

ELECTION YEAR AND PUBLIC CONTRACTS

Integrity trends in four
municipalities of Kosovo

Fushe Kosove



Election Year and Public Contracts:
Integrity Trends in Four Kosovo Municipalities
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Introduction

This report was prepared within the framework of the MAP – Municipal Action for Political Integrity project, with the aim of assessing institutional behavior in the Municipality of Fushë Kosovë during the 2025 election period, with a special focus on public procurement. Procurement constitutes one of the most sensitive mechanisms of governance integrity, especially in election years, when institutional pressure increases to implement high-visibility projects and accelerate the capital investment cycle. The analysis aims to identify changes in the pace, volume and typology of contracting in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje across three key phases: before the elections, during the campaign period and after the elections.

The main goal is to understand whether the electoral dynamics have influenced procurement decision-making at the municipal level and to what extent this is reflected in the concentration of contracts, the use of certain procurement methods, and the distribution within the fiscal year. To this end, the report uses multi-year comparative data (2021–2025), which creates the analytical basis to assess common trends and deviations that can be interpreted as related to the electoral cycle.

The European Commission's Kosovo 2025 report notes that “integrity in the public service remains a challenge”, with delays in the adoption of integrity plans and shortcomings in the implementation of procurement and internal control standards. These findings increase the importance of analysing municipal procurement, especially in periods of increased political sensitivity. In this context, the report on Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje aims to assess whether local procurement practices comply with the concerns raised by the Commission – including sudden increases in contracting in the run-up to elections, the use of framework contracts and the dominance of a few economic operators.

Part of the objectives of the MAP project is to provide a clear and balanced analysis that helps increase institutional transparency and citizen awareness. The report's findings will serve as a basis for further discussions at the local level and for practical recommendations for strengthening procurement integrity in electoral periods and in the daily practice of local government.

Methodology

The report's methodology is based on comparative analysis of public procurement data for the 2025 election period, following the practices of OECD/SIGMA, the EU, Transparency International, and KDI's local integrity analyses. The approach aims to measure changes in the pace and typology of contracting in Kosovo Polje, using a clear timeframe and indicators harmonized with existing integrity monitoring methodologies.

The date of the first round of the 2025 local elections (October 12, 2025) serves as a reference point (“t = 0”), and the periods are analyzed according to three standardized time intervals:

a) Pre-Election Period

Includes the 90 days before election day (July 14 – October 12, 2025). This period is usually characterized by increased investment initiatives and accelerated procurement procedures.

b) During the elections (Election-Period Window)

Includes 14 days before and 14 days after the elections (September 28 – October 26, 2025). This interval usually marks administrative uncertainty and a slowdown in contracting due to the political transition cycle.

c) After the elections (Post-Election Period)

Includes the 30 days after the voting date (October 12 – November 11, 2025), a period during which the administration stabilizes processes and gradually returns to its usual pace.

The data used were collected from the official public procurement platform and municipal planning documents. Contracts were categorized by procurement method, value, economic operator and date of signature. In addition to quantitative analysis, the report integrates qualitative assessments of transparency and integrity standards, based on EU reports and national documents on municipal performance.

Combining the multi-year trend (2021–2025) with specific election periods allows for the identification of unusual increases in contracting, concentration of economic operators, and deviations that may be related to the political cycle. This approach provides the basis for a balanced assessment of procurement integrity in the 2025 election year for the Municipality of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje.

Capital Investments and Their Importance in Local Governance

Capital investments constitute a central component of local governance, as they are directly related to the fulfillment of the municipalities' essential obligations towards citizens. Based on Law No. 03/L-040 on Local Self-Government, municipalities enjoy exclusive own competences in areas that affect the daily life of the community – from urban planning and public infrastructure to education, primary health care, the environment and local economic development. Capital investments, as the main instruments for the realization of these competencies, represent not only construction projects, but also strategic choices that affect the balancing of priorities and the quality of local services.

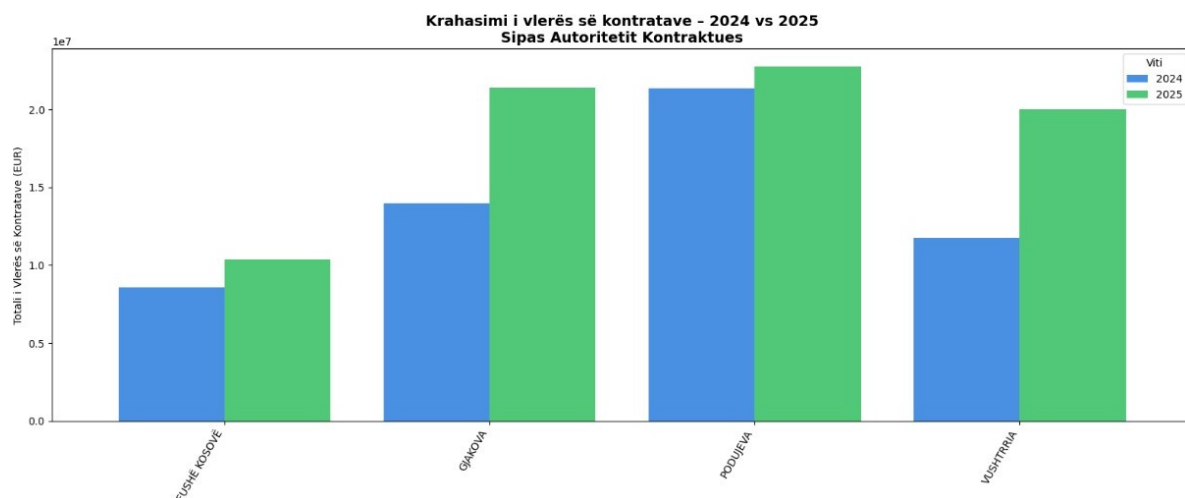
Fushë Kosova has a unique profile due to its geographical position and special territorial structure. As a smaller municipality in terms of surface area, but with a high population density and direct influence from its proximity to the capital, it presents a mix of urban and suburban dynamics. Road infrastructure, urban space management and the expansion of public services face continuous pressures from demographic growth, high population mobility and economic developments in the Pristina metropolitan area. These circumstances make capital investment a vital instrument for improving accessibility, public safety, the quality of living spaces, and the modernization of municipal infrastructure.

In sectoral analyzes and annual budget planning, Fushë Kosova appears as a municipality with an average volume of capital projects, focused mainly on road infrastructure, sewerage, sidewalks and educational facilities. A significant part of the financing comes from the municipal budget, while larger projects are often supported by central grants and donor programs for local development. The structure of investments reflects the needs of a growing area, but part of the funds continues to be focused on traditional construction sectors, with limited space for innovative investments in local economic development, recreational spaces, the environment or digital public services.

In this sense, the capital investments of the Municipality of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje should be seen as the result of a combination of factors: legal obligations, demographic and urban pressures, dependence on central grants and the administration's capacities for long-term planning and management. This report aims to assess how these investments behave in the 2025 election period, analyzing whether the dynamics of contracting align with the functional and development objectives of the municipality, or whether there are deviations from common practices that may be related to the political cycle.

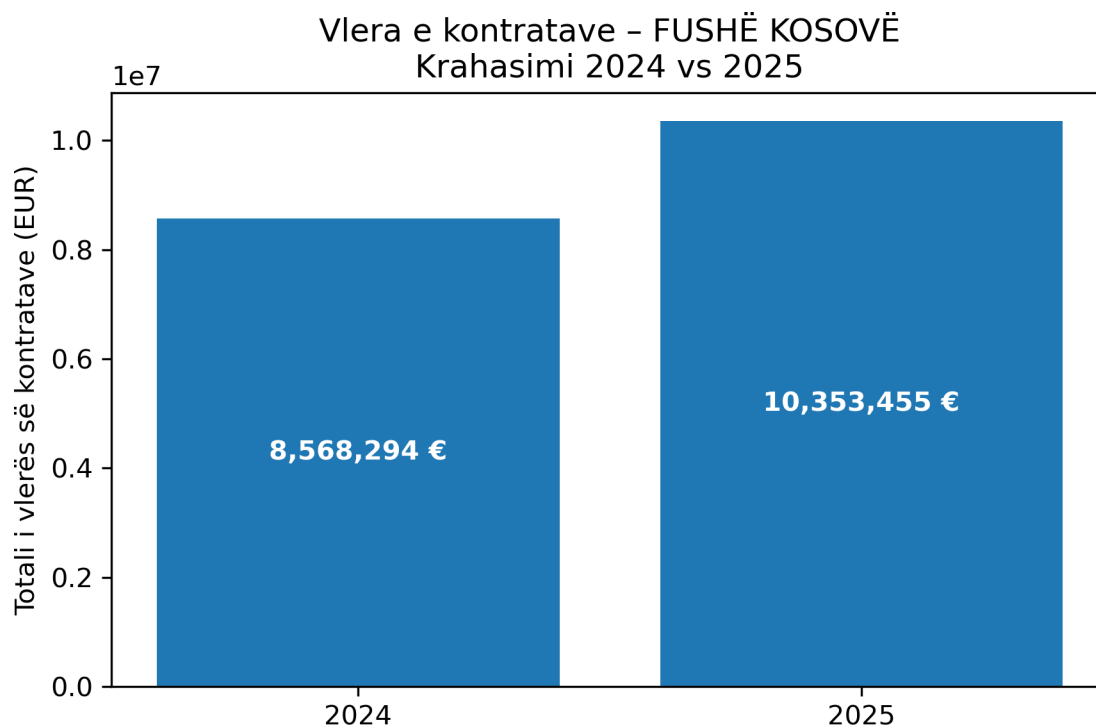
Contracting and work in an election year

Data analysis for the four selected municipalities – Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Gjakova, Podujevo and Vushtrri – confirms that the 2025 election year is associated with a significant increase in the value of contracts compared to 2024. The inter-municipal comparison of the total value of contracts shows that all municipalities have recorded an increase, which suggests that the election cycle has coincided with an intensification of capital investments at the local level. In this context, Fushë Kosova registers a transition from €8,568,294 in 2024 to €10,353,455 in 2025, an increase of around 21%. This place the municipality in an intermediate position in the comparative analysis: the growth is higher than that of Podujeva, but more moderate than the significant overshoot in Gjakova and Vushtrri.

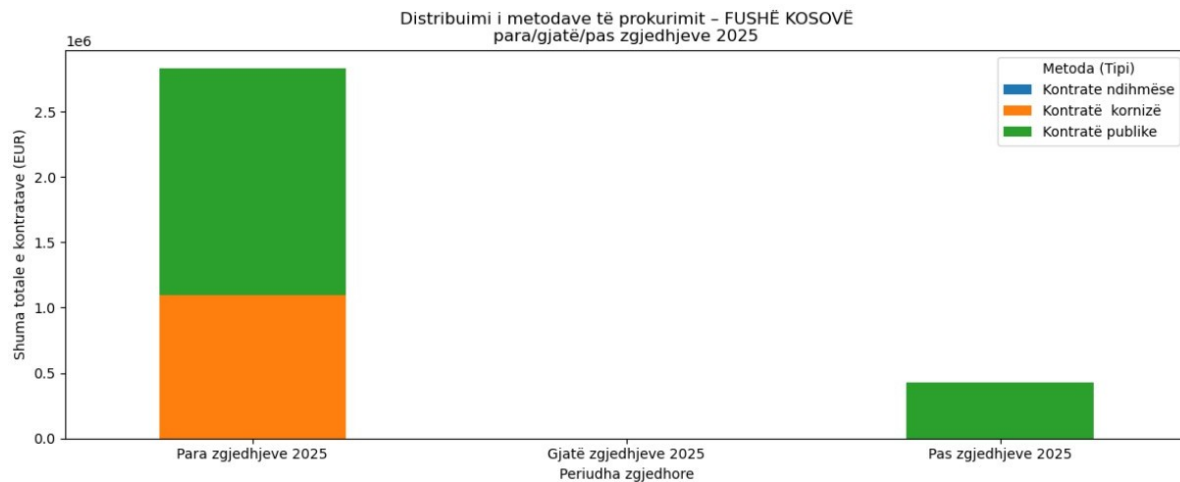


In the case of the Municipality of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, the data from the electoral periods (before and after the elections) make this dynamic more tangible. Before the elections, the municipality signed contracts worth a total of €2,829,103, of which €1,731,489 were public contracts and €1,097,614 were framework contracts, while no ancillary contracts resulted. After the elections, in the 30-day period

monitored, only public contracts worth €428,449 were signed. No new contracts are recorded in the 14-day window “during the elections”. In total, the pre- and post-election periods account for around 3.26 million euros or around 31.5% of the total value of contracts in 2025, with the pre-election window clearly dominating (around 27% of the annual volume). This indicates that a significant portion of contracting activities is concentrated in the 90 days before election day, while the period immediately following the elections remains significantly more limited.



The distribution chart by procurement method (pre/post elections) further concretizes this pattern. In both periods, ancillary contracts are completely absent; before the elections, a combination of public and framework contracts is observed, with public contracts accounting for the relative majority of the value, while framework contracts appear as a complementary instrument, but with considerable financial weight.



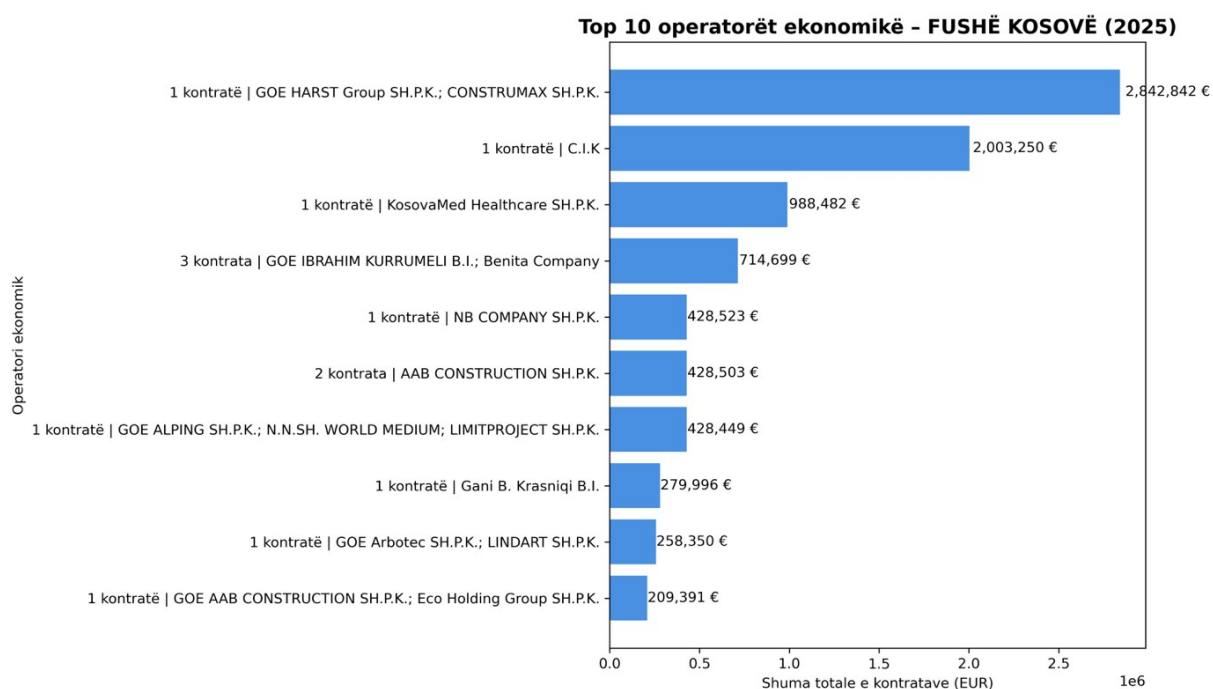
After the elections, the single value of €428,449 is entirely represented by public contracts, signaling a normalization of the pace and a more limited focus of projects in the immediate post-election period. The lack of contracts during the election window itself (± 14 days) is in line with expectations for administrative slowdown in moments of political transition, but further emphasizes the contrast with the high concentration of values in the pre-election quarter.



The analysis of the monthly performance of the value of contracts for the period 2021–2025 in the Municipality of Fushë Kosovë shows a fluctuating profile, with generally moderate monthly expenditures and some very pronounced peaks. At the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023, there are sudden increases of several million euros in a single month, while in mid-2024 a high peak of contracts appears again. In the 2025 election year, the graph highlights two clear bursts – at the beginning of the year and in the third part of it – where the monthly value approaches or exceeds the threshold of 2–3 million euros. This pattern shows that the signing of contracts is not distributed evenly throughout the year, but accumulates in certain periods, which may be related both to the finalization of multi-year projects and budget cycles, as well as to the motivations to materialize projects with high visibility before citizens on the eve of the elections.

Tipi	Kontratë kornizë	Kontratë publike	Total
Para zgjedhjeve 2025	1,097,614	1,731,489	2,829,103
Gjatë zgjedhjeve 2025	nan	nan	0
Pas zgjedhjeve 2025	0	428,449	428,449

The chart of “Top 10 economic operators – Fushë Kosovë (2025)” provides an important indicator of the structure of the procurement market. The ten main operators together benefit from around 8.6 million euros, or approximately 83% of the total value of contracts in 2025 – a high level of concentration. At the top of the list is the consortium GOE HARST Group SH.P.K.; CONSTRUMAX SH.P.K. with €2,842,842 in a single contract, followed by C.I.K with €2,003,250 also in a single contract. These two operators alone collect almost half of all annual values. Next come “KosovaMed Healthcare SH.P.K.” with €988,482, the consortium GOE IBRAHIM KURRUMELI B.I.; Benita Company with €714,699 in three contracts, as well as several other operators.



Other challenges in financial management and public integrity

In addition to the dynamics of capital expenditures in an election year, audit findings for the Municipality of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje indicate a number of structural challenges in financial management and the integrity of local government practices. The report highlights that internal controls are insufficient in both financial reporting and the management of projects, public funds and own-source revenues. This is reflected in the fact that a large part of the recommendations are repeated from previous years, while the Internal Audit Unit and the Audit Committee are still not functional at the required level to provide systematic and independent oversight.

One of the most prominent challenges is related to the classification of expenditures

and the use of the capital investment budget for purposes that, by their economic nature, belong to other categories. Payments in high amounts for obligations from collective contracts (jubilee salary, meals) and for operating expenses (transportation, parking, contracted services) were executed from the capital investment category and from other inadequate categories. This practice not only distorts the financial statement, by inaccurately presenting the structure of expenditures in the annual financial statements, but also weakens the municipality's capacity to timely and fully implement capital projects that are a priority for citizens. Laps in the presentation of the final budget, as well as the inaccurate disclosure of contingent liabilities, indicate a lack of professional care and sufficient capacities in financial administration. The management of capital projects also faces serious shortcomings in the implementation of contracts and the protection of the public interest. The audit documented numerous cases where payments were made for unfinished or incompletely completed works and not in accordance with technical specifications, including capital facilities such as sports halls, recreational parks and public spaces. In some projects, cheaper equipment with lower technical characteristics has been installed instead of those foreseen in the contract, while construction logs are often generalized, unsigned and without clear evidence of quantities and locations of works. At the same time, performance security and bank guarantee for the quality of works have not been required or have not been extended for the entire contracted period in a number of high-value contracts, significantly increasing the risk that the municipality will be left without legal and financial instruments to compensate for damages from non-implementation or poor implementation of contracts.

The conclusion of contracts in values higher than the amounts planned in the law on budget allocations, as well as the complete failure to respect legal criteria in the selection of economic operators, also remains problematic. Cases of signing capital contracts beyond planned values create subsequent pressures on the budget, forcing the municipality to cover the differences from other projects or from different budget lines, with chain consequences for the implementation of planned programs. The selection of operators that do not fully meet formal criteria, such as the submission of audited financial statements and required documentation, damages the credibility of the public procurement process and increases the risk of poor quality of works and possible legal challenges.

Challenges in the integrity of the use of funds also extend to the area of subsidies and contractual relations with NGOs and individual beneficiaries. The audit found a lack of essential documentation (declarations on double financing, financial statements, bank statements, individual evaluation forms of commission members), as well as cases where the criteria announced in public calls were not respected in practice. Furthermore, a number of subsidized projects have not been monitored, while beneficiaries have not submitted narrative and financial reports on the use of public funds. This weakens accountability, creates ground for potential misuse of funds, and risks that subsidies will not achieve their publicly stated purpose.

Managing liabilities and debts is another weak link with direct fiscal implications. Failure to pay invoices on time has resulted in a significant amount of additional costs

through judicial and enforcement proceedings, including interest, enforcement fees and court costs. At the same time, the level of accounts receivable from property taxes, rents, construction permits and other services has increased significantly, while the municipality has not taken sufficient legal and administrative measures to collect these revenues. Inspection of real estate is well below the legal threshold, leading to incomplete assessments of the tax base and limiting the potential for own-source revenues. Additional problems are evident in rental contracts that are not signed by users of public property, which creates contractual uncertainty and difficulties in collecting rent.

Beyond the financial dimension, the audit also highlights weaknesses in human resource management practices, with a direct impact on the integrity of the municipal administration. The Human Resources Management Unit has not been involved as required in the recruitment processes for civil servants, including key sectors such as education and health, while selection committees have been managed mainly by the relevant directorates. This violates the principle of standardization and professionalization of recruitment, increasing the risk of unequal practices, political influence, and lack of transparency in staff selection.

Overall, these findings indicate that the challenges in financial management and public integrity in the Municipality of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje are more than technical reporting issues: they signal structural weaknesses in the culture of governance, accountability, and oversight of the use of public money. In the context of an election year, where pressures for the implementation of visible projects and the distribution of funds increase, these weaknesses become even more dangerous. Fully addressing audit recommendations, real functionalization of the IAU and the Audit Committee, strengthening internal control and professionalizing procurement, subsidy, revenue collection and recruitment practices are prerequisites for a local government with integrity and a sound financial basis.

Conclusions

The analysis of capital investment dynamics and audit findings for the Municipality of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje indicate a combination of increased investment activity in the election year and structural weaknesses in financial management. The increase in the value of contracts in 2025, alongside the significant volume of contracts signed in pre-election periods, signals a tendency to concentrate spending in politically sensitive time windows, instead of a more balanced distribution throughout the budget year. Kjo e bën më të vështirë të argumentohet se ritmi i kontraktimit udhëhiqet kryesisht nga logjika e planifikimit afatgjatë, dhe jo nga presionet për të materializuar projekte të dukshme në sy të qytetarëve.

On the other hand, the use of the capital investment category to cover obligations of the nature of salaries, wages, operating expenses or obligations from court decisions indicates a significant distance between formal budget planning and actual implementation during the year. This practice distorts financial reporting, weakens the capacity to accurately assess the weight of capital investments and, in practice, competes with development projects for the same funds. Also, errors in the presentation of the final budget and in the disclosure of contingent liabilities demonstrate deficiencies in the quality of financial control and in the professional resources of the financial administration.

The implementation of capital projects exhibits a significant number of technical and contractual integrity problems: payments for unfinished work, deviations from technical specifications, lack of complete documentation in construction logs, complete malfunctioning of execution security mechanisms and bank guarantees. Systematic delays in the completion of projects, without the application of the foreseen penalties, indicate an unbalanced relationship between the contracting authority and economic operators, where the public interest is not sufficiently protected in practice.

Integrity challenges are not limited to procurement and public contracts. The subsidy processes of NGOs and individual beneficiaries are characterized by incomplete documentation, complete non-compliance with public call criteria, lack of monitoring and reporting by beneficiaries. This creates a real risk that part of the funds will be spent without sufficient traceability and without guarantees of achieving the intended results. At the same time, the high level of accounts receivable and the non-use of legal mechanisms for debt collection indicate weaknesses in the management of own-source revenues, limiting the fiscal space for investments and services.

Weaknesses in human resources management, particularly the lack of involvement of the Human Resources Management Unit in recruitment processes, undermine the principles of professionalism, equality and transparency in staff selection. Finally, the fact that a large proportion of audit recommendations are repetitive indicates that the municipality lacks a systematic approach to addressing findings and closing the accountability loop. Without a substantial change in organizational culture and in the functioning of internal control mechanisms (IAU, Audit Committee, risk management), there is a risk that current practices will continue and be reproduced in future budget and election cycles.

Recommendations

1. Balancing the annual distribution of contracts to avoid pre-election concentration points

Data for Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, as for the other municipalities in the study, show a clear increase in the volume of contracts in the 90-day pre-election period, creating strong deviations from normal procurement rates. This high concentration increases the risk of overloaded capacities, reduces the quality of supervision and pushes the municipality to make hasty decisions.

It is recommended that the municipality establish internal standards for a more even

distribution of contracts throughout the year, linked to the budget calendar and not to political cycles.

2. Increasing transparency for projects contracted in pre-election periods

The concentration of large public contracts in the months leading up to elections creates perceptions of political influence on investments.

The municipality should proactively publish the list of projects contracted during these periods, including the development rationale, source of funding and implementation timelines. This will increase public trust and ensure that decision-making is seen as motivated by development needs and not electoral momentum.

3. Stronger evidence for territorial and sectoral priorities

The distribution graphs of contracts and economic operators, as well as the differences between 2024–2025, show that the increase in spending does not always reflect clear territorial or sectoral strategies. It is recommended that the municipality develop needs assessment mechanisms by neighborhoods/villages and by sectors (infrastructure, water supply, education, environment), linking contracting to clear analyses of community requirements and not to the time pressure of the election year.

4. Adding quality verification and monitoring for contracts signed during peak periods

The high concentration of contracts in short periods increases the risk that management and oversight will not be proportionately strong. It is recommended that contracts signed during the 90-day period before the elections be treated with an increased regime of technical verifications, monthly reporting and field monitoring, so that the high volume does not affect the quality of the projects.

5. Internal analyses for economic operators that take large shares of the municipal market

The chart of “Top 10 economic operators – Fushë Kosovë (2025)” shows a significant concentration of contracts in a few companies.

It is recommended:

Recommended:

- conduct an internal analysis of competition in municipal procurement,
- monitor the participation and performance of dominant operators,
- ensure that tenders attract the widest possible competition so that the increase in volume in an election year does not turn into a benefit for a very limited group of companies.

Consolidation of multi-year investment planning to avoid late signature

The monthly distribution of contracts (2021–2025) shows that contracting is often carried out with high intensity in only a few months of the year, which signals procedural delays and delayed finalizations.

It is recommended that capital projects be planned with multi-year clarity, synchronized with procurement phases, to avoid artificial accumulation in the periods before elections.

6. Increasing analytical capacities to understand and manage the impact of the electoral cycle

Given that the election year pattern is clearly evident in the data, the municipality should develop an internal analytical system that monitors procurement rates, monthly distribution, duration of procedures, average contracting time, and project implementation. This system would enable:

- identifying deviations from normal rhythms,
- assessing the impact of the electoral cycle,
- planning to minimize future pressures.
- More transparent communication with citizens during the election year

To avoid the perception that projects are being implemented “just for elections,” the municipality can:

- publish investment planning and calendar
- clearly explain the status of multi-year projects,
- communicate the objectives and justification of large contracts signed in the pre-election period.

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