

ELECTION YEAR AND PUBLIC CONTRACTS

Integrity trends in four
municipalities of Kosovo

Vushtrri



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

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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 Vushtrri 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 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”.¹ 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, our report on the municipality of Vushtrri seeks 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 findings of this report 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.

¹ European Commission Report (2025), available at https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/127563ea-4c03-44a4-b56c-2d569afd86a5_en?filename=kosovo-report-2025.pdf (qasur në nëntor, 2025)

Methodology

The methodology of this report is based on the 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 Vushtrri 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, on 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 the KDI integrity reports, which serve as a reference framework for interpreting procurement practice in relation to 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. After the elections (Post-Election Period)

Includes the 30 days following the election date, a transition period where the administration stabilizes priorities and procurement processes gradually return to normal. Timelines: October 12, 2025 – November 11, 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.

At the national level, capital investments have long been considered an instrument for reducing regional disparities, stimulating economic development and increasing the competitiveness of local communities. The analysis of the Ministry of Regional Development (MDR) for 2022 shows that capital investments, both at the central and local levels, constitute a strategic pillar of development. However, the analysis highlights that these investments are often concentrated in traditional infrastructure sectors – such as local roads, sidewalks and sewers – while sectors with high socio-economic potential, such as tourism, local economic development or cultural infrastructure, continue to remain underfunded. The report also highlights significant regional disparities, with the North Region, which includes the Municipality of Vushtrri, receiving the lowest share of investments (8% of the national total of capital investments).

In this context, capital investments in the Municipality of Vushtrri should be seen in relation to this legal and policy framework. As a municipality in the Northern Region, Vushtrri carries a multitude of competencies that require ongoing investments, such as the provision and maintenance of local roads, water supply, sewage, educational facilities, health centers, parks and public spaces, social service facilities, and infrastructure for culture and sports. The realization of these functions cannot be done without careful financial planning and strategic prioritization of capital projects that address emergency needs, but also create long-term value.

The 2022 MDG data shows that Vushtrri has benefited from several important projects at the central level, mainly from the Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure (MMPHI), including the expansion of the water supply network and the regulation of the Sitnica riverbed. A key project funded by the Ministry of Industry, Entrepreneurship and Trade (MINT) – the construction of infrastructure in the Vushtrri Industrial Park – makes this municipality the only one in the region to benefit in this sector. On the other hand, a large number of ministries did not record any investments in Vushtrri, including MESTI, MCYS, MH and MLGA, which highlights the challenges of the municipality's equal inclusion in national investment planning.

At the local level, Vushtrri implemented 57 capital projects worth a total of 2.9 million euros in 2022, prioritizing local roads, sewerage and educational facilities. These priorities are in line with the legal competences of municipalities, but also indicate budgetary capacity constraints, as sectors with broad socio-economic impact are financed at modest levels. Rarely have projects been identified that focus on development innovation, tourism, sports or cultural infrastructure, sectors that can generate sustainable development and attract long-term investment.

In this way, the capital investments of the Municipality of Vushtrri should be understood as a combination of legal obligations, citizen demands and structural constraints resulting from regional disparities in the allocation of funds. This report aims to analyze how these investments change in the electoral period, assessing whether contracting trends are consistent with their legal function or deviate towards politically motivated patterns, a crucial issue for local integrity and good governance.

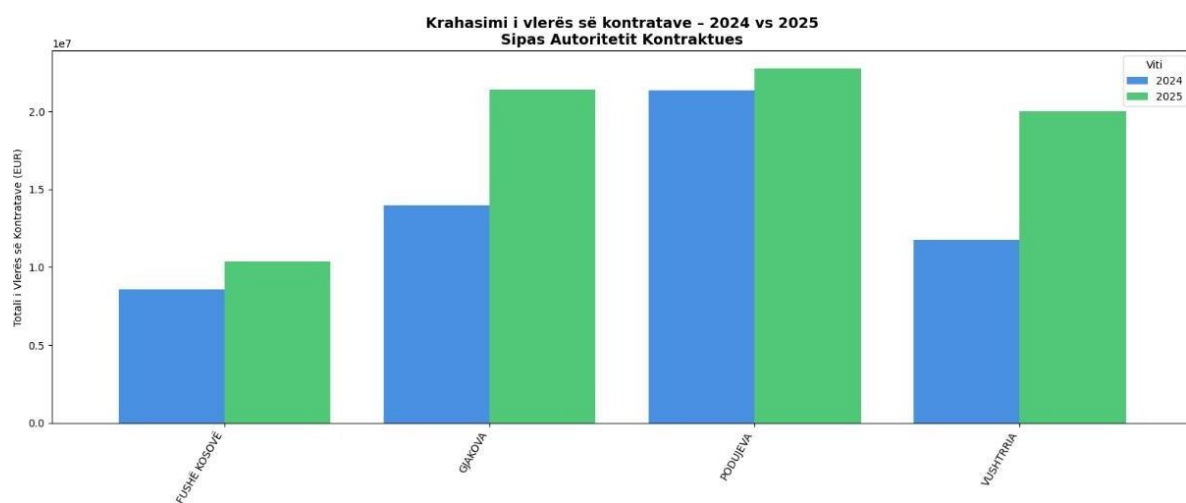
In addition to the classic infrastructure sectors, there is also a noticeable increase in contracting in other categories that are not necessarily related to emergency or priority functions of the municipality, but that often take off during election periods. Such examples include contracts for the maintenance of municipal buildings, renovations of administrative premises, high-visibility recreational projects, as well as various operational and municipal services that usually do not require urgent investment. Multi-year analysis shows that these categories mark a disproportionate increase in election years, suggesting that the dynamics of procurement deviate from the normal logic of long-term planning and come closer to the logic of the political cycle. The increase in framework contracts, accelerated procedures and contracting oriented towards projects with a visual impact on citizens is another signal of this trend, making it necessary to analyze the structure of expenditures beyond the large capital sectors.

Furthermore, the data show that not only does the total value of investments increase in an election year, but also the frequency of contract signing, often in tight periods before and during the campaign. This increase is not found with the same intensity in non-election years and constitutes an important indicator to assess whether the procurement process is influenced by political incentives to create immediate electoral effects. In this report, the next chapter will address this phenomenon in detail, presenting a clear overview of expenditures in different categories and highlighting the structural deviations that appear in the 2025 election year compared to previous years.

Contracting and work in an election

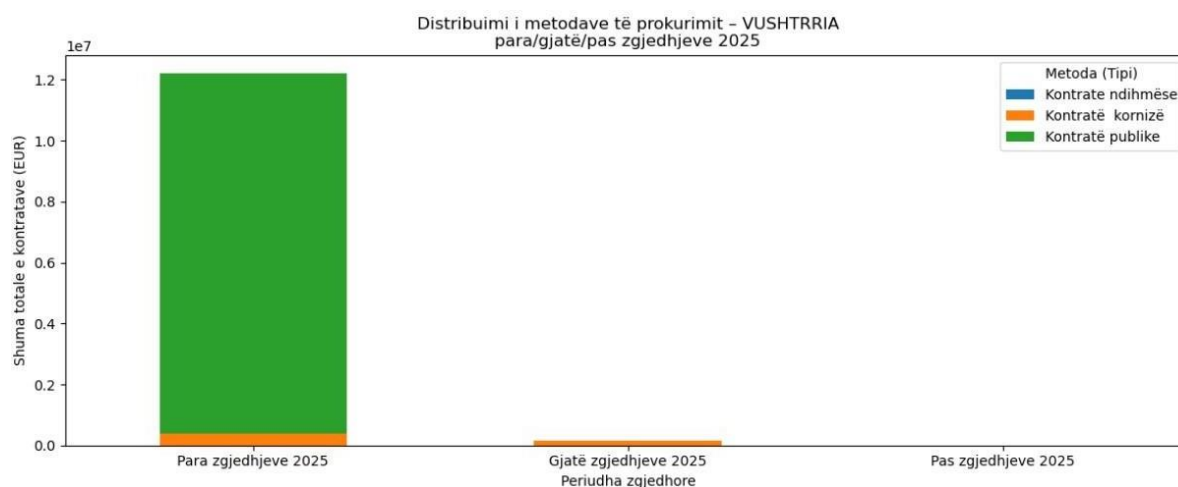
The analysis of data for the four selected municipalities – Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Gjakova/Djakovica, Podujevo/Podujevo and Vushtrri/Vučitrn – clearly shows a significant increase in the value of contracts during the 2025 election year, compared to 2024. The comparative graph of contract value (2024 vs. 2025) demonstrates that all municipalities have recorded a significant increase, with Podujevo/Podujevo and Vushtrri/Vučitrn appearing as the two most prominent cases. This increase is structural and exceeds the expectations of the usual annual procurement movements, suggesting a direct impact of the electoral dynamics on the planning and execution of public expenditures.

In the case of the Municipality of Vushtrri, detailed data by electoral period (pre-during-post-election) make this phenomenon even clearer. Before the elections, the municipality signed contracts worth €12,203,075, of which €11,817,060 are public contracts and €386,015 are framework contracts. This constitutes an exceptionally high volume of investments within a narrow time window. This intensity of contracting is in line with the international literature on “electoral budget cycles”, which argues that local governments increase investments with direct visual impact – roads, sidewalks, sewers, civil works – to create immediate political gains during the campaign.



During the election period (± 14 days from 12 October), contracting falls to minimal levels, with only €150,000 of framework contracts signed, an expected administrative slowdown due to the period of institutional instability and procedural constraints. After the elections, spending drops to less than €4,000, clearly confirming that the election year is characterized by a front-loading of contracting before election day, while the periods during and after the elections remain very limited.

The second graph, the one of distribution according to procurement methods – further deepens the understanding of this phenomenon. Before the elections, public contracts categorically dominate, reaching over 11.8 million euros, while framework contracts appear as an instrument used in a complementary manner. In the periods during and after the elections, the presence of public contracts disappears, leaving only framework contracts of symbolic value. These data suggest that the municipal administration has concentrated the signing of large and visible projects on the eve of the elections, while it has almost completely stopped the usual activity after the election day.



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 analyzed municipalities 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.

VUSHTRRIA

Tipi	Kontratë kornizë	Kontratë publike	Total
Para zgjedhjeve 2025	386,015	11,817,060	12,203,075
Gjatë zgjedhjeve 2025	150,000	0	150,000
Pas zgjedhjeve 2025	3,372	0	3,372

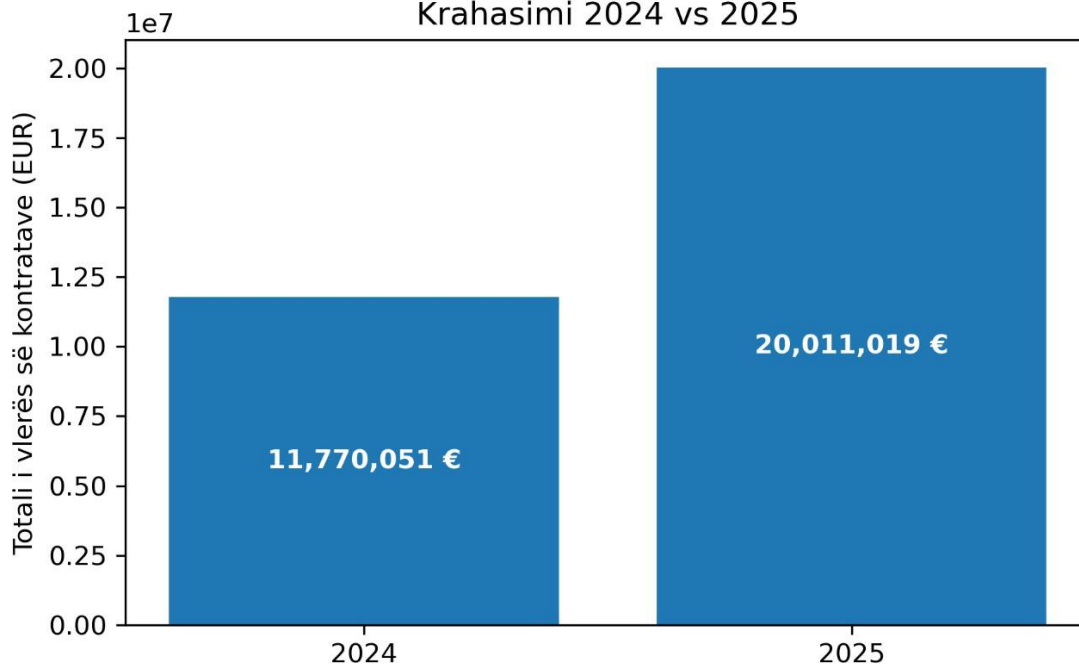
The analysis of the monthly performance of contract signing for the period 2021–2025 in the Municipality of Vushtrri (figure: Monthly performance of contract value – Vushtrri 2021–2025) presents a clear cyclical pattern, with high peaks of contracting appearing sporadically, but more pronounced in years when the political dynamics are more intense. For most of the period 2021–2023, procurement expenditures fluctuate at low and stable levels, often below the threshold of 200,000 euros per month. This is typical for municipalities with limited budgets and an administrative pace burdened by standard public procurement processes, which require in-depth documentation, agreed plans and numerous verifications before signing contracts.

However, entering 2024 and especially the election year 2025, some extraordinary peaks in the value of contracts are observed. In some months of 2024, figures exceeding 2–7 million euros appear, while in 2025 the levels reach almost 10 million euros in a single month. These peaks constitute notable deviations from the usual pattern of previous years and indicate that contracting is not evenly distributed throughout the year, but is concentrated in a few specific months.



One possible interpretation of this phenomenon is related to the dynamics of the election year, which is often accompanied by increased investment activity by municipalities to complete projects visible to the public. However, to be methodologically correct, it should be noted that this pattern cannot be attributed entirely or exclusively to the election year, as other administrative factors play an important role. Prolonged procurement procedures – including complaints to the PRB, re-runs of tenders, delays in approving budget plans, or the lack of technical staff in municipalities – 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 illusion of political intensification, even when the explanation is mainly procedural.

Vlera e kontratave - VUSHTRRIA
Krahasimi 2024 vs 2025



The comparison between 2024 and 2025 (figure: Value of contracts – Vushtrri 2024 vs 2025) shows an increase of about 70%, where from €11,770,051 in 2024, the total value of contracts increases to €20,011,019 in the election year 2025. This is a significant change and constitutes one of the largest increases recorded over the years for Vushtrri.

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, increase capital expenditures to materialize tangible projects – such as roads, sidewalks, sewers, or visible interventions in infrastructure – that are perceived positively by citizens.

However, to maintain analytical integrity, it should be noted that increased spending in an election year is not automatic evidence that contracting is politically motivated. Other factors that may explain this increase include:

- the finalization of projects accumulated from previous years,
- the acceleration of procurement processes after inevitable delays,
- the closure of multi-year capital project cycles,
- changes in budget priorities for 2025,
- the increase in government grants to municipalities,
- pressures from fiscal deadlines.

However, even taking into account these procedural factors, the intensity and concentration of contractions in 2025 exceeds the normal rhythms of non-election years, suggesting a combination of technical and cyclical-political motivations.

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 reports at the central level, municipalities often face difficulties in planning and executing capital investments. In some cases, audits have identified delays in project implementation, which are often related to property issues, lack of technical documentation, or poor planning of project phases. Municipal performance reports show that failure to prepare the prerequisites for implementation often leads to delays and carryover of projects to subsequent years..

Audits have also identified cases of incorrect use of budget categories, which means that some payments were not made through the correct economic category. This practice is seen as a violation of public accounting standards and creates uncertainty in the presentation of the municipality's financial situation. Also, in some cases, the failure to register capital assets in a timely manner was highlighted, which leads to an incomplete presentation of municipal assets and undermines financial transparency..

Budget progress reports have assessed that some municipalities have had difficulties in meeting the criteria related to performance grants, due to insufficient implementation of capital projects.

This shows that the capacities of local administration to manage large infrastructure projects remain limited and require continuous improvements.

2. Challenges in public procurement

According to ongoing assessments by the EU, KDI, and the National Audit Office, public procurement continues to be among the processes most exposed to deviations from integrity standards. Audits have identified cases of tenders drafted with technical specifications that may restrict competition, citing examples where technical descriptions refer to specific brands without the need for equivalence. This undermines competition and contradicts the fundamental principles of the Public Procurement Law.

A recurring finding in audits is the lack of proper documentation of contract management, which includes failure to record work progress and failure to use mandatory modules for electronic contract management. This weakens internal control, reduces transparency and makes accountability difficult.

At the national level, SIGMA assessments highlight that the capacities of contracting authorities – including municipalities – remain limited, particularly in managing large infrastructure contracts and in meeting monitoring and reporting requirements. Such administrative weaknesses facilitate delays, missed deadlines and a lack of adequate oversight.

3. Political context and election years

EU reports and analyses by local governance monitoring organisations have highlighted that public investment at the local level is often sensitive to political cycles. In many municipalities, election years are characterised by an increase in investment activity and contracting, while the following years often see a slowdown or under-implementation of projects. Although this phenomenon cannot necessarily be attributed solely to political motives, the reports highlight that budget cycles and lengthy procurement procedures have a complex impact on the pace of project implementation.

On the other hand, analyses of central-level funding to municipalities have raised concerns about inequality and a certain politicization in the distribution of capital investments. Reports by independent institutions and public monitoring organizations have pointed out cases where a disproportionate share of central funds has been directed towards municipalities led by the same political entities as the central government. These assessments do not always provide direct evidence of political interference, but they raise important concerns about public perception and standards of integrity.

4. Administrative and internal control challenges

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

EU reports also highlight that corruption and public integrity remain significant challenges in local governance, with particular emphasis on public procurement. Although data transparency has increased, publication of information is often in non-open formats (such as PDF), making it difficult to use the data for advanced monitoring.

Conclusions

The analysis of public procurement in the Municipality of Vushtrri during the 2025 election period confirms that the political cycle is significantly reflected in the pace and structure of contracting. The data show a significant increase in the volume of contracts in the election year, especially in the quarter before the election date, with a significant concentration of capital contracts in projects with high public visibility. This pattern is not limited to Vushtrri, but is also seen in other municipalities included in the project, suggesting that electoral dynamics are an important factor in investment decision-making at the local level.

The monthly performance of contracting for the period 2021–2025 shows a cyclical behavior, with high peaks in years of increased political intensity and relatively quiet periods in non-election years. These peaks mainly coincide with time windows when capital projects are concluded and new contracts are signed, creating the impression of a “front-loading” of spending before the elections. However, in line with the findings of the international literature and audit reports in Kosovo, the report assesses that part of this phenomenon is also related to administrative factors – such as lengthy procurement procedures, complaints, delays in providing technical documentation and budget approval – which lead to the accumulation of contracts at certain periods of the year.

In substantive terms, it is noticeable that the increase in spending in an election year is not limited to basic infrastructure functions, but also extends to other categories of spending that are not necessarily urgent. This includes cosmetic interventions in public spaces, renovations of buildings, and recreational projects with high visual impact. This spending orientation is in line with the patterns described in the reports of KDI and other monitoring organizations, which emphasize that capital investments are often used to project an image of performance to citizens, especially on the eve of elections.

At the same time, the report’s findings are placed in a broader context of structural weaknesses in financial management and public integrity. Reports by the National Audit Office, the European Commission and SIGMA/OECD repeatedly highlight challenges such as poor planning of capital projects, failure to record assets, incorrect use of budget categories and limited procurement capacities in municipalities. The behaviour observed in Vushtrri during the 2025 election year is therefore part of a broader picture where the risk of deviations from integrity standards is present also outside the electoral context.

Finally, the report concludes that, while it cannot be claimed that every increase in capital spending in an election year is politically motivated, the combination of a strong increase in pre-election contracting, the dominance of high-visibility projects, and identified weaknesses in financial management creates an environment of heightened risk for the integrity of public procurement. This makes it necessary to strengthen planning, internal control, transparency, and citizen monitoring mechanisms, so that capital investments are oriented as much as possible to the real long-term needs of the community and as little as possible to the short-term political cycle.

Recommendations

1. Strengthening capital investment planning

- The Municipality of Vushtrri should develop a multi-year capital investment plan based on measurable objectives and clear development priorities, avoiding the disproportionate concentration of projects during election periods.
- Prior to the launch of projects, technical, property and administrative prerequisites must be ensured, to reduce delays and project carryovers in subsequent years.
- Monitoring of capital budget execution should be carried out regularly and reports should be published for the Municipal Assembly and the public, identifying delayed projects and the respective reasons.

2. More careful procurement management in election years

- The municipality should adopt internal guidelines to avoid the concentration of large contracts in the period before elections, except in cases justified by real need and legal deadlines.
- For every major project launched in the pre-election period, a justification note should be drafted that is linked to the municipality's planning documents.
- The use of technical specifications that restrict competition (such as references to certain brands) should be avoided, in accordance with EU standards and the Public Procurement Law.

3. Përmirësimi i kapaciteteve dhe kontroleve të brendshme

- Training for procurement and contract management staff should be regular, including technical modulation, risk management and capital asset reporting.
- Full use of electronic modules for contract management should be ensured, improving traceability and internal control.
- The Internal Audit Unit should have a clear mandate to specifically monitor capital procurement during election periods and report directly, in a transparent manner, to the Municipal Assembly.

4. Increasing transparency and citizen participation

- The municipality should publish in an open format all procurement data and the list of capital projects, in accordance with the transparency standards recommended by KDI, SIGMA and the EU.
- For capital projects with high financial or social impact, it is recommended to conduct public consultations and continuous communication with citizens.
- Cooperation with civil society organizations should be strengthened to monitor project implementation and publish periodic progress reports.

5. Recommendations at the central level

- The responsible ministries should implement the repeated recommendations of the NAO, the EC and SIGMA to strengthen capital investment management and procurement capacities in municipalities.

- Performance grant schemes could integrate indicators that measure not only the rate of expenditure execution, but also their balanced distribution throughout the year and compliance with integrity standards.
- National guidelines for managing expenditure in election years should be developed to minimize the risks of politically motivated investment distortions.

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