



**MULTI-ETHNIC
CARAVAN**
FOR PEACE AND
COHABITATION

**Meetings
in Štrpce/Shtërpcë:
Municipal and Religious Leaders**

November/December 2024

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Foreword

The civil society initiative "Multi-Ethnic Caravan for Peace and Cohabitation" includes 10 representatives from the Albanian and Serbian civil society communities, led by the Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED), based in Prishtina/Priština, and NGO Aktiv, based in North Mitrovica. This initiative is supported by the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society (KFOS).

The "Multi-Ethnic Caravan for Peace and Cohabitation" aims to foster dialogue, understanding, and cooperation between different ethnic and religious communities, and to contribute to strengthening inter-ethnic cohabitation in Kosovo.

A unique aspect of this initiative is the "Letters of Desires and Expectations," written by the Caravan participants. These letters express their hopes and visions for cohabitation and mutual respect between different ethnic groups. They serve as a basis for our discussions with mayors and religious leaders, and they also include suggestions for improving relations and cohabitation between ethnic communities.

We invite you to support the goals of this initiative in strengthening the foundations and building a multi-ethnic, democratic, and liberal society in Kosovo.

Lulzim Peci
Executive Director
KIPRED

Miodrag Miličević
Executive Director
NGO AKTIV

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I. Introduction

The "Multi-Ethnic Caravan for Peace and Coexistence" third stop was the southern municipality of Štrpce/Shtërpçë – which represents a tourist centre of Kosovo. It is a Serb majority municipality, consisting of roughly 60% Serbian and 40% Albanian population. The meetings included the Mayor of Štrpce/Shtërpçë municipality, the local head of the Islamic Community of Kosovo and the local representative of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Central to this endeavor are the "Wishes and Expectations Letters," which are thoughtfully composed by the participants of the caravan. These letters are more than mere formalities; they embody the sincere hopes and visions of their authors for a future where different ethnic groups live together in respect and peace. The letters are foundational to the dialogue process, guiding discussions with mayors and religious leaders. They contain insightful suggestions that are aimed at improving interethnic relations and enhancing daily cohabitation among communities.

Prior to the meetings, all members of the Caravan wrote "Letters of desires and expectations" to the key interlocutors in Peja/Pec: Mayor Dalibor Jevtic; local Head of Islamic Community – Kushtrim el Polloviqi, and the Serbian Orthodox Church Father Stanisa Milenkovic.

The following text outlines the key insights drawn from these important discussions, as well as the letters expressing the aspirations and expectations shared by the Caravan members.

Key takeaways from the meeting with the Mayor in Štrpce/Shtërpçë

Meeting with Mr. Dalibor Jevtić, Mayor of Štrpce/Shtërpçë, 11 December 2024. Through the letters of desires and expectations, members of the Caravan expressed their desire for a greater role of municipality of Peja in advancement of multi-ethnicity and tolerance, and have put forth concrete proposals for consideration.

Key proposals from the letters of desires and expectations addressed to the Mayor:

- **Hosting a Municipal Conference on Disinformation:** Aimed at addressing and mitigating the spread of disinformation that affects interethnic relations within the community.
- **Organizing Multiethnic Cultural Festivals and Economic Ventures:** Proposals include establishing cultural festivals that display the diverse cultural heritage of Štrpce, coupled with economic ventures such as artisan markets that promote local craftsmanship and cooperative businesses which can enhance economic collaboration among different ethnic groups.
- **Developing Multiethnic Sports Teams and Educational Programs:** Initiatives to form sports teams consisting of youths from various ethnic backgrounds to encourage teamwork and unity. Additionally, educational programs that focus on mutual respect and understanding among children can help cultivate a foundation of interethnic friendship and cooperation.
- **Promoting Tourism to Boost Local Economy:** Utilizing the natural landscapes and cultural assets of Štrpce to attract tourists, thereby supporting local businesses and fostering a community environment where interethnic cooperation is not only necessary but also beneficial economically.

- **Establishing Public Celebrations and Diversity Days:** Encouraging the organization of events that celebrate the ethnic diversity of Štrpce, including public celebrations that feature music, food, and art from different community groups, enhancing mutual appreciation and understanding.

The dialogue with the Mayor and his team centered around the municipality's ethnic composition, economic challenges, and interethnic relations within the community.

Mayor Jevtić commenced the session with a brief introduction to Štrpce/Shtërpce, highlighting its strategic location near three airports and its proximity to major cities like Skopje, Prizren, and Pristina. He mentioned the municipality's significant asset, the Brezovica Skii Center, and its potential to drive economic growth. Despite these advantages, Jevtić pointed out the high unemployment rate as a major challenge.

Jevtić noted that, in terms of administration, Serbs and Albanians work well together within the municipality. However, he indicated that problems often arise from individuals outside the community who do not reside in the area. He shared positive examples of local Serbs and Albanians frequently socializing and conducting business together, which he believes mitigates potential conflicts.

The discussion took a critical turn as Jevtić expressed concerns about external influences exacerbating ethnic tensions. He argued that these issues are often propagated by people not living in Štrpce, which complicates the local social fabric.

The conversation briefly touched on broader political issues affecting Kosovo, with specific references to recent elections in the United States of America (USA) and the upcoming general elections on 9 February, 2025 in Kosovo. Concerns were raised about potential impacts on local governance and interethnic relations.

Jevtić emphasized the importance of the municipal security council, which he mentioned meets regularly to address local issues. He highlighted the collaborative atmosphere of these meetings, which include representatives from different ethnic backgrounds.

The meeting concluded with a reaffirmation of the commitment to maintaining and enhancing interethnic cooperation in Štrpce. Both the civil society representatives and municipal leaders expressed a forward-looking perspective, focusing on potential improvements and the continued promotion of a harmonious multiethnic community.

Key takeaways from the meetings with religious leaders

Key messages from the letters of expectations and desires addressed to the religious leaders were centered along the lines of further advocating understanding and coexistence between ethnic communities, including joint activities, especially given the positive example of Peja/Peć. Key proposals from the letters were the following:

For the local Serbian Orthodox Church:

- **Cultural Exchange and Education:** The letters emphasize the importance of organizing cultural events and exhibitions to showcase the rich heritage of the Serb community. These initiatives are aimed at fostering cultural exchange and mutual understanding among different ethnic groups in Kosovo, highlighting shared histories and cultural values.

- **Community Cohesion Through Arts:** Proposed hosting of art exhibitions that could serve as platforms for artists from various ethnic backgrounds to display their work side by side. Such events are suggested to promote inter-ethnic dialogue and build bridges within the community.
- **Enhanced Communication and Collaboration:** Advocated for more systematic engagement between the Orthodox Church and other religious communities to enhance interfaith dialogue. This includes regular meetings and collaborative projects that address common community issues and celebrate diverse cultural expressions.
- **Educational Initiatives:** Suggested the development of educational programs that focus on the history and contributions of the Serb community in Kosovo. These programs aim to educate the wider public, especially the youth, fostering a greater understanding and respect for cultural diversity.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Recommended the launch of public awareness campaigns that highlight the positive examples of coexistence and cooperation between different ethnic and religious groups in the region. These campaigns would use stories and examples of successful inter-ethnic collaborations to inspire similar efforts across communities.

Meeting with Father Stanisa Milenkovic at the Serbian Orthodox Church of Štrpce, 11 November 2024. The meeting convened at the Orthodox Church of Štrpce, where Father Milenkovic warmly received the delegation, thanking them for their visit and expressing appreciation for their initiative aimed at fostering peace and cohabitation. The dialogue began with a focus on the historical and ongoing contribution of the church to the community in Štrpce/Shtërpçë.

The session revealed several critical issues affecting the local community and the church, including challenges with narcotics and prostitution, which Father Milenkovic described as external influences that pose significant risks. He emphasized that these issues require broader community engagement and are not confined to the local area.

Throughout the meeting, Father Milenkovic highlighted the operational challenges faced by the church, such as inadequate municipal support for basic services like road maintenance and winter snow clearing, which particularly affect access to the church and its functionality. He noted ongoing discussions within the community security committee, which he participates in, addressing these concerns periodically.

The church, established in 1566, stands as a historical beacon in the area, with Father Milenkovic stressing its significance not only as a place of worship but also as a cultural heritage site that needs preservation. He expressed concerns about the lack of proper signage leading to the church, which affects visitors and pilgrims who come to the area, suggesting that better signage could help improve access and awareness.

Father Milenkovic also touched on broader socio-political issues, including the implications of local and national politics on community cohesion and the church's role within this framework. He criticized the political exploitation of interethnic tensions and emphasized the church's neutrality, focusing on its spiritual mission and community service.

Civil society representatives shared their insights and reiterated their commitment to supporting the church and the local community in overcoming these challenges. They discussed potential collaborative efforts to address the specific needs highlighted during the meeting, such as improving infrastructure and enhancing social services.

In conclusion, the meeting underscored the importance of continued dialogue and cooperation between religious leaders and civil society to foster a peaceful coexistence and address mutual concerns effectively. Father Milenkovic and the attendees agreed on the need for ongoing engagement and collective efforts to ensure the well-being and unity of the community in Štrpce/Shtërpçë.

For the local Islamic Community of Kosovo

- **Educational Initiatives:** The letters emphasize the need for educational programs that foster mutual understanding and respect among the community's youth. This includes interfaith education initiatives that aim to dissolve misconceptions and build bridges between different ethnic and religious groups in Štrpce/Shtërpçë.
- **Community Cohesion Events:** There is a strong push for organizing community events that include members from all ethnic and religious backgrounds. These events should celebrate diverse cultural heritages and promote a sense of unity and solidarity among the residents.
- **Support for Multilingual Services:** The importance of offering religious services and community information in multiple languages to accommodate the diverse linguistic landscape of the area is highlighted. This could help improve communication and understanding across different community segments.
- **Interfaith Dialogue:** The letters suggest the establishment of regular interfaith dialogue sessions that encourage open and respectful communication between different religious groups. These dialogues aim to address community issues collaboratively and deepen mutual respect.
- **Youth Engagement:** There is a call for initiatives specifically designed to engage young people from different ethnic backgrounds, encouraging them to participate in community development and intercultural dialogue. This includes sports events, educational workshops, and cultural exchanges that can foster a sense of shared community and cooperation.

Meeting with Imam Kujtim ef. Polloviqi of Ferizaj responsible for Štrpce/Shtërpçë, 23 November 2024. The meeting with Imam Kujtim N. Polloviqi took place in the village of Firajë near Štrpce. The meeting underscored a shared commitment to fostering interethnic harmony and unveiled several insights into the community dynamics and challenges.

Imam Polloviqi, who has been serving since his election four years ago, reflected on the interethnic relationships within the community. He noted that although there were initial tensions post-war between Albanians and Serbians, no substantial conflicts have occurred under his tenure. Residents cohabit peacefully, with the language barrier being the primary obstacle to deeper integration, as community members often do not speak each other's languages.

Participating actively in the municipality's security council, Imam Polloviqi recounted an incident where a theft at a church was reported by a priest; the culprit was identified as a Serbian national involved in petty crimes, illustrating that the challenges faced are often criminal rather than ethnic.

He highlighted the robust civic services available in the municipality and expressed a positive outlook on the efforts to maintain peace and cohabitation. Despite these efforts, the area faces demographic challenges, with significant migration reducing the local population. In his village, only 60 households remain out of what were once 300 homes. This decline is reflected in the local

high school, which now has only 90 students from the surrounding area, indicating a broader trend of migration to larger cities or abroad.

Furthermore, the Imam brought attention to the plight of the region's oldest mosque, dating back to the 17th century, which is in danger of collapsing due to insufficient funds for necessary restoration. This mosque, a crucial piece of the area's historical and cultural fabric, urgently needs support to preserve its structure and legacy.

The meeting concluded with a reinforced commitment from both the civil society members and Imam Polloviqi to continue their collaborative efforts to promote interethnic dialogue and community cohesion. The visit not only highlighted the current state of peace but also the ongoing needs and potential areas for further cooperation to ensure the stability and growth of this multiethnic community.

II. Conclusions and Commitments for Future Actions

The meetings held in November and December 2024 provided extremely valuable insights into the state of inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations in the municipality. These engagements revealed both the significant progress made and the challenges that persist, emphasizing the need for further collaboration based on existing fundament, in order to ensure its sustainability, including the need to maximize the tourist potential of the municipality, in full collaboration and consultation with the local community and the municipal institutions.

Conclusions

1. **Interethnic Cohesion:**

- Štrpce/Shtërpçë demonstrates relative interethnic harmony despite historical tensions, with local leaders playing key roles in maintaining peaceful cohabitation.
- Major challenges arise more from external influences and broader socio-political issues than from within the community itself.

2. **Demographic Decline:**

- A significant decrease in population due to migration is affecting the community's vitality, reducing school attendance and the number of active households.

3. **Cultural Heritage at Risk:**

- The region's historic religious sites, including the 17th-century Mosque and the Orthodox Church, face structural and operational challenges requiring immediate support for preservation.

4. **Youth Engagement and Multilingualism:**

- There is a lack of sufficient initiatives to engage the youth and address the language barrier that inhibits deeper interethnic integration

5. **Infrastructure and Economic Issues:**

- Poor infrastructure and high unemployment persist, hindering the municipality's potential despite its proximity to key cities and tourist assets like Brezovica Skii Center.

6. Community Safety and Security:

- Local security councils, including religious and civil society representatives, are pivotal in addressing criminal activities and promoting community safety.

Commitments for Future Actions

These commitments reaffirm a collective dedication to further the current positive relations in Štrpce/Shtërpçë, also making it a model to be followed by other municipalities and potentially the central government in the future. By focusing on dialogue, inclusivity, and shared progress, the meetings resulted in the following commitments.

1. Educational Initiatives and Youth Engagement

- Develop interfaith and interethnic educational programs for schools to promote mutual respect and understanding among children.
- Organize youth-oriented activities such as sports teams, cultural exchanges, and educational workshops to foster friendships across ethnic lines.

2. Community Cohesion Events

- Host multiethnic cultural festivals, diversity days, and public celebrations showcasing the area's rich cultural heritage to strengthen interethnic bonds.
- Encourage community gatherings and shared cultural experiences to celebrate diversity and unity.

3. Infrastructure and Economic Development

- Advocate for restoration funding for the historic mosque and Orthodox Church, ensuring the preservation of these cultural and religious landmarks.
- Enhance tourism through better signage, improved infrastructure, and promotional campaigns leveraging the natural beauty and historical sites of the region.
- Promote economic collaboration through artisan markets and cooperative businesses that involve all ethnic groups.

4. Multilingual and Interfaith Efforts

- Support the implementation of multilingual services in public and religious institutions to overcome language barriers.
- Establish regular interfaith dialogue sessions to address shared challenges and foster mutual respect.

5. Addressing Broader Social Issues

- Work with local and external stakeholders to combat challenges such as narcotics, prostitution, and disinformation through public awareness campaigns and strengthened community engagement.
- Host a municipal conference on disinformation to address external influences exacerbating ethnic tensions.

6. Continued Collaboration

- Strengthen the role of municipal security councils by encouraging active participation from diverse community leaders and focusing on localized problem-solving.
- Foster deeper engagement between civil society, religious leaders, and municipal authorities for long-term community growth and stability.

Meetings in Štrpce/Shtërpçë:
Mayor and Religious Leaders



Mr. Dalibor Jevtić,
Mayor of Štrpce/Shtërpçë,
05 December 2024



Meeting with Father Stanisa Milenkovic at
the Serbian Orthodox Church of Štrpce,
05 December 2024



Meeting with Imam Kujtim ef. Polloviqi ,
Firajë/Firaje, Municipality of Štrpce/Shtërpçë,
23 November 2024



Letters of Desires and Expectations

Jovana Radosavljević, Ramadan Ilazi, Dušan Radaković, Ilir Deda, Senad Sabović, Mentor Agani dhe Zoran Savić

Mr. Dalibor Jevtić, Mayor
Municipality of Štrpce/Shtërpçë

December 2024

Jovana Radosavljević, Executive Director
New Social Initiative
North Mitrovica, Kosovo

Dear Mr. Jevtić,

I am writing to you regarding the increasingly challenging situation faced by the Serb community in Kosovo, emphasizing the importance of collective action and the necessity of unity to effectively address the pressing issues before us.

The Kosovo Serb community continues to encounter numerous difficulties, including insecurity, limited access to basic rights, and socio-economic challenges that threaten their everyday lives. These circumstances call for decisive steps to ensure a peaceful, stable, and dignified future. In this context, maintaining unity within our community is crucial for protecting and advancing our shared interests.

Equally important is fostering interethnic cooperation and coexistence across Kosovo. Building trust and creating space for dialogue between communities is not only a moral imperative but also a prerequisite for long-term stability and security. Our shared responsibility is to advocate for tolerance and mutual respect, contributing to a future that benefits not only the Serb community but all citizens in Kosovo.

Your position as the Mayor of Štrpce provides an opportunity to implement concrete initiatives and projects that can promote positive change within the Kosovo Serb community and the broader social fabric. Through joint efforts, we can lay the foundations for a more stable and secure future, ensuring the protection and development of our community while fostering mutual understanding with others.

Sincerely,

Jovana Radosavljević

**Ramadan Ilazi, Head of Research
Kosovar Center for Security Studies
Prishtina, Kosovo**

Dear Mr. Jevtić,

As the Mayor of Štrpce, you have a major responsibility in promoting greater interethnic cooperation and understanding. I am writing to express my interest in supporting you on initiatives aimed at strengthening interethnic cooperation and improving the democratic norms of Kosovo.

You have already taken some important steps in this direction. For example the Community Forums for Public Interests (CFPI), that was held in your municipality, showed your commitment to promote interethnic cooperation along shared interests.

Given the rich cultural diversity of your municipality, Štrpce has the unique potential to serve as a model of coexistence and mutual respect. To that end, I propose that you work to strengthen the Municipal Committee for Communities, and organize more regular, and public meetings of this mechanisms, and transform this institutional forum as a leading municipal institution in promoting better understanding and cooperation among the Kosovar Albanians and Kosovar Serbs.

Secondly, I see disinformation as a major threat and concern for interethnic relations in Kosovo, and I want to propose that Municipality of Štrpce organizes a municipal conference dedicated to better understand how is this affecting the quality of interethnic cooperation in the municipality. Also, I would like to suggest that you ask from the office for public communication to pay greater attention to this phenomena.

I would be delighted to discuss these ideas further and explore how we might align them with the municipality's priorities. Your leadership is crucial in ensuring these initiatives succeed, and I look forward to the opportunity to work together to build a stronger, more cohesive community in Štrpce.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to reach out to me at your earliest convenience to schedule a meeting.

Sincerely,

Ramadan Ilazi

**Dušan Radaković, Executive Director
Advocacy Center for Democratic Culture (ACDC)
North Mitrovica, Kosovo**

Dear Mayor Dalibor Jevtić,

I hope this letter finds you in good health and high spirits. My name is Dušan Radaković, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Advocacy Center for Democratic Culture (ACDC) in Mitrovica. I am writing to you as part of the Multi-Ethnic Caravan for Peace and Cohabitation, an initiative aimed at promoting inter-ethnic dialogue and understanding across Kosovo. Your leadership in Štrpce/Shtërpçë, a municipality recognized for its multi-ethnic character and heritage, makes you an essential partner in our collective journey toward fostering unity and collaboration among Kosovo's diverse communities.

As Mayor of Štrpce, your role is pivotal in ensuring that all citizens feel included and represented. Štrpce's diverse cultural landscape and history offer a unique opportunity to lead by example in promoting peaceful cohabitation.

- How do you plan to further strengthen inter-ethnic relations between the Serbian and Albanian communities in Štrpce?
- What measures can your administration take to encourage shared community spaces, cultural exchanges, or joint economic ventures that foster mutual trust and collaboration?
- Could you share your insights on how Štrpce's administrative policies have successfully contributed to inter-ethnic dialogue, and what improvements might be made?

I envision Štrpce becoming a model municipality for peaceful and harmonious cohabitation in Kosovo. To achieve this, it is critical to prioritize long-term strategies that promote understanding, cooperation, and mutual respect among ethnic groups.

- What is your vision for the municipality in terms of creating an environment where all communities can thrive together?
- Do you see potential for youth-focused initiatives that bring Serbian, Albanian, and other community members together through education, sports, and cultural activities?
- Could Štrpce serve as a hub for inter-municipal collaborations on shared interests such as tourism, agriculture, and environmental sustainability, thereby uniting diverse groups around common goals?

I encourage you to consider hosting inter-ethnic forums or events in Štrpce, allowing residents to share their experiences, challenges, and aspirations. This could include:

- Joint cultural festivals celebrating the traditions of all communities.
- Roundtable discussions with local leaders, civil society organizations, and residents to identify and address barriers to cohabitation.
- Would your administration be open to collaborating on such initiatives?

Thank you for considering this letter, Mr. Jevtić. Your continued dedication to improving the lives of all citizens in Štrpce is vital to the success of multi-ethnic cohabitation efforts in Kosovo. I hope to engage in constructive discussions with you and your team, aiming to create tangible steps toward a peaceful and inclusive future.

Warm regards,

Dušan Radaković

**Ilir Deda, Civil Society Activist
Prishtina, Kosovo**

Dear Mayor Jevtić,

As you know, I have been engaged and involved in key issues for Kosovo and the Western Balkans for over two decades in various roles, including preservation and advancement of diversity in our country.

The purpose of this letter is to explore opportunities to begin the creation of culture of peace in Kosovo, and to explore the possibilities of expanding your involvement in promoting Strpce as a very successful multi-ethnic and multi-confessional area. This is especially important now when populist and exclusive attitudes are gaining ground.

You have navigated through very difficult times, and regardless of hurdles, have maintained a great understanding with the representatives of Albanian community in Štrpce/Shtërpce, including fair share representation and investment.

Štrpce/Shtërpce is destined to its multiethnic character also because it is a central tourist location in Kosovo. Here, I am very keen to hear from you on what can we as members of this Carvan do to help the municipality of Štrpce/Shtërpce maximise its tourist potential.

I am very much looking forward to exploring with you the following ideas:

1. Multiethnic youth projects which can be developed by the municipality;
2. Multiethnic sports teams which may be established under your leadership;
3. A municipal day for celebrating the diversity of Štrpce/Shtërpce;
4. A forum for inter-religious dialogue which can be created with municipal assistance.

I believe your work and respectful attitude can help us in designing a successful model for coexistence throughout Kosovo.

As you have been a very respected mayor by both ethnic communities in Štrpce/Shtërpce municipality, it is extremely important to understand if there are additional steps we can take to support your work.

I strongly believe that your leadership is critical at this point for maintaining good interethnic relations in Kosovo, and I express my hope that you will consider the proposed actions.

With sincere regards,

Ilir Deda

**Senad Šabović, Senior Adviser
European Institute for Peace
Brussels - Prishtina**

Honorable Mayor Jevtić,

I have had the pleasure of working with You on many important engagements over the years. As you know, I now work as a senior advisor with the European Institute of Peace, with the primary focus on supporting the EU-facilitated Dialogue and the normalization process in general. My organization is part of a civil society coalition, called the Kosovo Civic Alternative (KCA), which strives to provide a tangible contribution in this field. I am also a member of the project called *Multi-Ethnic Caravan for Peace and Cohabitation* and I am writing in this capacity.

It is in the project's design for us to write a letter of expectations to the respected interlocutors we meet in the municipalities encompassed. This letter is thus meant to state my expectations from You in terms of multi-ethnicity and cohabitation. In our approach, we are driven by the principles of multi-ethnicity that are firmly embedded in Kosovo's constitutional and legal system. They also continue to be a key expectation of the international community as regards Kosovo. At present, these values are not necessarily upheld by all stakeholders in Kosovo, but there are also a lot of them – from the political, media, and civil society spectrum – who continue to believe in these values and are working to strengthen their implementation. Those who do cherish them need partners, so as to jointly demonstrate that multi-ethnicity works and that it is here to stay.

Over the years, I have been thoroughly impressed with Your contribution to functional multi-ethnicity in Kosovo. You have led or contributed to some of the key frameworks in this regard. Your commitment matched by Your practical approach and trust You build with all stakeholders are truly exemplary. At present, I understand that as a mayor of a Serb-majority municipality You do not necessarily feel empowered to initiate engagements of this sort. This is especially understandable under the present circumstances of strained inter-ethnic relations and a stalled normalization process. The Serb community, not just in the north, is reasonably concerned and will be looking to their political leaders for responses. Therefore, if there is any opening for reversing the current negative trends or responding to any sincere multi-ethnic initiatives coming from Kosovo's mainstream social-political spectrum, Your intervention would be most effective. Those who do not uphold multi-ethnicity in Kosovo are precisely the ones that benefit from the failure of such initiatives from those who wish to uphold it.

Our project group has recently conducted a series of meetings in other municipalities, including with Mayors and religious leaders, and we have indeed seen a lot of good will at this level towards multiethnic initiatives. The Mayor of Pristina, Përparim Rama, was outspoken in our meeting, whereas it was a particular pleasure to meet the Mayor of Pejë/Peć, Gazmend Muhaxheri, who is a leading example in this regard. For example, he has introduced an official day of interethnic tolerance that is celebrated annually under the municipality's funding.

Based on the above, there could perhaps be opportunities for some form of inter-municipal action in the domain of multi-ethnicity. We have also witnessed that the religious communities would be onboard, too. In light of all this, the colleagues from the project and I would like to encourage You to respond to – and even initiate when you feel it is appropriate – these initiatives and offer a few suggestions. In general terms, using the opportunities provided to stress multi-ethnicity as a value is extremely useful. This may include press releases or social media content by You and the municipality in community languages, for example on the occasion of their national days or religious holidays. It may also include publicized visits jointly with mayors of surrounding municipalities to community centers or multi-ethnic neighborhoods, encouraging peaceful

cohabitation and multi-ethnicity. It is in these aspects that You are also a bright example and these stories do need to be more visible across Kosovo.

In more particular terms, an initiative could be taken towards joint inter-municipal projects with other municipalities, perhaps in Your region but also more broadly. This would be a great way to engage on development-oriented trust-building. It could develop into a standing inter-municipal cooperation structure that could then engage with the Association of Municipalities of Kosovo and perhaps other forms of municipal associations on projects reflecting this same concept.

Rest assured, Honorable Mayor, that my colleagues from the European Institute of Peace, from this project, as well as from the mentioned KCA coalition, would be more than willing to provide tangible support to You and Your team in the execution of the suggestions provided hereby.

With great respect and appreciation,

Senad Šabović

Mentor Agani, Senior Researcher
Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development
Prishtina, Kosovo

Honorable Mayor, Mr. Dalibor Jevtić,

My name is Mentor Agani, and I am a Senior Researcher at KIPRED, The Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development, as well as a Lecturer at the Dardania College in Prishtina. During the period 2003-2016, I was also lecturer at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Prishtina. I am writing this letter with the intention of expressing some of my expectations and desires regarding the inter-ethnic cohabitation in Kosovo.

First of all, I hope this letter finds you in good health and spirits. I am writing it on my own, and on behalf of KIPRED, as well as of several other organizations with which we share a common commitment to fostering mutual respect and understanding between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo in general, and in the Municipality of Štrpce/Shtërpce in particular.

We are aware that in different periods our shared history has been marked by tensions and conflicts; but it was also marked by peaceful cohabitation and collaboration, and, in both communities, this history of ours is also enriched by a deep cultural and spiritual legacy. It is my strong belief that through good will and collaboration, we can pave the way toward a future where our communities will coexist in harmony, working together for the common good.

The shared goal of our coalition of NGO-s is to create a more inclusive, understanding, and peaceful environment for all citizens. We believe that by working together—local governments, religious leaders, civil society and community leaders—we can initiate meaningful actions that bridge divides and strengthen inter-ethnic relations.

To that end, I would like to propose several tentative initiatives that our NGOs, in collaboration with the Municipality, could undertake (indeed, without being limited only to them – we can find others in the process):

1. **Joint cultural and educational programs**, such as festivals, workshops, and historical tours that highlight our shared cultural heritage and promote mutual respect.
2. **Community-building projects**, where Albanians and Serbs will participate in activities like public space improvements, neighborhood cleanups, or humanitarian initiatives that address the common needs of all citizens.
3. **Youth engagement and dialogue initiatives**, including sports events, artistic collaborations, and dialogue forums, designed to empower young people of both communities to work together and build lasting relationships. For instance, one such activity can be the use of turistic opportunities provided by the environment of Štrpce/Shtërpce, for organizing workshops in which the Albanian and Serbian youngsters will discuss the opportunities for a number of them to start learning the native languages of one-other.

Certainly, platforms for dialogue would enable residents from diverse backgrounds to contribute their perspectives and ideas. This initiative would not only empower individuals but will also foster trust and cooperation among ethnic groups.

We are convinced that the Municipality of Štrpce/Shtërpce can play an extremely important role in these initiatives by providing support, facilitating dialogue, and endorsing projects that encourage peaceful coexistence. We are ready to collaborate closely with your office and other local institutions to develop and implement these ideas.

I would be happy to have the opportunity to meet with you and your team to further discuss these proposals and explore how we might work together for the benefit of all residents of Štrpce/Shtërpce. We are hopeful that these efforts can contribute to a more united and harmonious future for our municipality.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your response and the opportunity to work together for the good of our communities.

With deep respect and best regards,

Mentor Agani

Zoran Savić, Project Coordinator
NGO AKTIV
North Mitrovica, Kosovo

Dear Dalibor Jevtic,

My name is Zoran Savić and I am a project coordinator in the non-governmental organization Aktiv from North Mitrovica. Although I was born in Pula, Croatia, I have actually lived in Mitrovica for 30 years and I am actively involved in social life in Kosovo, both through work and cultural life, considering that I am also a musician, and I have participated in various inter-ethnic projects with musicians of all ethnicities.

At the same time, for many years I worked as a journalist in the Kosovo Sever portal - KoSSev, and through this job I became even more familiar with the political and security situation in Kosovo.

Your position as mayor of Strpce can help a lot in promoting messages of peace and unity. Therefore, I am looking forward for your support in organizing inter-ethnic dialogues and community service projects that involve different ethnic groups working together.

In this spirit, I hope for a future where multi-ethnic cohabitation becomes the norm in Kosovo. I envision communities where ethnic differences are embraced as strengths rather than sources of division. To this end, you might focus on creating sustainable programs that educate on cultural diversity and tolerance and support joint community projects.

Therefore, I encourage you to actively participate in creating a peaceful and inclusive community by supporting inter-ethnic initiatives, advocating for policies that guarantee equal opportunities for everyone.

I conclude this letter on a hopeful note, envisioning a future where our united efforts cultivate a genuinely harmonious and multi-ethnic society in Kosovo. I am certain that with our shared dedication, we can achieve remarkable progress toward this worthy goal.

Zoran Savić



Letters of Desires and Expectations

Jovana Radosavljević, Ramadan Ilazi, Dušan Radaković, Ilir Deda, Senad Sabović, Mentor Agani dhe Zoran Savić

Mr. Staniša Milenković, Vicar of Prizren
Serb Orthodox Church of Štrpce/Shtërpçë

December 2024

Jovana Radosavljević, Executive Director
New Social Initiative
North Mitrovica, Kosovo

Dear Father Staniša,

I write to you with profound respect and appreciation for the tireless work of the Serbian Orthodox Church, which continues to serve as a guiding light for the Serb community in Kosovo, offering spiritual strength, cultural preservation, and moral guidance in these challenging times.

The Serb community in Kosovo faces many difficulties, from threats to its cultural and religious heritage to the daily struggles of preserving identity and securing basic rights. In such circumstances, the Church remains a steadfast pillar of hope, unity, and resilience. Its centuries-old mission of promoting peace, reconciliation, and faith has been instrumental in helping our people navigate through adversity.

Your role as the Vicar of Prizren carries immense significance in this endeavor. Through your dedication, the Church serves not only as a place of worship but also as a sanctuary of mutual support and understanding, where the values of unity, tolerance, and coexistence are nurtured. This role is vital not only for our community but also for fostering interethnic dialogue and trust among all the people of Kosovo.

The Church's long-standing advocacy for peaceful coexistence and its emphasis on the importance of shared human values have always been a source of inspiration. In these efforts, I believe there is great potential to further strengthen ties within the Kosovo Serb community and build bridges with other communities, fostering a sense of mutual respect and collaboration in our shared homeland.

With heartfelt respect and gratitude,

Jovana Radosavljević

**Ramadan Ilazi, Head of Research
Kosovar Center for Security Studies
Prishtina, Kosovo**

Dear Priest Milenković,

I hope this message finds you well. As the spiritual leader of the Orthodox Christian community in Prizren, your role in promoting peace and understanding is invaluable, particularly in these times when fostering interfaith and interethnic cooperation is so vital for the region.

I am reaching out to express my deep respect for your work and to propose some ideas how to advance reconciliation and mutual respect among all communities in Kosovo. Specifically, I believe we can work together on promoting interfaith dialogue. To this end, I would suggest that civil society organizations, such as KIPRED and AKTIV, or even the think-tank I work for, the KCSS, host you and other religious leaders for a public interfaith event.

Also, I would like to encourage you to organize some event that promotes Cultural Preservation, focusing on the shared heritage of the Municipality of Prizren.

Your leadership and commitment to these causes could greatly enhance the impact of these efforts. I would be honored to meet with you to discuss how we might work together to achieve these goals.

Thank you for your tireless dedication to your community, and I look forward to your thoughts on this potential collaboration.

With deepest respect,

Ramadan Ilazi

Dušan Radaković, Executive Director
Advocacy Center for Democratic Culture (ACDC)
North Mitrovica, Kosovo

Dear Father Staniša Milenković,

I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Dušan Radaković, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Advocacy Center for Democratic Culture (ACDC) in Mitrovica. I am reaching out to you as part of the Multi-Ethnic Caravan for Peace and Cohabitation, an initiative aimed at fostering unity and understanding among Kosovo's diverse communities. As the Vicar of Prizren and a spiritual leader within the Serbian Orthodox Church, your voice is invaluable in promoting the principles of tolerance, respect, and mutual support.

Expectations for Cohabitation

Faith leaders play a critical role in shaping attitudes and fostering reconciliation. As the Vicar of Prizren, your outreach to both Serbian and Albanian communities can help build bridges and dismantle prejudices.

- What are your views on how faith and religion can serve as tools for fostering reconciliation and promoting inter-ethnic understanding in Prizren?
- Could the Serbian Orthodox Church in Prizren initiate joint efforts with other faith-based organizations to encourage dialogue and cooperation among communities?
- How might the Church support multi-ethnic activities, particularly for the youth, to inspire a new generation of collaboration and trust?

Desires for the Future

I envision a future where Prizren serves as a beacon of harmony and collaboration, celebrating its rich cultural and religious diversity. Your leadership can help lay the groundwork for such a future by encouraging cooperation between faith communities and supporting initiatives that bring different groups together.

- Could the Church organize cultural or religious events in partnership with other religious institutions to celebrate the heritage of all Prizren's residents?
- Are there opportunities to revive traditional practices of coexistence and mutual respect that have historically characterized Prizren?
- What role do you believe the Church can play in addressing the lingering divisions among communities in Kosovo?

Call to Action

I encourage you to consider engaging with local leaders, civil society organizations, and youth groups to foster inter-ethnic and interfaith understanding. Some potential actions include:

- Hosting multi-faith dialogues or inter-religious prayers.
- Supporting programs that educate young people on the history of multi-ethnic cohabitation in Prizren.
- Creating platforms where community members can share their stories and experiences of reconciliation.

- Would you be open to collaborating on such initiatives to promote dialogue and peace?

In closing, I want to express that your role as a spiritual leader positions you to be a cornerstone in efforts to foster a harmonious future in Prizren and Kosovo at large. I look forward to your insights and support in this noble goal.

Warm regards,

Dušan Radaković

**Ilir Deda, Civil Society Activist
Prishtina, Kosovo**

Dear Father Milenkovic,

I have been engaged and involved in key issues for Kosovo and the Western Balkans for over two decades in various roles, including preservation and advancement of diversity in our country.

The purpose of this letter is to explore opportunities to expand your involvement in promoting Strpce as an open place for all people, which includes the multiethnic and multi-religious cohabitation. This is especially important now when populist and exclusive attitudes are gaining ground.

I am of strong belief that inter-religious harmony must be preserved and further promoted. The Serbian Orthodox Church has a role in preserving and promoting this value. I believe there are a few short-term and long-term gestures that can be taken from you and establish them into practices. A few stem from the past practices.

In the past, there was a practice where religious leaders would publicly congratulate the most important religious holidays to each other. The reintroduction of this practice, although symbolic, would be the initial step towards advancing inter-religious respect in our country. This would mean respect for the most important religious holidays for members of Islamic communities.

Inter-faith dialogue and greater understanding is a modern form aiming to advance cohabitation and inter-religious harmony. Although we live in times when harmony is not valued, I believe it is the right time to consider the establishment of the inter-faith dialogue at the local municipal level, and begin creating the culture of peace. This forum would advance the mutual understanding between local religious leaders, including the understanding with local municipal authorities. It would also serve as a forum to discuss and address respective needs of each of the religious communities.

I strongly believe that your leadership as Vicar of Prizren of the Dioceze is of great importance for the development of your municipality, inter-religious harmony and interethnic relations, and express hope that you will consider the proposed actions.

With respect,

Ilir Deda

**Senad Šabović, Senior Adviser
European Institute for Peace
Brussels - Prishtina**

Honorable Vicar Milenković,

My name is Senad Šabović and I am writing to You as a supporter of the project called *Multi-Ethnic Caravan for Peace and Cohabitation*. I work as a senior advisor with the European Institute of Peace, with the primary focus on supporting the EU-facilitated Dialogue and the normalization process in general. My organization is part of a civil society coalition, called the Kosovo Civic Alternative (KCA), which strives to provide a tangible contribution in this field.

This letter is meant to state my expectations from You in terms of multi-ethnicity and cohabitation. The principles of multi-ethnic society are firmly embedded in Kosovo's legal and constitutional system. They also continue to be a key expectation of the international community and are the primary mechanism for the well-being of non-majority communities in Kosovo, in particular the Serb community. As such, the principles of multi-ethnicity, understanding and peaceful cohabitation should be fully reflected in the religious life of Kosovo. A lot of work has been done in this regard, but it needs to further solidify and expand, especially at this time of increased tension and stalled normalization. Over the years, I have noticed with great appreciation Your Church's active participation in different Inter-Faith dialogue activities and various other forms of contribution to peaceful cohabitation.

The colleagues from the project and I would like to encourage You to expand on these initiatives and offer a few suggestions in this regard. I very much understand the unique position of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) in Kosovo and the sensitivities that come with this position. Nevertheless, Your active contribution to enhancing the sense of multi-ethnicity and tolerance – as has often been the case – would create a significant added value. This is particularly important in a diverse municipality such as Prizren, featuring some of the most treasured religious heritage sites of all faiths in Kosovo. Thus, either in terms of responding to positive external initiatives or initiating Your own, every opportunity should be used to stress multi-ethnicity as a value. This may include joint press releases, social media content, or joint visits with different religious or institutional leaders to community centers and sites. Emphasizing Your Faith's messages of tolerance and respect as appropriate in Your engagements with the believers would also be an effective way of contributing.

In more particular terms, I have also suggested to other religious representatives the creation of an Inter-Faith council by the leaders of different Faiths in Kosovo that would coordinate and advise Kosovo's institutions and international donors in terms of the protection and rehabilitation of vulnerable religious sites throughout Kosovo. You and Your Church may also wish to consider initiating this endeavor, that may be particularly useful in Prizren. This would not only enhance the physical wellbeing of these sites but also continuously reaffirm the message of tolerance and respect, so integral to Faith.

Rest assured, Honorable Vicar, that my colleagues from the European Institute of Peace, from this project, as well as from the mentioned KCA coalition, would be more than willing to provide tangible support to You and Your fellow religious leaders the execution of the suggestions provided hereby.

With great respect and appreciation,
Senad Šabović

**Mentor Agani, Senior Researcher
Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development
Prishtina, Kosovo**

Reverend Vicar, Staniša Milenković,

My name is Mentor Agani, and I am a Senior Researcher at KIPRED, The Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development, as well as a Lecturer at the Dardania College in Prishtina. During the period 2003-2016, I was also lecturer at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Prishtina. I am writing this letter with the intention of expressing some of my expectations and desires regarding the inter-ethnic cohabitation in Kosovo.

First of all, I would like to express my hope that this letter will find you well. I am writing it on my own, and on behalf of KIPRED, and together with the letters of several other organizations with which we share a common commitment to fostering mutual respect and understanding between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo in general, and in the Municipality of Štrpce/Shtërpce in particular.

As we are well aware, in different periods our shared history has been marked by tensions and conflicts, but also by peaceful cohabitation and collaboration; and, in both communities, this history of ours is also enriched by a deep cultural and spiritual legacy. It is my strong belief that through good will and collaboration, we can pave the way toward a future where our communities will coexist in harmony, working together for the common good. To this end, I would like to propose a series of tentative joint initiatives between our NGOs and your church, aimed at promoting dialogue, trust, and cooperation between Albanians and Serbs.

We believe that these initiatives can take many forms, including (but not being limited to):

1. **Interfaith dialogues and cultural exchanges**, where members of both communities will come together to learn about each other's faith, culture, and shared values.
2. **Community service projects**, where Albanians and Serbs will work side by side in activities that benefit the local population, such as environmental cleanups, humanitarian aid, or support for vulnerable groups.
3. **Youth engagement programs**, where young people from both communities will participate in workshops, sports events, or art projects, encouraging mutual understanding and lasting friendships.

We believe that the Serbian Orthodox Church, as a respected institution with the ability to bring people together through faith, compassion and dialogue, can play an extremely important role in these efforts. We are confident that with your support and guidance, these initiatives will help to create a more peaceful and inclusive environment for all who live in Štrpce/Shtërpce.

We would be honored to meet with you to further discuss these ideas, as well as search for the new ones, and explore how we might collaborate to turn them into a reality. We look forward to hearing from you and hope that, together, we can build bridges between our communities and move toward a more peaceful future.

With deep respect and best regards,

Mentor Agani

Zoran Savić, Project Coordinator
NGO AKTIV
North Mitrovica, Kosovo

Dear Priest Stanisa Milenkovic,

My name is Zoran Savić and I am a project coordinator in the non-governmental organization Aktiv from North Mitrovica. Although I was born in Pula, Croatia, I have actually lived in Mitrovica for 30 years and I am actively involved in social life in Kosovo, both through work and cultural life, considering that I am also a musician, and I have participated in various inter-ethnic projects with musicians of all ethnicities.

At the same time, for many years I worked as a journalist in the Kosovo Sever portal - KoSSev, and through this job I became even more familiar with the political, security and religious situation in Kosovo.

The Serbian Orthodox Church has always been a cornerstone for the Serb community in Kosovo, providing spiritual guidance and support. Your leadership at church in Prizren places you in a crucial role in fostering inter-ethnic harmony. Encouraging dialogue and cooperation between different religious and ethnic groups can significantly enhance unity and mutual understanding in our communities. I urge you to support community programs and joint service projects that bring together people from diverse backgrounds. Your sermons and public addresses should continue to emphasize the importance of unity, tolerance, and respect for all.

In this spirit, I hope for a future where multi-ethnic religious cohabitation becomes the norm in Kosovo. I envision communities where religious differences are embraced as strengths rather than sources of division. To this end, you might focus on creating sustainable programs that educate on religious diversity and tolerance, support joint community projects, and ensure equal representation of all religious groups in local governance.

Looking forward, I envision a Kosovo where multi-ethnic cohabitation and religious tolerance is embraced. Regular interfaith meetings and intercultural initiatives can foster dialogue and cooperation.

I conclude this letter on a hopeful note, envisioning a future where our united efforts cultivate a genuinely harmonious and multi-ethnic society in Kosovo. I am certain that with our shared dedication, we can achieve remarkable progress toward this worthy goal.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Zoran Savić



Letters of Desires and Expectations

Jovana Radosavljević, Ramadan Ilazi, Dušan Radaković, Ilir Deda, Senad Sabović, Mentor Agani dhe Zoran Savić

Imam Kujtim ef. Polloviqi
Municipality of Štrpce/Shtërpçë

November 2024

Jovana Radosavljevič, Executive Director
New Social Initiative
North Mitrovica, Kosovo

Dear Imam Kujtim ef. Polloviqi,

I am writing to you with deep respect for your work and the vital role of the Islamic community in fostering understanding, compassion, and unity among the people of Kosovo.

The times we live in are challenging, as communities across Kosovo navigate difficulties related to identity, security, and coexistence. In these circumstances, faith leaders like yourself play a pivotal role in guiding communities toward mutual respect, dialogue, and harmony. Your dedication to these principles is a testament to the power of faith in building bridges and healing divisions.

As an Imam, your efforts to uphold and promote the values of tolerance and peaceful coexistence are of great importance not only to your community but also to all who share Kosovo as their common home. Interfaith dialogue and cooperation are essential for creating a society that values diversity and recognizes the shared humanity that unites us all.

I believe that through collaboration and shared initiatives, faith communities can serve as beacons of hope and unity. Whether through fostering interethnic dialogue, addressing common challenges, or supporting vulnerable groups, we have the opportunity to set an example of how mutual understanding and cooperation can lead to a brighter future for all.

With profound respect and gratitude,

Jovana Radosavljević

**Ramadan Ilazi, Head of Research
Kosovar Center for Security Studies
Prishtina, Kosovo**

Dear Imam Polloviqi,

Your leadership as a religious and spiritual leader in the community is very important, particularly in these times when fostering understanding and cooperation in Kosovo is more important than ever.

I am writing to commend your efforts in promoting tolerance and mutual respect within the community and to explore opportunities that can further strengthen these values. In particular, I believe that your leadership is crucial in promoting interfaith dialogue.

I would like to propose that we potentially work together on preparing a concept note for organizing structured dialogues between faith leaders and community members from different religious backgrounds to address misconceptions, build mutual understanding, and foster cooperation in the Municipality of Prizren. In addition to this, I suggest developing a community education program to raise awareness about the dangers of disinformation, particularly narratives that fuel radicalization, and providing tools to critically evaluate online content.

Your leadership in these efforts would have a profound impact, as your voice is highly respected and trusted within the community. I would be honored to meet with you to discuss these ideas and explore how we can work together to strengthen interfaith understanding and resilience against harmful influences.

Thank you for your dedication and service to the community. I look forward to your response.

With sincere respect,

Ramadan Ilazi

Dušan Radaković, Executive Director
Advocacy Center for Democratic Culture (ACDC)
North Mitrovica, Kosovo

Dear Father Imam Kutim ef. Polloviqi,

I trust this message finds you in good health and high spirits. My name is Dušan Radaković, and I am the Executive Director of the Advocacy Center for Democratic Culture (ACDC) in Mitrovica. This letter is part of the Multi-Ethnic Caravan for Peace and Cohabitation initiative, a project aimed at uniting people across Kosovo by fostering dialogue, respect, and mutual understanding among all communities. Your esteemed role as a spiritual leader provides a unique opportunity to inspire and guide efforts for inter-ethnic harmony in Kosovo.

The influence of religious leaders like yourself is instrumental in promoting values of peace and coexistence. As a representative of the Islamic community, your guidance can foster reconciliation and understanding.

- How do you envision religious communities contributing to the process of healing and unity between different ethnic groups in Kosovo?
- Could the Islamic community under your leadership initiate educational programs to promote values of tolerance, mutual respect, and acceptance among all faiths?
- What steps do you believe are necessary to foster collaboration between Islamic leaders and leaders of other faiths for joint community-building activities?

I hope to see a future where diverse communities in Kosovo work together to build a society based on trust, respect, and shared goals. Your leadership in this process would be invaluable.

- Would it be possible to organize joint cultural or humanitarian activities with other religious communities to showcase unity and shared values?
- Could the mosque serve as a platform for interfaith discussions and programs focused on educating young people about Kosovo's multi-ethnic heritage?
- What role do you see for Islamic leaders in addressing the challenges faced by marginalized groups in Kosovo?

I encourage you to consider leading initiatives that bring together people from all walks of life, such as:

- Hosting interfaith dialogues or events at the mosque.
- Supporting youth-led initiatives that emphasize the importance of tolerance and shared values.
- Partnering with other religious leaders to advocate for peace and cohabitation at regional or national forums.

Thank you, Imam Koloviq, for considering this invitation to support inter-ethnic cohabitation in Kosovo. Your leadership and commitment to promoting peace and understanding can inspire meaningful change. I look forward to your thoughts and the possibility of working together on this noble endeavor.

Warm regards,

Dušan Radaković

**Ilir Deda, Civil Society Activist
Prishtina, Kosovo**

Dear Imam Polloviqi,

I have been engaged and involved in key issues for Kosovo and the Western Balkans for over two decades in various roles, including preservation and advancement of diversity in our country.

The purpose of this letter is to explore opportunities to expand your involvement in promoting the multiethnic and multi-religious cohabitation in Štrpce/Shtërpce. This is especially important now when populist and exclusive attitudes are gaining ground.

Inter-religious harmony has been at the core values of our nation, and the Islamic Community of Kosovo has a central role in preserving and promoting this value. I believe there are a few short-term and long-term gestures that can be taken from you and establish them into practices. A few stem from the past practices.

In the past, there was a practice where religious leaders would publicly congratulate the most important religious holidays to each other. The reintroduction of this practice, although symbolic, would be the initial step towards advancing inter-religious respect in our country. This would mean respect for the most important religious holidays for members of the Orthodox believers.

Inter-faith dialogue and greater understanding is a modern form aiming to advance cohabitation and inter-religious harmony. Although we live in times when harmony is not valued, I believe Kosovo given its unique history, can establish inter-faith dialogue at the local municipal level, to begin creating the culture of peace. This forum would advance the mutual understanding between local religious leaders, including the understanding with local municipal authorities. It would also serve as a forum to discuss and address respective needs of each of the religious communities.

Kosovo will be successful only if it preserves its multi-ethnic character, and the Islamic Community of Kosovo has a key role in preserving and advancing this character of our state. I am especially interested to hear from you on the work done to maintain harmony and inter-religious understanding in Štrpce/Shtërpce.

I strongly believe that your leadership is critical at this point of development of our country, and express hope that you will consider the proposed actions.

With respect,

Ilir Deda

**Senad Šabović, Senior Adviser
European Institute for Peace
Brussels - Prishtina**

Honorable Imam Polloviqi,

My name is Senad Šabović and I am writing to You as a supporter of the project called *Multi-Ethnic Caravan for Peace and Cohabitation*. I work as a senior advisor with the European Institute of Peace, with the primary focus on supporting the EU-facilitated Dialogue and the normalization process in general. My organization is part of a civil society coalition, called the Kosovo Civic Alternative (KCA), which strives to provide a tangible contribution in this field.

This letter is meant to state my expectations from You in terms of multi-ethnicity and cohabitation. As we know, the Republic of Kosovo is defined as a multi-ethnic state of all of its citizens and communities. These principles are firmly embedded in Kosovo's constitutional and legal system. They also continue to be a key expectation of our international partners and the organizational system of the Euro-Atlantic community, to which we aspire. As such, the principles of multi-ethnicity, understanding and peaceful cohabitation should be fully reflected in the religious life of our country. A lot of work has been done in this regard, but it needs to further solidify and expand, especially at this time of increased tension and stalled normalization. Over the years, I have noticed with great appreciation the contributions of the Islamic Community of Kosovo in the context of different Inter-Faith dialogue frameworks and various Inter-Faith practical cooperation initiatives. Our meetings with Head Imam Sahiti and a number of Imams in different municipalities have been particularly encouraging in this regard. My colleagues and I were thoroughly impressed both with the number of activities that the Islamic Community of Kosovo has conducted in this regard and the commitment to do more.

The colleagues from the project and I would like to encourage You to expand on these initiatives and offer a few suggestions in this regard. In general terms, using the opportunities provided to stress multi-ethnicity as a value is extremely useful. This may include joint press releases, social media content, or joint visits with different religious or institutional leaders to community centers and sites. Facilitating the inclusion of respect for religious and ethnic diversity into the Jumu'ah sermons, as I am sure is taking place already, is also an effective way of contributing. In more particular terms, I have proposed in some of my previous letters the establishment of a multi-confessional council that would coordinate and advise the state and international donors in terms of the protection and rehabilitation of vulnerable religious sites throughout Kosovo. This would not only enhance the physical wellbeing of these sites but also continuously reaffirm the message of Peace, so firmly embedded in the Muslim Faith both in Kosovo and worldwide.

Rest assured, Honorable Imam, that my colleagues from the European Institute of Peace, from this project, as well as from the mentioned KCA coalition, would be more than willing to provide tangible support to You in the execution of the suggestions provided hereby or any other initiative in this respect.

With great respect and appreciation,

Senad Šabović

**Mentor Agani, Senior Researcher
Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development
Prishtina, Kosovo**

Honorable Imam, Kujtim Efendi Polloviqi,

My name is Mentor Agani, and I am a Senior Researcher at KIPRED, The Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development, as well as a Lecturer at the Dardania College in Prishtina. During the period 2003-2016, I was also lecturer at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Prishtina. I am writing this letter with the intention of expressing some of my expectations and desires regarding the inter-ethnic cohabitation in Kosovo.

First of all, I hope this letter finds you in good health and spirits. I am writing it on my own, and on behalf of KIPRED, as well as of several other organizations with which we share a common commitment to fostering mutual respect and understanding between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo in general, and in the Municipality of Štrpce/Shtërpce in particular.

We recognize the key role religious leaders and communities play in fostering peace, understanding, and reconciliation in the Kosovo's context. With this in mind, I would like to propose several initiatives that could be undertaken jointly by you, the other religious leaders in Štrpce/Shtërpce, as well as the municipal authorities, civil society organizations, and local actors, in order to promote mutual respect and cooperation between Albanians and Serbs. Following is a list of initiatives that we believe will contribute meaningfully to these efforts: and, indeed, we should not be limited only on them.

1. **Interfaith Dialogues and Public Discussions:** Organizing regular interfaith dialogues, where religious leaders from the Islamic, Orthodox, and other religious communities can engage in open and constructive conversations about shared values, spiritual wisdom, and how faith can be a bridge to peace. These discussions have to be open to the public, in order to spread to entire society, thus fostering deeper understanding and dispelling misunderstandings among community members of different ethnicities and faiths.
2. **Joint Charitable and Community Service Projects:** Bringing together Albanians and Serbs from various religious backgrounds to work on charitable initiatives that benefit the wider community—such as supporting vulnerable families, improving public spaces, providing humanitarian assistance, and so forth. These projects would encourage cooperation and build trust between the different groups through shared, positive actions.
3. **Youth and Family Engagement Programs:** Creating opportunities for young people and families from all backgrounds to participate in joint workshops, cultural exchanges, and other activities. By engaging the future generations, we can create lasting relationships and nurture a culture of peace and respect. One such activity can be the use of turistic opportunities provided by the environment of Štrpce/Shtërpce, for organizing workshops in which the Albanian and Serbian youngsters will discuss the opportunities for a number of them to start learning the native languages of one-other.
4. **Public Interfaith Celebrations and Cultural Events:** Organizing joint meetings or events that celebrate the cultural and religious diversity of Štrpce/Shtërpce, and congratulating the religious celebrations to members of respective religious communities. This can be accompanied by joint statements, participation in shared public prayers or reflections, and with all these religious leaders will set a powerful example for all citizens to embrace tolerance, respect and cooperation as essential elements of their everyday lives.

We believe that, through collaboration of religious communities, of municipal authorities, and civil society and local actors, these initiatives can make a tangible difference in improving relations between Albanians and Serbs. Your leadership as the head of Islamic Community would be essential in guiding and promoting these efforts.

I would be honored to meet with you to discuss these ideas further and explore how we can work together to implement them as well as to look for new ones. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you and to the opportunity to collaborate on these important initiatives.

With respect and best regards,

Mentor Agani

Zoran Savić, Project Coordinator
NGO AKTIV
North Mitrovica, Kosovo

Dear Imam Kutim ef. Polloviqi,

My name is Zoran Savić and I am a project coordinator in the non-governmental organization Aktiv from North Mitrovica. Although I was born in Pula, Croatia, I have actually lived in Mitrovica for 30 years and I am actively involved in social life in Kosovo, both through work and cultural life, considering that I am also a musician, and I have participated in various inter-ethnic projects with musicians of all ethnicities.

At the same time, for many years I worked as a journalist in the Kosovo Sever portal - KoSsev, and through this job I became even more familiar with the political, security and religious situation in Kosovo. Even today, I collaborate with many Albanian journalists and editors, both project-wise and through jobs that are not related to the same.

As you are the part of the Islamic Community in Kosovo, you can greatly promote inter-ethnic harmony. Encouraging dialogue and cooperation between different religious and ethnic groups can help bridge divides. I urge you to support community programs and joint service projects that bring people from diverse backgrounds together. Your sermons and public addresses can emphasize unity, tolerance, and respect for all. Therefore, I am looking forward for your support in organizing inter-ethnic dialogues and community service projects that involve different religious groups working together.

In this spirit, I hope for a future where multi-ethnic religious cohabitation becomes the norm in Kosovo. I envision communities where religious differences are embraced as strengths rather than sources of division. To this end, you might focus on creating sustainable programs that educate on religious diversity and tolerance, support joint community projects, and ensure equal representation of all religious groups in local governance..

I conclude this letter on a hopeful note, envisioning a future where our united efforts cultivate a genuinely harmonious and multi-ethnic society in Kosovo. I am certain that with our shared dedication, we can achieve remarkable progress toward this worthy goal.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Zoran Savić