

ELECTION YEAR AND PUBLIC CONTRACTS

Integrity trends in four
municipalities of Kosovo

Gjakove



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

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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 Gjakova during the 2025 election period, with a particular focus on public procurement. Procurement processes represent one of the most sensitive components of governance integrity, especially in an election year, when political pressure increases to make significant investments and to manage public funds efficiently. The analysis of this report aims to highlight changes in the pace, volume and structure of public contracting throughout the three phases of the process: before the elections, during the campaign and after the elections.

The main goal is to understand whether and to what extent the electoral dynamics have influenced procurement decision-making at the local level. For this reason, the report uses multi-year comparative data (2021–2025), creating a solid analytical basis that allows for the identification of unusual trends – such as a sudden increase in contracting, increased use of framework contracts, or the orientation of projects towards the nature of the campaign.

In addition to data analysis, the report also draws on the findings and methodologies used in existing KDI reports on political integrity at the local level. This integrated approach allows for a more accurate assessment of the risk of misuse of public funds and the level of institutional transparency in a period of heightened political competition.

The European Commission’s 2025 annual report on Kosovo notes that “integrity in the public service remains a challenge”. Among the main points mentioned are the delays in finalising and approving integrity plans for institutions, while their quality remains inadequate. This highlights the need for an analysis of public procurement at the municipal level, especially during the election period. In this context, the report on the Municipality of Gjakova attempts to find out whether the practices of the local institution are accompanied by behaviours that resemble the pattern identified by the Commission — for example, the lack of administrative stability, the increase in contracting in the election year and the use of framework contracts or accelerated procedures. This reflection is essential to understand the level of transparency and accountability of municipal authorities during the critical period of local elections.

As part of the MAP project objectives, the report aims to provide a clear picture of how procurement practices evolve in an election year and contribute to increasing accountability, transparency and civic awareness. The report’s findings will serve as a basis for consultative discussions at the local level and for practical recommendations aimed at strengthening integrity in procurement in election periods and beyond.

Metodologjia

The methodology of this report is based on a comparative analysis of public procurement data for the 2025 election period, following the well-known practices of OECD/SIGMA, Transparency International and the World Bank for assessing institutional behavior in electoral contexts. The approach aims to measure whether and how the dynamics of contracting in the Municipality of Gjakova change using a clear time frame and a set of indicators harmonized with existing integrity analyses at the local level. The date of the first round of the 2025 local elections, 12 October 2025, serves as a reference point (“t = 0”) to standardize comparisons and ensure analytical objectivity. Although data from 2021–2025 are included to build a multi-year trend, the year 2025 remains the central focus of the interpretation.

Procurement data is collected from the official public procurement platform and additional documents of procurement planning and implementation at the municipal level. Contracts are categorized by type, value and date of signature, excluding those cancelled or without final value. In addition to the quantitative analysis, the report integrates qualitative assessments from KDI’s integrity reports, which serve as a reference framework for interpreting procurement practice in terms of transparency, access to data, use of exceptional procedures and the influence of political factors.

To assess institutional behavior during the election period, three time intervals have been defined, which allow for the measurement of deviations from normal procurement rates:

a. Pre-Election Period

Includes the 90 days before Election Day, a period when incentives are increased to expedite tenders and capital projects. Time limits: July 14, 2025 – October 12, 2025.

b. During the elections (Election-Period Window)

Includes 14 days before and 14 days after election day, an interval usually characterized by institutional uncertainty and slow administrative processes. Time limits: September 28, 2025 – October 26, 2025.

c. P After the elections (Post-Election Period)

Përfshin 30 ditët pas datës së zgjedhjeve, periudhë tranzicioni ku administrata stabilizon prioritetet dhe proceset e prokurimit kthehen gradualisht në ritmin e zakonshëm. Kufijtë kohorë: 12 tetor 2025 – 11 nëntor 2025.

This time frame, combined with an integrated analysis of financial data and the nature of contracted projects, enables the identification of unusual increases in contracting, changes in contract typologies, and trends related to electoral dynamics. In this way, the report aims to provide a reliable assessment of procurement integrity in the critical election year of 2025 and contribute to increasing transparency and accountability at the local level.

Capital Investments and Their Importance in Local Governance

Capital investments constitute an essential component of local governance, as they are directly related to the most fundamental obligations of municipalities towards citizens. The role and responsibilities of municipalities are clearly defined by Law No. 03/L-040 on Local Self-Government, which grants municipalities full and exclusive competences in areas that are the core of local development and public welfare. In this context, capital investments are the means through which municipalities exercise these competences – from local economic development and urban planning, to public services, infrastructure, education, primary health care and environmental protection. According to Article 17 of this law, all these areas require physical, infrastructural and functional investments, which not only create conditions for long-term development, but also directly affect the quality of life of citizens.

Gjakova, as the largest municipality in the Gjakova Region with around 95 thousand inhabitants, has a special profile in relation to capital investments. The Gjakova Region is estimated to benefit from around 13–15% of the total national capital investments, which places the municipality in a more favorable position compared to many other local units. However, the large rural composition – with dozens of villages – creates a need for territorially extended investments in rural roads, sewerage and water supply, in addition to the pressure to preserve and develop the cultural infrastructure of the historic city.

According to the Ministry of Regional Development's analysis and sectoral data, Gjakova has been among the municipalities most supported by the central level in the period 2021–2023. This includes projects from MMPHI for roads and sewerage, interventions from MCYS for the restoration of the Greater Qarshia, as well as investments by the Ministry of Health in QKMF and satellite centers in rural areas. In parallel, the municipal budget has financed hundreds of small and medium-sized projects, mainly in road infrastructure, educational facilities and public lighting.

However, MDR reports and financial audits point out that, although the overall level of investments is high, their structure often remains concentrated in traditional infrastructure sectors (roads, sidewalks, sewers), while sectors with particular socio-economic potential, such as local tourism, cultural infrastructure, recreational spaces or the promotion of the rural economy, do not always manage to receive sufficient shares of the budget.

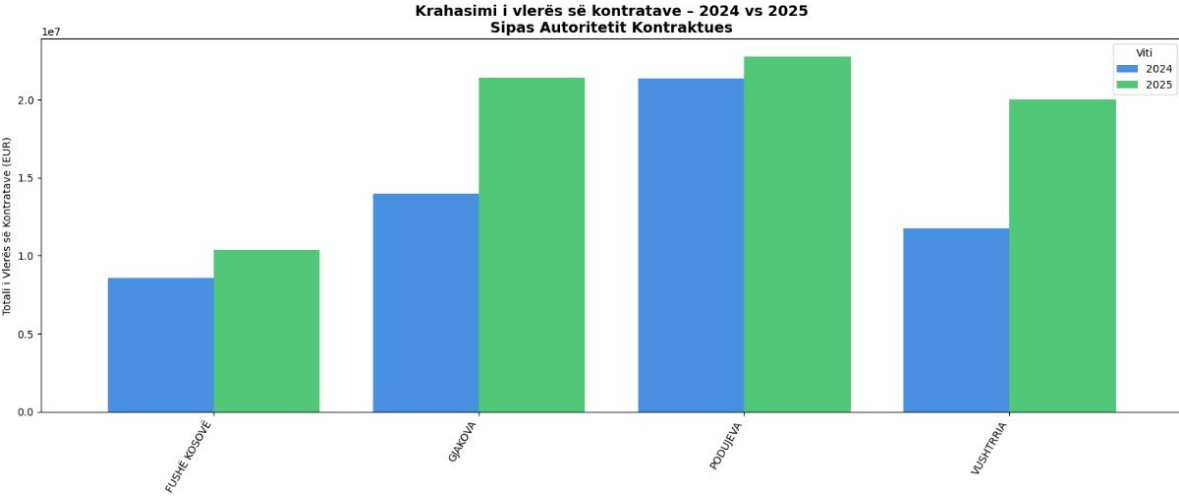
In this sense, the capital investments of the Municipality of Gjakova should be understood as the result of a combination of factors: legal obligations, demands of urban and rural citizens, significant dependence on central-level projects and structural challenges in long-term planning. This report aims to analyze how these investments behave in the electoral period, assessing whether contracting trends are consistent with their legal and developmental function or deviate towards politically motivated patterns – a crucial issue for local integrity and good governance.

In addition to the classic infrastructure sectors, significant increases can also be observed in contracting in categories that are not necessarily related to emergency or priority functions of the municipality, but which often have high public visibility. These include contracts for the maintenance of municipal facilities, renovation of administrative premises, recreational and cultural projects, as well as various municipal operational services.

Multi-year analysis shows that these categories tend to increase in years when the political agenda is more intense, suggesting that procurement dynamics may deviate from the logic of long-term planning and move closer to the logic of the political cycle. The increase in framework contracts, the use of accelerated procedures, and the orientation of projects towards urban spaces with high public exposure are additional signals of this trend.

Contracting and work in an election year

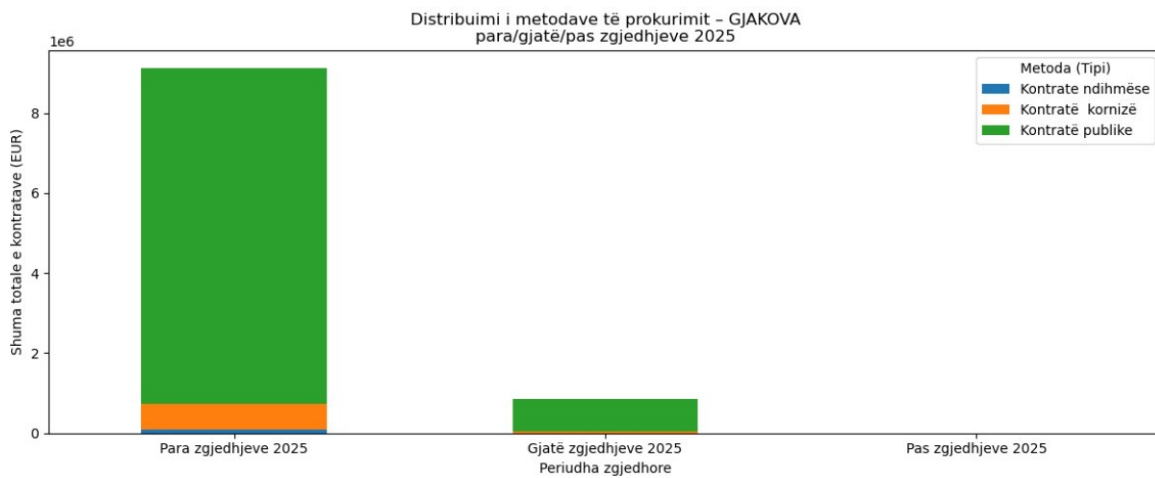
Analysis of data for the four selected municipalities – Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Gjakova/Djakovica, Podujevë/Podujevo and Vushtrri/Vučitrn – shows a significant increase in the value of contracts during the 2025 election year, compared to 2024 (inter-municipal comparison figure 2024–2025). The graph demonstrates that all municipalities have recorded significant increases, exceeding expectations of typical annual procurement movements and suggesting that 2025 has been particularly busy with capital investments at the local level.



In the case of the Municipality of Gjakova, the detailed data by electoral periods (before-during-after the elections) make this phenomenon more tangible. Before the elections, the municipality signed contracts worth €9,114,757, of which €8,386,692 are public contracts, €625,486 are framework contracts and €102,580 are ancillary contracts. This constitutes a very high volume of investments within the 90-day window before the election day.

During the election period (± 14 days from 12 October), the total value of contracts falls to €849,799, of which €810,810 are public contracts and €38,989 are framework contracts, while there are no ancillary contracts. After the elections, for the 30-day period monitored, no new contracts were signed. This distribution of expenditure clearly shows that the main contracting activity is concentrated before election day, while the windows during and after the elections are characterized by a noticeable slowdown.

The distribution chart by procurement methods for Gjakova before/during/after the elections (figure: “Distribution of procurement methods – GJAKOVA before/during/after the elections 2025”) deepens this finding. Before the elections, public contracts dominate, which constitute the vast majority of the value, while framework and ancillary contracts appear as complementary instruments. During the election period, the value of public contracts decreases significantly and framework contracts remain at limited levels, while after the elections there is no recorded activity. This pattern suggests a concentration of signing of large and visible projects on the eve of the elections, while normal administrative activity is postponed or slowed down in the days around and after the election process.



This behavior is in line with the practices observed in other municipalities of the analysis, where the increase in expenditures is not only numerical, but also structural. In many cases, the increase includes categories of investments that are not urgent and do not require immediate intervention, such as renovations of municipal buildings, undertaking recreational projects, construction or reconstruction of sidewalks, or operational services that are usually distributed evenly throughout the year. Due to their highly visual nature, these projects have electoral potential and are often activated on the eve of elections to create a perception of dynamism and administrative efficiency.

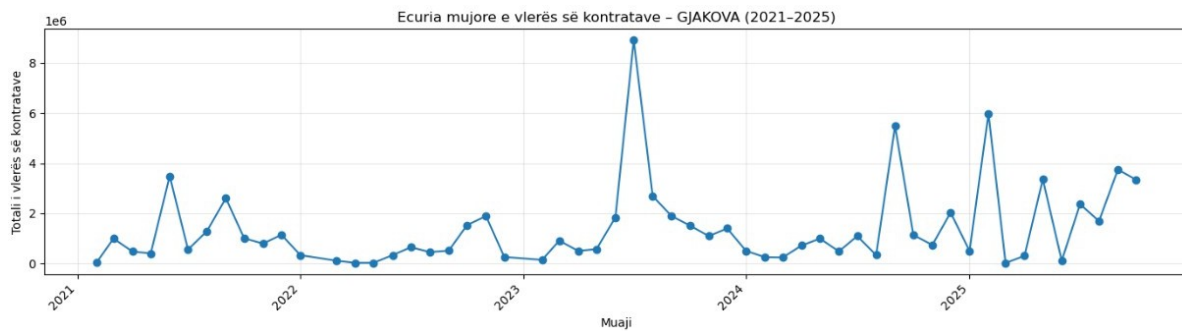
Overall, the data for the 2025 election year show a clear shift from a normal administrative model to a cyclical political model, where contracting increases disproportionately before elections and falls immediately afterwards. This chapter reflects the report’s core argument: that tenders and capital expenditures in the municipalities analyzed do not only follow the logic of real community needs, but also reflect the political cycle of the election year. The following chapter will analyze in detail the distribution of these projects by category, as well as the sectors where this electoral distortion is most pronounced.

Tipi	Kontrate ndihmëse	Kontratë kornizë	Kontratë publike	Total
Para zgjedhjeve 2025	102,580	625,486	8,386,692	9,114,757
Gjatë zgjedhjeve 2025	0	38,989	810,810	849,799
Pas zgjedhjeve 2025	nan	nan	nan	0

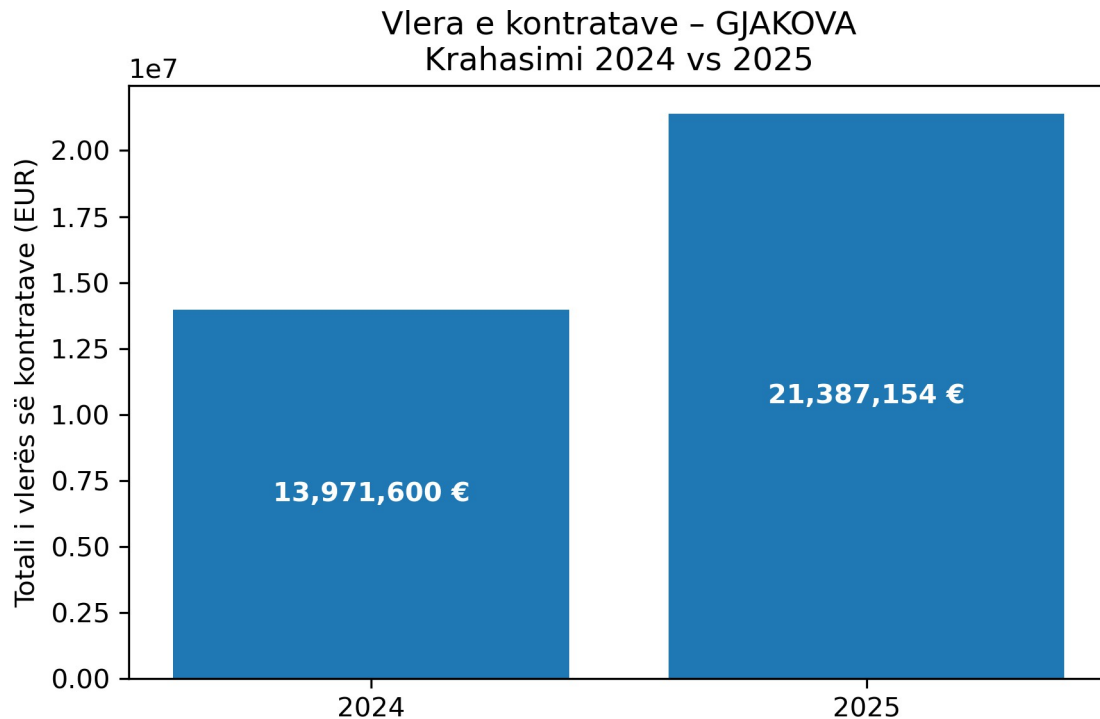
Overall, the data for the 2025 election year show a shift from a normal administrative model to a cyclical political model, where capital contracts increase disproportionately before elections and decrease immediately after them. This chapter reflects the report’s core argument: that tenders and capital expenditures in the municipalities analyzed do not only reflect the logic of real community needs, but are also sensitive to the political cycle of the election year. The following chapter analyzes in more detail the distribution of projects by category, as well as the sectors where this electoral distortion is most pronounced.

The analysis of the monthly performance of contract signing for the period 2021–2025 in the Municipality of Gjakova (figure: “Monthly performance of contract value – GJAKOVA 2021–2025”) presents a clear cyclical pattern, with high peaks of contracting appearing sporadically over the years. For most of the period 2021–2023, monthly expenditures fluctuate at relatively low and stable levels, typical for a municipality with a limited budget and an administrative pace determined by standard public procurement procedures.

In some months of recent years, however, much higher amounts have appeared, with contracts reaching values of several million euros in a single month. These peaks represent notable deviations from the usual pattern and show that the signing of contracts is not evenly distributed throughout the year, but is concentrated in certain periods, often linked to the conclusion of multi-year projects, the dynamics of central-level funding or the intensification of the political agenda..



One possible interpretation of this phenomenon is related to the dynamics of years with increased political load, when municipalities tend to finalize capital projects before major political or fiscal events. However, to maintain methodological correctness, it should be emphasized that this pattern cannot be attributed entirely or exclusively to the election year. Prolonged procurement procedures – including complaints to the PRB, re-tenders, delays in approving budget plans and challenges in preparing technical documentation – often cause contracts to accumulate and be finalized in a single period of time. This “cumulative effect” is well-known in the public procurement literature and can create the impression of political intensification even when the explanation is mainly procedural.



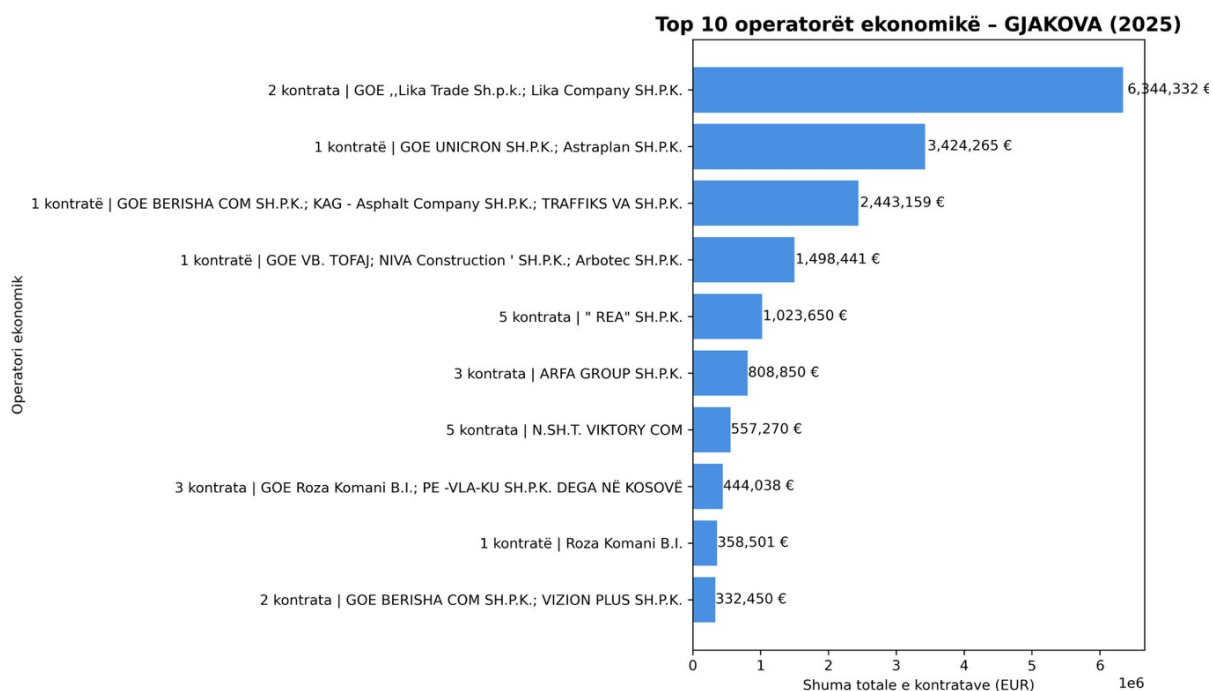
The comparison between 2024 and 2025 (figure: “Value of contracts – GJAKOVA 2024 vs 2025”) shows an increase of about 53%: from €13,971,600 in 2024, the total value of contracts increases to €21,387,154 in the election year 2025. This increase represents a significant change and places 2025 among the years with the highest volume of contracting in Gjakova.

In local government analyses, such increases often coincide with election years, a phenomenon observed more widely in the literature on budget cycles and “electoral spending.” Municipalities, on the eve of elections, may increase capital expenditures to materialize tangible projects – such as roads, sidewalks, sewers, interventions in urban and cultural spaces – that are positively perceived by citizens.

However, to maintain analytical integrity, the report emphasizes that increased spending in an election year does not in itself constitute evidence that the contracts are politically motivated. Other factors that may contribute to this increase include:

- finalization of projects accumulated from previous years,
- acceleration of procurement processes after procedural delays,
- closing of multi-year cycles of capital projects,
- changes in budget priorities for 2025,
- increased support from central grants,
- pressures from fiscal deadlines and implementation of donor-funded projects.

Even taking these factors into account, the intensity and concentration of contractions in 2025 exceed the normal pace of non-election years, suggesting a combination of technical and cyclical-political motivations.



The graph presents the 10 economic operators with the highest value of contracts in the Municipality of Gjakova during 2025, showing a significant concentration of public funds in a few entities. At the top is GOE “Lika Trade” Sh.p.k. – “Lika Company” Sh.p.k. with around 6.34 million euros in two contracts, significantly distancing itself from other operators. It is followed by GOE “UNICRON” Sh.p.k. – “Astraplan” Sh.p.k. with around 3.42 million euros in a single contract, while GOE “Berisha Com” Sh.p.k.; “KAG – Asphalt Company” Sh.p.k.; “Traffiks VA” Sh.p.k. reaches around 2.44 million euros, also through a single contract. The top four operators together represent the vast majority of the value of contracts presented in this list, signaling a high level of procurement concentration in consortia for large infrastructure projects.

The rest of the ranking is dominated by operators with a larger number of contracts, but with lower total values. “REA” Sh.p.k. has five contracts with a cumulative value of around 1.02 million euros, while “ARFA Group” Sh.p.k. has three contracts with around 808 thousand euros, and N.SHT. “Viktory Com” five contracts with around 557 thousand euros. The two combinations with “Roza Komani” (as GOE and as sole operator) as well as GOE “Berisha Com” – “Vizion Plus” Sh.p.k. have values from around 330 to 440 thousand euros each. This profile shows a structure where the largest contracts are concentrated in a few consortia, while a larger number of medium and small contracts are distributed among several other local operators, which makes it important to monitor competition and contract management for these main entities.

Other challenges in financial management and public integrity

Financial management and public integrity at the local level remain ongoing challenges in Kosovo, as regularly highlighted in annual audit reports, the EU Progress Report, as well as in analyses by organizations such as KDI, GAP and SIGMA/OECD. Municipalities face a combination of structural challenges related to administrative capacity, the quality of investment planning and compliance with public procurement standards. These challenges directly impact the implementation of capital projects and the efficiency of public spending at the local level.

1. Planning and implementation of capital investments

According to audits by the National Audit Office and budget reporting at the central level, municipalities often face difficulties in planning and executing capital investments. In the case of Gjakova, these challenges are particularly evident in multi-year infrastructure and cultural heritage projects, as well as in the large number of small rural projects spread across many villages. Delays are often related to property issues, lack of technical documentation, poor planning of project phases, and insufficient coordination with central institutions.

Audits have identified cases of incorrect use of economic categories, where capital payments are recorded in other budget categories, violating public accounting standards and financial transparency. It has also been highlighted that new capital assets are not registered in a timely manner, which leads to an incomplete reflection of municipal assets.

2. Challenges in public procurement

According to assessments by the EU, KDI and OKA, public procurement continues to be among the processes most exposed to deviations from integrity standards. In Gjakova, in addition to the general challenges, the following are also highlighted:

- the high number of complaints to the PRB regarding infrastructure tenders,
- cases of technical specifications that may restrict competition, through references to certain brands without sufficient scope for equivalence,
- deficiencies in contract management documentation, including failure to record work progress and incomplete use of electronic modules for contract management.

These weaknesses reduce transparency, make accountability more difficult, and increase the risk of exceeding deadlines and deviations from regular procedures.

3. Political context and election years

EU reports and analyses by local governance monitoring organizations have noted that public investments at the local level are often sensitive to political cycles. In many municipalities, election years are characterized by increased investment activity and contracting, while the following years often mark a slowdown or under-implementation of projects.

In Gjakova, where the urban center has great political weight and high-visibility projects in public spaces influence the perception of performance, the risk of capital expenditures being used as an instrument of political communication is particularly pronounced. In parallel, dependence on central funds creates additional exposure to changes in central-level priorities.

4. Administrative and internal control challenges

A recurring challenge in audits is related to the weakness of internal controls. In some cases, delays in payments to economic operators have been identified due to a lack of available funds, often related to unforeseen obligations from court decisions. The lack of adequate monitoring of obligations and the incorrect classification of expenses increase the risk of material errors and reduce the efficiency of financial management.

EU reports also highlight that, although data transparency has increased, the publication of information is often in non-open formats (such as PDF), making it difficult to use the data for advanced monitoring. For Gjakova/Đakovica, where there are a large number of capital projects spread across the territory and multi-year projects in cultural heritage, the need for strong internal control systems and for the publication of data in open formats is even greater.

Conclusions

The analysis of public procurement in the Municipality of Gjakova for the 2025 election year clearly shows that the dynamics of contracting is influenced by both the political cycle and the administrative factors that characterize the management of capital projects in this municipality. The comparative data between 2024 and 2025, combined with the monthly performance of contracts and the distribution according to electoral periods, constitute a model where contracting is concentrated in certain months and especially on the eve of the elections. These peaks are consistent with the literature on “electoral spending cycles”, but some of them are also related to prolonged procedures, complaints to the PRB, and the finalization of multi-year projects.

The inclusion of the “Top 10 economic operators” chart for 2025 brings an important

dimension to the integrity of procurement in Gjakova. The concentration of more than half of the total value of contracts in a few consortia affects the structure of competition and increases the need for more careful monitoring of the management of large infrastructure contracts. This level of concentration is in line with repeated observations of audits and reports of the European Commission, which highlight the risk that arises when a limited number of operators win the majority of high-value contracts. In this context, the results of the report are placed within a broader picture of structural challenges to procurement and public integrity in Kosovo.

Overall, the analysis confirms that, although not solely attributable to political motivations, strong increases in contracting before elections, the concentration of high-visibility projects and the dominance of a few economic operators create an environment of increased risk for deviations from integrity standards. These findings make it necessary to strengthen control mechanisms, transparency and long-term planning to ensure that capital investments are oriented towards the real needs of the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Strengthening capital investment planning**

- The municipality should draft multi-year investment plans based on measurable objectives and clear priorities, avoiding the concentration of a few high-value projects on the eve of the elections.
- Before launching capital projects, all technical, property and administrative conditions must be met, to avoid delays and artificial accumulation of expenses.
- Periodic reports on the progress of capital investments should be published in a transparent manner and identify deviations from annual plans.

2. **More careful procurement management in election years**

- The municipality should establish internal guidelines to avoid concentrating large contracts in the quarter before elections, except in cases where this is consistent with multi-year plans.
- For major projects initiated in the pre-election period, a formal justification related to municipal planning is required.
- The use of technical specifications that limit competition should be avoided, respecting EU standards and the Public Procurement Law..

3. **Improving internal capacities and controls**

- Procurement staff should be regularly trained in planning, risk management, and the use of electronic modules for contract monitoring.
- Full use of e-procurement modules for multi-year contracts and large infrastructure projects should be ensured.
- The Internal Audit Unit should have a special mandate to monitor capital contracts during election periods and report directly and transparently to the Municipal Assembly.

4. **Increasing transparency and citizen participation**

- All procurement data and lists of capital projects should be published in open format (open data), in accordance with practices recommended by the EU, SIGMA and KDI.
- For large projects with urban impact, regular consultations with citizens and local groups should be carried out.
- Cooperation with civil society organizations should be strengthened for monitoring procurement and publishing periodic reports on contract progress.

5. **Recommendations at the central level**

- Line ministries should implement repeated audit and European Commission recommendations to strengthen procurement and capital investment management capacities in municipalities.
- Performance grant schemes can include indicators that measure not only budget execution, but also the balanced distribution of expenditures during the year.
- Specific national guidelines for the management of capital contracts during election periods should be developed to reduce the risk of polarization of spending and concentration of contracts in a few economic operators, as evidenced by the 2025 data.

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