena. Their activities have mainly been towards ensuring support and votes during election campaigns. Some respondents also claim that during the election campaigns, well-known political figures have openly flirted and collaborated with certain individuals

⁸¹ Interview with Mr. Agim Veliu, the Mayor of the Municipality of Podujevo, 9 August 2018.

⁸² Interview with Mr. Bekim Bislimi, the Commander of Kosovo Police in the Municipality of Podujevo (19 October 2018) and with Mr. Patriot Rudari, President of the AAK branch in Podujevo (14 September 2018).

⁸³ Interviews with Mr. Agim Veliu, the Mayor of the Municipality of Podujevo (9 August 2018), Mr. Patriot Rudari, President of the AAK branch in Podujevo (14 September 2018) and Mr. Rafet Llapashtica, President of the PDK branch in Podujevo (14 September 2018).

who have been quite active in promoting Wahhabism, just for securing some votes for themselves and their parties.⁸⁴

Overall, cooperation related to prevention of these phenomena has also been on a satisfactory level between representatives of the KBI, civil society, and local media. Often, members of the KBI leadership or the Imams from the municipality have appeared in the local media to clarify the damages of radical Islamic preaching that was trying to infiltrate the territory of the municipality. Through debates and lectures, these religious representatives have clarified and disseminated accurate knowledge about Islam, and have explained the truth about these new radical movements.⁸⁵ At the same time, the KBI leadership and the Imams engaged within the Council have participated in various events dedicated to youth that were organized by representatives of civil society. Upon invitation by the civil society organisations, various lectures were held for high school students in order to familiarize them with the traditional values of the Islamic religion. According to the representatives of civil society in this municipality, KBI and the Imams have been extremely cooperative and have always, without any financial compensation, been involved in trainings, debates and other activities organized by civil society. Moreover, civil society representatives are convinced that the constructive and correct engagement of KBI and local Imams has had a great positive impact on young people in the municipality and has contributed directly to the prevention of the penetration of radical Islamic ideologies that lead to radicalisation and violent extremism.⁸⁶ In general, there was a joint action on all fronts, against all attempts by anyone to ruin traditional values and introduce foreign ideologies that lead to violent acts.

However, there are indications that the situation regarding radicalisation and religious extremism in the Municipality of Podujevo has been worsening lately. Such a reality is mainly related to the changes that have been made within the municipal KBI, as well as changes to the BIK Regulation regarding the appointment of Imams in all municipalities

⁸⁴ Interviews with Imam 1 of the Municipality of Podujevo (9 August 2018) and Imam 2 of the Municipality of Podujevo (09 August 2018).

⁸⁵ Interview with Mr. Enver Hyseni, representative of "Radio Llap" in the Municipality of Podujevo, 14 September 2018.

⁸⁶ Interview with Ms. Donjetë Shaqiri, director of the network of NGOs in the Municipality of Podujevo, 15 September 2018.

of Kosovo. On the one hand, changes in the municipal KBI have resulted in bigger tolerance towards Imams and other individuals who preach radical forms of Islam. This poses a risk, because if such cases are not handled properly, they can lead to increased radicalisation and violent extremism in the municipality. On the other hand, prior to these changes in the Regulation, Imams within the specific municipality were nominated by direct proposal of the KBI Presidency. With the latest changes, the appointment of Imams in different municipalities is now under strict jurisdiction of the BIK Presidency.⁸⁷ In this way, given that there are already radical individuals in the BIK Presidency, there is a risk, that in the Municipality of Podujevo, and elsewhere in Kosovo, Imams who preach radical Islamic forms, other than traditional forms preached in Kosovo for centuries, might be appointed.

In the Municipality of Podujevo, an individual who was previously a director of the branch office of the previously mentioned non-governmental organisation AKEA in Podujevo, has already been appointed as Imam in a certain mosque.⁸⁸ This organisation, along with 13 others, has in 2015 been suspended by the Ministry of Public Administration, due to suspicion that it is interconnected or funded by suspicious organisations related to terrorism and the promotion of radical Islam.⁸⁹ If the practice of appointing Imams preaching radical forms of Islam continues, this may lead to an increased level of radicalisation and violent extremism in the Municipality of Podujevo, thus putting at risk the good work that was done in this municipality by KBI and local Imams for almost 20 years.

⁸⁷ Interview with Imam 1 of the Municipality of Podujevo, 9 August 2018.

⁸⁸ Interview with Imam 2 of the Municipality of Podujevo, 9 August 2018.

⁸⁹ Mentor Gjergjaj, "Shteti ua pezulloi sërish punën 16 organizatave që dyshohen për lidhje me grupe radikale," Gazeta Express, 09 January 2017, <https://www.gazetaexpress.com/lajme/shteti-ua-pezulloi-serish-punen-16-organizatave-qe-dyshohen-per-lidhje-me-grupe-radikale-dokument-304696/?archive=1>

3.2. Analysis: Municipality of Suhareka

Unlike the Municipality of Podujevo, the citizens of the Suhareka region have traditionally never been too religious. This refutes the explanation put forward from some circles that the reason why radicalisation and violent extremism has failed to take root in the Llap region has to do with the fact that the population in that part of Kosovo has always been more religious than citizens in other parts of the country. Having this in mind, one should look for other reasons for explaining why radicalisation and violent extremism have not emerged in the Municipalities of Podujevo and Suhareka. It is worth mentioning that, unlike the Municipality of Podujevo, Suhareka has had a more mixed population, both in ethnic and religious terms. Before the war in 1999, in the village of Mushtisht and some other villages of the municipality, there was also a Serb population, while the village of Sallagrazhdë was mainly inhabited by Albanians of the Catholic belief.⁹⁰ However, it is important to mention that despite such diversity, during this period, inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations were predominantly good.

Similarly to the Municipality of Podujevo, in this municipality all respondents also agree that during the period (1989-1999) of Albanians' peaceful and armed resistance to Milosevic's discriminatory regime, all Albanian citizens of the municipality have been deeply committed to the national cause, leaving the religious issues completely aside.⁹¹ Moreover, the population in this municipality has always had strong patriotic feelings, and the Imams engaged in these areas have also supported efforts related to national cause.⁹² After the end of the armed conflict in 1999, Kosovo's new circumstances inevitably triggered a process of transformation and redefinition of the position of religion. The presence of both Islam and Christianity became visible and pronounced in all public spheres, from personal lives, to society at large, including politics. Very soon, the entire Kosovar society was rapidly exposed to a variety of competing ideas, which were simultaneously, more liberal, as well as more conservative.⁹³ Under the guise of humanitarian aid, many organisations which were previously unknown to the

⁹⁰ Interview with Mr. Bali Muharremaj, Mayor of the Municipality of Suhareka, 30 August 2018.

⁹¹ Such attitudes have been unanimously confirmed during the seven interviews conducted with representatives of the municipality, political parties, Councils of Islamic Community, police, media, and civil society.

⁹² Interview with Imam 2 of the Municipality of Suhareka, 30 August 2018.

⁹³ Demjaha dhe Peci, 2016, 81.

population of Kosovo, entered Kosovo and preached different forms of religion, both Islamic and Christian. Consequently, Kosovo's citizens were confronted with the more radical forms of Islam such as Wahhabism, Salafism, and the Muslim Brotherhood, but also with societies with Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical, and other Christian forms of religion.⁹⁴

However, it should be noted that in the Municipality of Suhareka, the process of the resurgence of religiosity and the increase in practicing religion has happened at a lower rate than in other parts of Kosovo. Similarly, despite attempts by various organisations, mainly from the Gulf States to promote the religious agendas of radical Islam camouflaged under humanitarian law, the Suhareka citizens have largely rejected such radical forms of Islamic preaching.⁹⁵ Still, although at a smaller scale, the activity of these associations has caused disagreement between Muslim believers and those belonging to other religions, but also within Muslims themselves, as an absolute majority population within the municipality.⁹⁶ The forms of action of these organisations were diverse, from the distribution of the Qur'an, the conduct of circumcision ceremonies in non-traditional religious forms, and the insistence of women wearing the headscarf (hijab) in exchange for humanitarian aid.⁹⁷ There were also cases of non-traditional forms of prayer in certain mosques, as well as different forms of provoking the majority of the believers that have remained faithful to the traditional forms of Islamic preaching. It should be emphasized that a small number of individuals who embraced and promoted these radical forms of Islam, mostly did so for financial gains and were often not residents of Municipality of Suhareka.⁹⁸

After the declaration of independence in 2008, similarly to the rest of Kosovo's territory, in the Municipality of Suhareka, the number of foreign associations from Arab countries was also greatly reduced. Fortunately, no local association that preached radical forms

⁹⁴ Interview with Imam 1 of the Municipality of Suhareka, 30 August 2018.

⁹⁵ Interview with Mr. Bali Muharremaj, Mayor of the Municipality of Suhareka, 30 August 2018.

⁹⁶ Interview with Imam 1 of the Municipality of Suhareka, 30 August 2018.

⁹⁷ Interview with Mr. Sali Asllani, former Mayor of the Municipality of Suhareka and the President of the LDK branch in Suhareka, 30 August 2018.

⁹⁸ Interview with Mr. Sali Asllani, former Mayor of the Municipality of Suhareka and the President of the LDK branch in Suhareka (30 August 2018) and the Imam 1 of the Municipality of Suhareka (30 August 2018).

of Islam was established within the municipality. Tendencies to promote such non-traditional forms were mainly made by associations from the Municipality of Prizren, but also from some neighbouring countries. However, the impact of these associations and individuals has been symbolic throughout the municipality, primarily because of the rejection by the local population. Still, there is no doubt that the activities of KBI and local Imams have also played an important role by constantly explaining to citizens the dangers of such radical forms of Islamic preaching and at the same time by refusing any kind of cooperation with these associations and individuals.⁹⁹ At the same time, it is worth mentioning that most of the interviewees believe that state institutions at central level have not responded in a timely manner to prevent the activities of associations and individuals that promoted radical forms of Islamic preaching. Such a reaction occurred only when Albanian youngsters from Kosovo began joining ISIS fighters and other radical groups in Syria and Iraq.¹⁰⁰

All respondents interviewed in the Municipality of Suhareka have emphasized the undeniable role of the KBI and local Imams in preventing the emergence of radicalisation and violent extremism throughout the entire territory of the municipality.¹⁰¹ KBI representatives have been actively involved in the unmasking of the associations and individuals who have tried to promote the radical forms of Islam within the municipality. Such activities were conducted in mosques, but also during various gatherings, in schools, and in the media. On these occasions, to citizens throughout the municipality it was clarified that radical forms of Islam such as Wahhabism, in essence, are not religion but ideologies. As such, these radical forms are extremely dangerous and that in fact these ideologies aimed the destruction of Islam itself. The negative role of such ideologies through the denial of the Albanian national values was also explained, as well as the fact that these ideologies directly jeopardize the entire nation and lead to its destruction. During this period, individuals who have in any way tried to promote such radical forms in mosques throughout the municipality were identified and expelled.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Interview with Imam 1 and Imam 2 of the Municipality of Suhareka, 30 August 2018.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Imam 1 of the Municipality of Suhareka, 30 August 2018.

¹⁰¹ Such attitudes have been confirmed during the seven interviews conducted with representatives of the municipality, political parties, Councils of Islamic Community, police, media and civil society.

¹⁰² Interviews with Imam 1 and Imam 2 of the Municipality of Suhareka, 30 August 2018..

Special attention and vigilance has also been shown during the process of reconstruction of mosques destroyed during the war and the construction of new ones. In the territory of the Municipality of Suhareka, 14 of the existing ones were destroyed during the war. Today there are in total 24 mosques, and after 1999, all of the destroyed mosques were rebuilt, and another five new ones were constructed. The entire process of building new mosques and reconstruction of the damaged ones was done in a transparent way with full financial control by KBI. The KBI Presidency has rejected attempts and offers for (re)building mosques by various associations that have conditioned their financial aid with the appointment of certain Imams to those mosques or by insisting on preaching the non-traditional forms of Islam in these religious objects. Financing for the construction of the new mosques has always been made without conditions and through regular bank transactions.¹⁰³

It is worth mentioning that the leadership of the KBI in Suhareka has shown determination and special caution during the process of appointment of the local Imams in all mosques that function within the municipality. During these appointments, the KBI has been careful to not admit within the institution any Imam or employee for whom there were suspicions of involvement in preaching and promoting the non-traditional forms of Islam. In some cases, such consequent policy has been objected and disapproved by the leadership of the Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK), and has even created serious tensions in the KBI-BIK direction.¹⁰⁴ The leadership of the KBI has also paid special attention to regular control of the preaching of its Imams within the municipality to make sure that this preaching is not radical and contradictory to the traditional Islam practiced in Kosovo and preferred by KBI. At the same time, immediately after the end of the war in 1999, the leadership of the KBI has taken a decision that Imams engaged within the Council should refuse any kind of cooperation with associations or individuals who were promoting radical forms of Islamic preaching.¹⁰⁵

The KBI leadership in the Municipality of Suhareka has given special attention and maximal engagement to preventing the penetration of associations from the Middle

¹⁰³ Interview with Imam 1 of the Municipality of Suhareka, 30 August 2018.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Imam 1 and Imam 2 of the Municipality of Suhareka.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Imam 1 of the Municipality of Suhareka, 30 August 2018.

East related to Wahhabi, Salafist, and Muslim Brotherhood as well as their actions. Precisely due to KBI's engagement in this regard, in this municipality, despite continuous efforts, especially during the early post-war phase, such associations have failed to find favourable terrain for promoting radical forms of Islamic preaching.¹⁰⁶ At the same time, in the Municipality of Suhareka these organisations were unable to find local collaborators as it has happened in other municipalities in Kosovo. In fact, currently there are no NGOs within the municipality that promote radical forms of Islam. In the past, there have been such attempts, mainly of organisations from Prizren, but representatives of these organisations were expelled by the police at the request of the municipal KBI as they have acted outside the BIK rules.¹⁰⁷ On the other hand, KBI and local Imams have been actively engaged in exposing these radical ideologies to citizens throughout the municipality.

Special efforts were devoted to activities in schools to explain to students the dangers of such ideologies that promote radical forms of preaching, violate national values and symbols, and insist that girls wear a headscarf.¹⁰⁸ During these activities to prevent the actions of these associations, KBI representatives have often been threatened by radical groups and individuals, but they have been protected not only by the police, but also by the citizens themselves.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, it can be concluded that in the Municipality of Suhareka, the citizens themselves have played an important role in the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism throughout the entire territory of the municipality. Not only did they not support attempts for activities leading to radicalisation, but have directly helped to identify groups and individuals who have tried to preach radical forms of Islam.¹¹⁰ For instance, in one of the villages of the municipality, certain individuals have attempted to invite students from school to go to the mosque for religious classes, but the school principal, the teachers, and parents have rejected it. On

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with the Commander of Kosovo Police in the Municipality of Suhareka, Mr. Milazim Lumi, 18 October 2018.

¹⁰⁸ It is worth noting that the number of women or girls wearing hijab in Suhareka municipality is very low. Interview with Mr. Bali Muharremaj, Mayor of the Municipality of Suhareka (30 August 2018) and Mr. Sali Asllani, former Mayor of the Municipality of Suhareka and the President of the LDK branch in Suhareka (30 August 2018).

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Imam 1 of the Municipality of Suhareka, 30 August 2018.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Mr. Shpëtim Ndrecaj, Director of "Radio Vala" in Suhareka, 18 October 2018.

this occasion, the clear message by all representatives of the society has been that in this region there is no room for preaching radical forms of Islam, but only the traditional one.¹¹¹

Similarly to the Municipality of Podujevo, in the Suhareka one, cooperation with municipal authorities has been at a high level. Local government has always been vigilant in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism. There were constant contacts and intensive cooperation between the representatives of local government and the KBI in Suhareka, in order to combat the radical forms of Islamic preaching.¹¹² A concrete example of such cooperation is the case of the construction of a new mosque in the village of Dubrava. Before the beginning of the construction, residents as well as three members of the Municipal Assembly from this village have reacted with the presumption that the construction was planned to be undertaken by suspicious individuals. To resolve this issue, municipal authorities have organized a referendum with village residents specifically on this issue. Only after the declaration of the majority of the inhabitants in favour of building the mosque, construction was allowed to proceed.¹¹³ The cooperation was also at a satisfactory level between KBI and Kosovo Police. Every time there was reaction/information from KBI about suspicion that radical forms of Islam were being preached, the police has immediately arrived on the scene and has reacted professionally. For instance, in the village of Grejkoc there were indications that the imam is preaching the non-traditional forms of Islam, including a different way of Fajr prayer. The police has reacted immediately by sending civilian police officers to observe the situation. However, the problem has been resolved without the police intervention, since at the request of the citizens, the imam in question has been discharged by KBI and replaced by another one.¹¹⁴ It is worth mentioning that the cooperation among KBI – Local government – Police has been continuous, among

¹¹¹ Interview with Mr. Blerim Xhemajli, the President of the PDK branch in Suhareka, 17 October 2018.

¹¹² Interview with Mr. Bali Muharremaj, Mayor of the Municipality of Suhareka (30 August 2018) and Mr. Blerim Xhemajli, the President of the PDK branch in Suhareka (17 October 2018).

¹¹³ It is noteworthy that a very small number of believers attend prayers in this mosque nowadays. Interviews with Mr. Sali Asllani, former Mayor of the Municipality of Suhareka and the President of the LDK branch in Suhareka (30 August 2018) and with Mr. Shpëtim Ndrecaj, Director of “Radio Vala” in Suhareka (18 October 2018).

¹¹⁴ Interview with Mr. Milazim Lumi, the Commander of Kosovo Police in the Municipality of Suhareka, 18 October 2018.

others through regular meetings of the Municipal Council for Community Safety. In the meetings of this Council, in which each of the three institutions mentioned above have its representatives, there were regular discussions about the eventual dangers of radicalisation and violent extremism, as well as ways of confronting such dangers.¹¹⁵ It can be concluded that, similarly to the Municipality of Podujevo, in the Suhareka one, successful cooperation between local religious authorities, local government and police represents one of the key factors in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism.¹¹⁶

In general, one gets the impression that unlike in other municipalities throughout Kosovo, in Suhareka, political parties have not flirted with groups and individuals promoting radical forms of Islam in order to secure votes. Moreover, especially during the early post-war years of 1999, LDK has been actively engaged in promoting religious tolerance and Western values.¹¹⁷ On the other hand, the political party AAK, has similarly to other territories in Kosovo, refused to cooperate with the abovementioned structures and was committed to the promotion of the national and pro-Western values.¹¹⁸ Other political parties active in the municipality have generally cooperated in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism in the territory of the municipality through participation in the meetings of the Municipal Council for Community Safety and discussions on these topics. The impression is that because the citizens of the municipality have largely rejected the radical forms of Islam, the largest political parties operating in the municipality did not need to flirt and cooperate with associations and individuals promoting such forms. Moreover, the candidates of the Justice Party for local elections within the municipality have regularly received just few symbolic votes.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Interview with Mr. Bali Muharremaj, Mayor of the Municipality of Suhareka, 30 August 2018.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Mr. Blerim Xhemajli, the President of the PDK branch in Suhareka, 17 October 2018.

¹¹⁷ Interviews with Mr. Sali Asllani, former Mayor of the Municipality of Suhareka and the President of the LDK branch in Suhareka, 30 August 2018.

¹¹⁸ It should be mentioned that in recent years both LDK and AAK have allowed infiltration of certain individuals promoting radical forms of Islam. We have such cases in the Municipality of Gjilan that is led by LDK, but also in Deçan that is currently led by AAK. Interview with Mr. Bali Muharremaj, Mayor of the Municipality of Suhareka, 30 August 2018.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Mr. Shpëtim Ndrecaj, Director of "Radio Vala" in Suhareka, 18 October 2018.

Similarly, the co-operation related to the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism has also been at a satisfactory level between the local media and the KBI at the municipal level. Similarly to the Municipality of Podujevo, in the Suhareka one, representatives of KBI have often appeared in local media to clarify the damages of radical ideologies that preach the non-traditional forms of Islam.¹²⁰ It should be noted, however, that local media representatives have been vigilant not to allow certain groups or individuals to use the media for promoting radical forms of preaching. Specifically, such requests were rejected to two individuals from Macedonia, but also to an Imam from Suhareka, who is known for preaching the non-traditional forms of Islam. At the same time, the local radio has promoted the spirit of tolerance and inter-religious co-operation, by inviting simultaneously representatives of the KBI, as well as those from the Catholic and Protestant Churches.¹²¹

However, although not to a great extent, there is recent evidence that confirms the presence of radical elements in the Municipality of Suhareka. Such a reality is mainly related to the already mentioned changes to the BIK Regulation regarding the appointment of Imams in all municipalities of Kosovo. Prior to these changes in the Regulation, Imams within the specific municipalities were nominated by direct proposal of the KBI Presidency, and were only approved by BIK. With the new Regulation, the appointment of Imams in different municipalities is now under the strict jurisdiction of BIK Presidency, while the KBIs only have an advisory role.¹²² As a result, in the Municipality of Suhareka there have already been several appointments of Imams who preach radical forms of Islam, different from the traditional tolerant forms characteristic for Kosovo. For instance, due to disagreements between KBI-BIK, there are currently two Imams preaching in the only mosque in the city of Suhareka. One week an Imam preaches forms of traditional Islam, while the other week preaches the other Imam who is considered close to radical Islamic ideologies.¹²³ Such a solution represents a kind of compromise after the disagreements between KBI and BIK in Prishtina. Also, in the mosque of the village Samadrexhë, despite the remarks of KBI, BIK has appointed an Imam for whom there are serious doubts that he preaches radical

¹²⁰ Interview with Imam 1 of the Municipality of Suhareka, 30 August 2018.

¹²¹ Interview with Mr. Shpëtim Ndrecaj, Director of "Radio Vala" in Suhareka, 18 October 2018.

¹²² Interview with Imam 2 of the Municipality of Suhareka, 30 August 2018.

¹²³ Interview with Mr. Shpëtim Ndrecaj, Director of "Radio Vala" in Suhareka, 18 October 2018.

forms of Islam.¹²⁴ If the practice by BIK of appointing Imams preaching radical forms of Islam continues, this may undoubtedly lead to an increased level of radicalisation and violent extremism in the municipality. Still, the fact that the residents of Suhareka Municipality have consistently refused radical forms of Islamic preaching and remained loyal to the Albanian nation and pro-Western and pro-American stance provides some space for consolation.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Interview with Imam 1 of the Municipality of Suhareka, 30 August 2018.

¹²⁵ Interview with Mr. Blerim Xhemajli, the President of the PDK branch in Suhareka, 17 October 2018.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

After terrorist attacks in several cities across Europe, prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism has become a priority in the political agendas of most governments in the world. In 2011, Kosovo was ranked as one of the countries with the highest number of foreign fighters per capita in wars in Syria and Iraq. Meanwhile, extensive research also speaks of a relatively high level of radicalism and violent extremism in certain regions of the country. While in some municipalities, such as those of Kaçanik and Hani i Elezit, a relatively high number of foreign fighters has been identified, the number in the municipalities of Podujevo and Suhareka was rather small or non-existent. Such a reality is more or less the same with regards to the level of radicalisation and violent extremism. Consequently, the main aim of this paper was to identify factors that have contributed to the prevention of radicalism and violent extremism in these two municipalities.

For years, socio-economic factors have been considered among the major causes of radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo. In order to analyse the impact of socio-economic factors on the emergence of radicalisation and violent extremism, during the research a comparison of these data has been conducted for the municipalities of Podujevo and Suhareka with the low level of radicalisation and violent extremism and those of Kaçanik and Hani i Elezit, where the level of these negative phenomena is quite high. In addition to verifying whether there are significant differences in these characteristics between these two groups of municipalities, such research also tried to confirm whether there is a correlation between these characteristics and the emergence of radicalisation and violent extremism. For this purpose, in both municipalities the data for the following categories were analysed: population and demographic movements; level of education in municipalities; religion including religious objects and religious clerics; persons who participated in the wars in Syria and Iraq; criminality level; economic situation as well as the municipal budget, with special emphasis on capital expenditures and spending and subsidies for youth. Special attention has been given to the age group 15–29 years because it is precisely the young people of this age who have been mostly affected by the phenomenon of radicalisation and violent extremism.

The comparison of all these socio-economic data for the four municipalities has shown that there are no major differences in any of the analysed categories between the municipalities of Podujevo and Suhareka on one side, and those of Kaçanik and Hani i Elezit, on the other. Consequently, it has been concluded that there is no clear correlation between these socio-economic characteristics and the level of emergence of radicalisation and violent extremism in these four municipalities. These results have clearly challenged the socio-economic paradigm of explaining the appearance of religious intolerance and violent extremism, but they did not answer the question - why is the level of violent radicalisation and extremism much lower in the municipalities of Podujevo and Suhareka than in some other municipalities? To answer this question, there was a need for a deeper analysis that takes into account the specific circumstances of these two municipalities.

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that the main factor contributing to the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism in these two municipalities is the appropriate and correct action by the Islamic Community Council (KBI). In both cases, the KBIs in question from the beginning have resisted the installation of organisations and individuals who have insisted on preaching the radical forms of Islam. Representatives of KBIs have constantly interacted with the citizens, not only in mosques during the prayer, but also during different meetings, including schools and media. Such radical ideologies have been unmasked as foreign and harmful to Albanians in Kosovo. Consequently, in these two municipalities, such associations have failed to find suitable ground for promoting radical forms of Islam despite continuous efforts, especially during the early post-war years.

At the same time, in these two municipalities, these organisations have failed to find sufficient numbers of internal collaborators, as it has happened in other municipalities in Kosovo. In addition, it can be concluded that KBIs in both municipalities have shown special attention and courage during the process of appointment of the local Imams. Despite objections and disapproval by the Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK), and even serious tensions in the KBI-BIK direction, KBIs in both municipalities have rejected the appointment of any Imam or employee for whom there was evidence that they were involved in preaching the radical forms of Islam. Furthermore, KBIs in Podujevo and

Suhareka have repeatedly rejected numerous offers from foreign organisations for the construction of new mosques or reconstruction of mosques destroyed during the war, if such a (re)construction process has been conditioned with the appointment of certain Imams in these mosques or by insisting on preaching the radical forms of Islam in these religious objects.

It can be concluded that a larger number of newly built mosques is not a barometer for measuring the level of radicalisation and violent extremism. In this regard, it is much more important which of the organisations have financed the construction of these new mosques, whether this construction was made with the permission of the municipal KBI, and whether these organisations have conditioned the construction of mosques with the appointment of certain Imams, or have insisted on preaching radical forms of Islam in these religious objects. At the same time, a very important element is the fact whether the KBIs at the municipal level have cooperated with representatives of radical "religious civil society" or have opposed such associations and have refused any cooperation with them. On the other hand, it can be concluded that the analysis has refuted the explanation put forward from some circles that the reason why radicalisation and violent extremism has failed to take root in the Llap region has to do with the fact that the population in that part of Kosovo has always been more religious than citizens in other parts of the country. Having this in mind, one should look for other reasons for explaining why radicalisation and violent extremism have not emerged in the municipality of Podujevo, but also that of Suhareka, whose inhabitants have traditionally been less religious.

Based on the research, it can be concluded that another important factor for preventing radicalisation and violent extremism in these two municipalities has been the successful cooperation between local religious authorities, local government, and police. There are numerous examples where, through the joint coordination of KBI, local authorities and police, the illegal construction of a new mosque was blocked, the actions of groups preaching radical Islam were prevented, or the members of such groups were imprisoned. Regarding the role of political parties in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism, the situation in the two municipalities is somewhat different. In the Municipality of Podujevo, apart from some small exceptions, political parties have hardly acted in preventing these negative phenomena and during election campaigns,

in order to secure additional votes, some of them have even flirted and collaborated with certain groups and individuals who have been involved in the promotion of the radical forms of Islam. On the other hand, in the Municipality of Suhareka, political parties have not flirted with groups and individuals promoting radical forms of Islam in order to secure additional votes. Rather, they have often been actively engaged in promoting religious tolerance and Western values either individually or through meetings at the Municipal Council for Community Safety and discussions on these topics. At the same time, it can be concluded that co-operation related to the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism has been at a satisfactory level when it comes to relations between the local media and KBIs in both municipalities. Often, KBI representatives have appeared in local media to clarify the danger of radical forms of Islam that attempted to infiltrate the territory of the municipality. Through debates and lectures, such representatives have provided sound knowledge about Islam and have also explained the real truth behind the new movements with radical character.

However, there are indications that the situation regarding radicalisation and religious extremism in the Municipality of Suhareka, and especially the one of Podujevo, has been worsening lately. Such reality is mainly related to the changes that have been made within municipal KBIs, as well as changes to the BIK Regulation regarding the appointment of Imams in all municipalities of Kosovo. While prior to these changes in the Regulation, Imams within the specific municipality were nominated by direct proposal of the KBI Presidency, with the latest changes, the appointment of Imams in different municipalities is now under strict jurisdiction of BIK Presidency. Having in mind that there are already radical members within the BIK Presidency, there is a risk that Imams who preach radical forms of Islam, different from traditional tolerant forms characteristic for Kosovo, might be appointed in the two municipalities, as well as across Kosovo. As a result, despite the objections of the municipal KBIs, some Imams who propagate the radical ideologies of Islam have already been appointed in both municipalities. The continuation of such a practice by BIK of appointing radicalized Imams can undoubtedly lead to increased levels of radicalisation and violent extremism in these municipalities. One hope in this regard is that citizens in both municipalities did not support attempts for activities leading to radicalisation, and have even directly helped in identification of groups and individuals who have attempted to preach radical forms of Islam. However, it remains questionable how the local population

would behave if KBI representatives in both municipalities had not been maximally engaged in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism from the beginning.

Recommendations:

- The government institutions, as well as political and religious leaders should re-introduce a joint public discourse that will promote traditional tolerant forms of Islam, and will condemn foreign radical forms that undoubtedly lead to radicalisation and violent extremism.
- The Islamic Community of Kosovo should stop the appointment of radical Imams in its mosques. During the appointment of Imams, BIK should closely cooperate with representatives of municipal KBIs, especially in such municipalities as Podujevo and Suhareka that until now have shown low levels of radicalisation and violent extremism.
- An intensive and ongoing co-operation between local religious authorities, local government representatives, and the police to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism at the level of each municipality needs to be ensured.
- Authorities of the local government in cooperation with the central government should considerably increase capital investments and support for culture, youth and sports, especially those related to youth activities and infrastructure.
- Political parties, both at central and local levels, should act jointly in unmasking the preaching of radical forms of Islam, and in fighting groups and individuals that promote such forms, while respecting the freedom of speech and the indispensable right to religious belief, as fundamental human rights.
- The Justice System of Kosovo should swiftly implement the Legal Framework (Penal Code) regarding religious and ethnic hatred, as well as extremist preaching.
- Electronic media in Kosovo, both at the central and local level, should offer program schemes that promote tolerance and religious coexistence and not provide space to individuals who use the language of inter-religious and inter-ethnic hatred.

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