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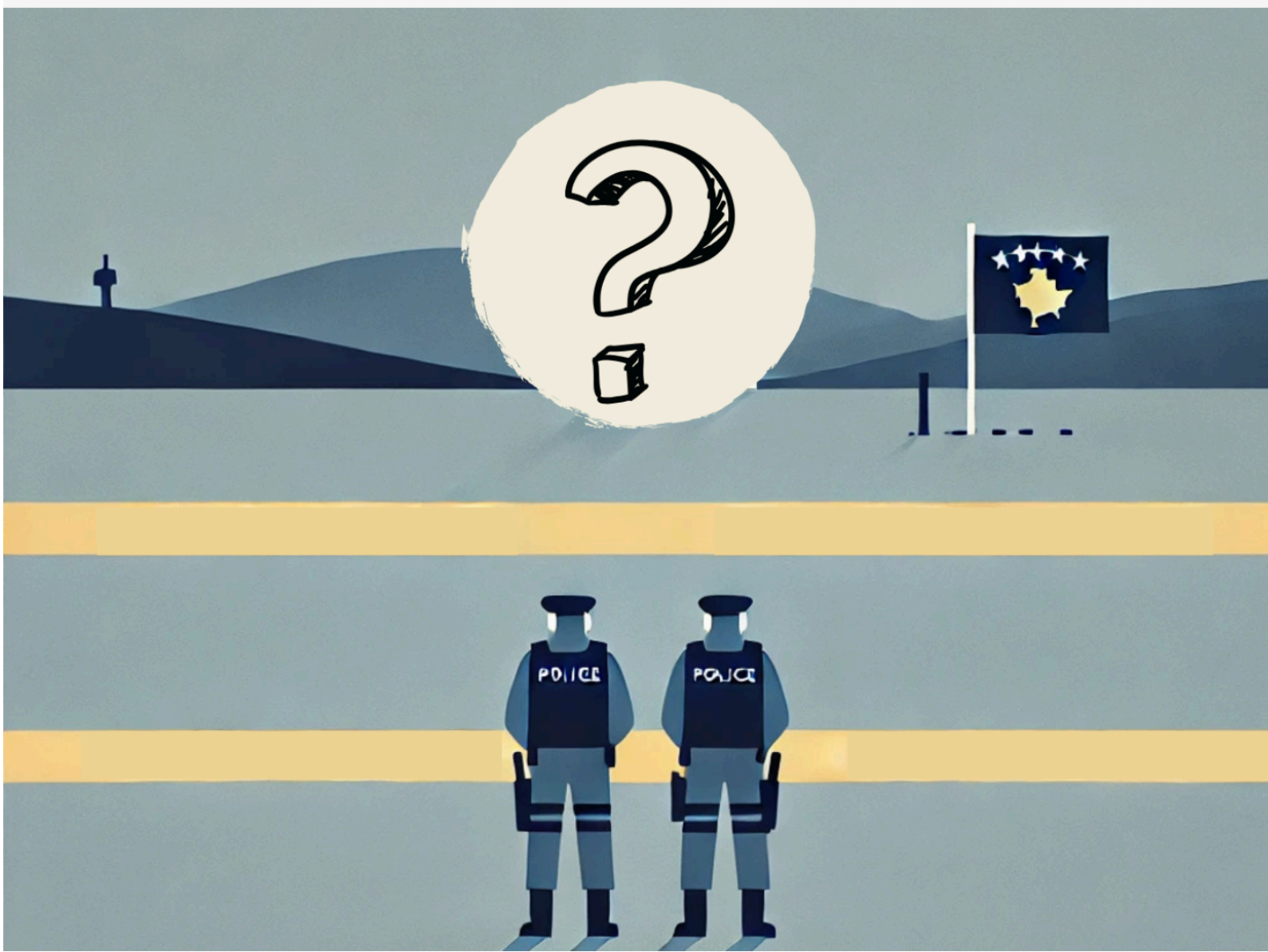
THE UNSOLVED KNOT

STEPS TOWARDS SECURITY AND STABILITY IN THE NORTH

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ABOUT PREVENT

Established in 2024, the Institute for Security and Resilience - PREVENT aims for a Kosovo where security, stability, and the rule of law are upheld through innovative and collaborative approaches. By promoting resilience and inclusivity, PREVENT strives to create a society where individuals, communities, and institutions work together to address complex security challenges.

PREVENT's mission is to build resilient communities by providing comprehensive support and expertise in policy development, advocacy, and project implementation. PREVENT focuses on empowering marginalized groups, particularly youth, through data-driven research, capacity-building initiatives, and offering expertise, promoting sustainable development, and actively combating violent extremism.

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1. Introduction

This report aims to provide an analytical overview of the terrorist attacks in northern Kosovo and the challenges of the Kosovo institutions in expanding sovereignty and state authority in this part that has remained outside the institutional control of Kosovo since the post-war period. The report highlights that the main obstacle in this regard is Serbia with its actions and influences that constantly hinder, whether through hybrid threats or other direct forms, any efforts by the Kosovo state authorities to extend sovereignty and restore the rule of law in the north for all citizens regardless of which community they belong to.

The most serious obstacles so far are the terrorist attacks in northern Kosovo, namely the Serbian terrorist attack in the village of Banjska, Zvečan, on September 24, 2023, and the second attack that took place on the Ibër-Lepenc water supply aqueduct, in the village of Varaga, Zubin Potok, on November 29, 2024. These attacks were preceded by a number of other criminal and terrorist attacks, albeit of lesser intensity, against the Kosovo Police and other state institutions to undermine the rule of law in the northern municipalities of Kosovo. This includes the campaign sponsored by Serbia and implemented by the political entity Srpska Lista in boycotting Kosovo institutions by the Serbian employees of public institutions, namely the Police, the Prosecution, the Judicial, the resignation of the City Mayors of northern municipalities, the boycott of the municipal elections for the election of the City Mayors of northern municipalities and the threat of the Srpska Lista, assisted with the full support of official Belgrade, against citizens of the Serbian community not to vote in the municipal elections, followed with the violent protests in 2023 in northern municipalities where members of the Kosovo Police, KFOR and the media were attacked by Serbian criminal groups.

Regarding the terrorist attack in Banjska, the Kosovo Special Prosecution Office filed an indictment on September 11, 2024 against 45 individuals involved in this attack. The terrorist attack in Banjska was led by the Vice-president of the Srpska Lista, Milan Radojčić, indicted for several criminal offenses in Kosovo, subject to sanction and imposed on the blacklist of the United States of America and the United Kingdom, and under INTERPOL's arrest warrant. He is still at large and unpunished in Serbia despite the fact that he publicly admitted that he has organized the attack in Banjska. According to the Special Prosecution, Radojčić is suspected of financing terrorism and money laundering, while in Banjska he and his armed terrorist group intended to secede northern Kosovo and annex it to Serbia. The organization of the terrorist attack in Banjska, according to the Prosecution's indictment, dates back to 2021 during a meeting in Raška, Serbia, between Radojčić and the Serbian president and senior Serbian state structures.

Although the life in northern Kosovo begun gradually to return to normality after the withdraw of Radojčić's Serbian terrorist group from Banjska and a year after this attack, the security situation would start to deteriorate during the month of November 2024 with two terrorist attacks in Zvečan (at the police station and the municipal building) culminating with the terrorist attack on the Ibër-Lepenc canal in

Zubin-Potok, where a heavy explosive weighing up to 20 kilograms exploded. This was the largest terrorist attack on critical infrastructure in Kosovo since the post-war period (1999), considering the dual strategic importance of this aqueduct for Kosovo: the water supply of several Kosovo cities through Lake Ujman and its importance for cooling Kosovo's power plants. This was an attempt to create a severe water supply crisis and cause energy chaos in the country. Kosovo institutions reacted rapidly to restore the damage in Ibër-Lepenc, thus avoiding a potential water and electricity supply crisis. The Kosovo government has held Serbia responsible for orchestrating and directing this attack through the now declared terrorist organizations from Kosovo that operated in the north of the country, the "Civil Protection- Civilna zaštita" and the "North Brigade - Brigada Sever". This terrorist attack was condemned in the strongest terms by the international community, while official Belgrade denied involvement in the case. In this case, law enforcement and justice authorities in Kosovo are conducting investigations, and the first suspects who carried out this terrorist attack in Ibër-Lepenc have already been identified.

The report assesses that Kosovo institutions have not yet managed to strengthen social dialogue with Serbs living in the northern part of Kosovo, to address their concerns regarding security. It emphasizes that better organized cooperation with the Serbian community in this area would make it possible to reduce the opportunities for criminal and extremist groups to operate in the north, preventing the spread of fear and panic among the civilian population. The report further assesses that the Government of Kosovo should intensify efforts to implement economic development projects in the northern municipalities of Kosovo, to strengthen the integration of this community into the social and economic life of Kosovo.

This report was compiled primarily based on publicly available, official documents, statements by political leaders in Kosovo and Serbia, as well as media reports during the period 2022-2024 and official documents of Kosovo institutions related to the topic subject of debate. In addition, the report is based on the database of the PREVENT Institute, which collected data related to the security situation in Kosovo with a focus on the north of the country.

2. Key findings

One year after the Serbian terrorist attack in Banjska

- More than a year after the Serbian terrorist attack in the village of Banjska, Zvečan, the leader of this group, Milan Radojčić, continues to remain unpunished and harbored in Serbia despite admitting that he was the organizer of the armed terrorist attack in Banjska. Official Belgrade has refused to extradite Radojčić to Kosovo to face trial in connection with the terrorist attack in Banjska and other criminal offenses charged with of committing in Kosovo.
- On September 11, 2024, the Kosovo Special Prosecution Office filed an indictment for the terrorist attack in Banjska organized by the Serbian terrorist group led by Radojčić. The prosecution filed an indictment against 45 persons for the terrorist attack in Banjska, including Radojčić. The latter is on the sanctions list of the United States of America and Great Britain, while INTERPOL has announced him as a wanted person for the terrorist attack in Banjska.
- The indictment of the Special Prosecution charges the Serbian terrorist group as suspects of committing two criminal offenses: “Committing a terrorist offense” and “Criminal offenses against the constitutional order and security of the Republic of Kosovo” sanctioned by the Criminal Code of Kosovo. Regarding Radojčić specifically, he is suspected of having committed two criminal offenses during the attack in Banjska: “Facilitation and financing of commission of terrorism” and “Money laundering”.

How the attack in Banjska happened according to the indictment of the Special Prosecution of Kosovo.?

- According to the indictment, the goal of this armed terrorist group in Banjska was the secession of the north of Kosovo, namely the municipalities inhabited by the majority Serbian population and the annexation of this part of the territory to Serbia, where, as a result of the violence used, police officer Afrim Bunjaku was killed and the lives of other police officers and the civilian population were endangered.
- Furthermore, the planning of the terrorist attack in northern Kosovo by the armed group led by Radojčić, according to the indictment of the Special Prosecution, was prepared and organized at least two years before the terrorist attack in Banjska occurred, from October 2021. The indictment indicates a meeting held in Rashka, Serbia, on October 13, 2021, between the leaders of the highest state institutions of Serbia, with presence of Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and the representatives of illegal Serbian structures that were operating in the northern municipalities of Kosovo at the time, including Milan Radojčić and Vladimir Radivojević, who were present at this meeting.
- In the meeting, Radojčić and Radivojević demanded the arming and the beginning of armed resistance against the institutions of the Republic of

Kosovo in the four northern municipalities. In addition, Radojčić, threatening the state security institutions in Kosovo, said “that next time we will defend ourselves! Until the end! Until death”.

- According to the Special Prosecution Office in Kosovo, the statements of the then vice-president of the Srpska Lista during the meeting imply that he had the major role in leading criminal groups in northern Kosovo, that he was the organizer of all events and incidents that occurred in Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo, and confirms or warns of the intention for future organizations and resistance “until death”, which includes various attacks in the north of the country from December 2022 to the terrorist attack in Banjska on September 24, 2023. The indictment states that these attacks were organized “by the head of illegal structures in northern Kosovo, the defendant Milan Radojčić”.

Terrorist attacks in Zvečan and on the Ibër-Lepenc water supply aqueduct in Zubin Potok

- Although after the terrorist attack in Banjska, the north of the country again became the target of terrorist attacks. At the end of November 2024, unknown persons attacked the police station in Zvečan and the Zvečan Municipality building with hand grenades, causing mainly material damage. These attacks were qualified as “criminal and terrorist acts” by the Kosovo Government. Furthermore, for the attack against the police station in Zvečan, senior Kosovo Government officials stated that the suspect is Nemanja Radivojević, a close ally to Milan Radojčić.
- A day after the attack on the Zvečan Municipality building, in northern Kosovo, specifically on the Ibër-Lepenc canal located in the village of Varage, Zubin Potok, the largest terrorist attack against Kosovo's critical infrastructure since the end of the war in 1999 would occur. This channel was the target of a serious terrorist attack with the detonation of an explosive which, according to the Kosovo Police, around 15-20 kilograms were activated with a mechanical detonator with a slow-burning fuse. The Ibër-Lepenc Canal is of strategic importance for Kosovo: supplying with water several cities in Kosovo and serves to cool the power plants of the Kosovo Energy Corporation, while this attack was an attempt to create a serious crisis in Kosovo regarding the supply of water and electricity.
- The Kosovo Security Council accused Serbia of orchestrating the terrorist attack on the Ibër-Lepenc canal. The statement released by the Kosovo Government regarding the Security Council meeting states that “this latest attack was orchestrated by the Serbian state, which has the capacity for such a criminal and terrorist attack. Elements of the terrorist organizations “Civil Protection- Civilna zaštita” and “North Brigade - Brigada Sever” and the criminal mastermind Milan Radojčić, under the direction of the President and Government of Serbia, planned and trained in Serbia for such professional attacks. The Security Council has approved additional measures to strengthen

security around critical facilities and services in the country, engaging the Kosovo Police and the Kosovo Security Force in this regard.

- the terrorist attack in Ibër-Lepenc was strongly condemned by the international community. The European Union called it a terrorist attack and a despicable act of sabotage on Kosovo's civilian infrastructure. Whilst, the US ambassador to Kosovo, although he concluded that It is still early days to talk about the perpetrator or know who is behind the attack in Ibër-Lepenc, but added that "no group or country can be ruled out". On the other hand, official Belgrade reacted by denying responsibility for the terrorist attack in Ibër-Lepenc.
- After this terrorist attack, Kosovo Police during raids in northern Kosovo found heavy weaponry and various uniforms, more precisely, more than 200 military uniforms, 6 rocket launchers or Zolja rockets, 3 hand grenades, 2 AK47 rifles, 1 revolver, ammunition of various calibers, weapon parts, detonators for initiating explosives, military helmets, masks, knives, cash in euros and dinars and other equipment were seized. According to the Police, most of the people whose properties were raided and searched are suspected of belonging to the "Civil Protection- Civilna zaštita" organization, declared terrorist organization by the Government of Kosovo in 2023.
- The police have arrested several suspects in connection with this terrorist attack, while the Court ordered a one-month detention for two of the arrested people. According to the investigations of the Special Prosecution, the suspect in the attack on the Ibër-Lepenc canal is Jovan Vićentijević, who, in co-perpetration with the other suspect, Dragiša Vićentijević, deliberately damaged public water supply equipment and committed the terrorist criminal offense by using explosives and explosive devices directly on the canal section and on the concrete infrastructure, activating the explosives in Ibër-Lepenc.
- According to data from the Government of Kosovo and the indictment of the Special Prosecution of the Republic of Kosovo, the members of the "Civil Protection- Civilna zaštita" who participated in the armed attack in the village of Banjska in September 2022 are directly related with the state structures of Serbia with valid employment contracts. These individuals are on the payroll of the Republic of Serbia and act under the direct instructions of the Serbian government structures. Their actions have raised deep concerns about Serbia's interference in Kosovo's internal affairs and the role these structures are playing in destabilizing the situation in the north of the country.

3. Brief analysis of the terrorist attack in Banjska

In September 2023, Kosovo institutions, respectively the Kosovo Police, encountered with the largest serious terrorist attack against the legal and constitutional order of Kosovo by a Serbian organized criminal and terrorist group in northern Kosovo. This attack was led by the Serbian politician operating in northern Kosovo, Milan Radojčić, accused of several criminal offenses in Kosovo in recent years by the Kosovo justice authorities.¹ The terrorist attack took place in the village of Banjska, Zvečan, and during this time, Radojčić was the vice president of the Srpska Lista, a Serbian political entity in Kosovo under the direct control of Belgrade to control the Serbian community in Kosovo.²

The attack in Banjska took place in the early morning hours of September 24, 2023, with the entry of the Serbian terrorist group into Kosovo from Serbia through illegal mountain roads in an organized manner.³ Based on information and evidence collected by the Kosovo Police, the terrorist group joined trainings at military barracks ranges in Serbia until a few days before the attack. They moved from Novi Pazar, Serbia, in the evening hours of September 23, 2023, and in the early morning hours of September 24, illegally crossed the border between Kosovo and Serbia. To cross the border, they used an illegal passage near the border crossing point called “Izvor,” which is the closest point to the city of Novi Pazar in Serbia and the village of Banjska in the municipality of Zvečan.⁴ Upon entering Kosovo, the terrorist group settled in the village of Banjska, a strategic location connecting the municipalities of Leposavič and Zvečan with North Mitrovica. This position chosen for the attack enabled the group to quickly access their objectives and created conditions for rapid connection with Serbian forces stationed on the territory of Serbia.⁵ The decision for this positioning demonstrates detailed planning and close cooperation with Serbian military structures, raising serious concerns for security and stability in the region.

The terrorist group placed two trucks with no license plates blocking the road to the village bridge in Banjska.⁶ This was noticed by the Kosovo Police, who were patrolling that part of the country. In an attempt to clear the blocked road, the Kosovo Police were attacked by the Serbian armed group and as a result, the Police

¹ Koha Net. [Radojčić admits organizing terrorist attack in Banjska](#). September 29, 2023.

² Kallxo. [Milan Radojčić among Serbian soldiers and military artillery](#). October 26, 2023.

³ Special Prosecution of the Republic of Kosovo. PPS.nr.75/2023, 11 September 2024, Indictment for the attack in Banjska.

⁴ Idem.

⁵ Idem.

⁶ Koha Net. [A Kosovo police officer and three insurgents are killed in tensions in the north](#). September 24, 2023.

Sergeant, Afrim Bunjaku, was killed in the line of duty,⁷ while another police officer was wounded and three Kosovo Police officers were injured.⁸

Following this attack against the Kosovo Police, around 30 heavily armed and masked individuals from the Serbian terrorist group fled towards the Banjska Monastery to hide in this religious compound and from there continuously attacked the Kosovo Police from a distance.⁹ Three of the insurgents of the Serbian terrorist group were killed in a shootout with Kosovo Police¹⁰ and three other insurgents of this group were arrested by the Police.¹¹ This terrorist attack ended at noon on September 24, 2023, when the vast majority of the Serbian terrorist group escaped towards Serbia via mountain roads.¹²

This terrorist attack was strongly condemned by the state institutions of Kosovo, according to which Kosovo faced a terrorist and professional criminal organization that planned and prepared the attack. As Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti stated, this group was not a smuggling gang, but a mercenary structure, supported politically, financially and logistically by Belgrade. Prime Minister Kurti has concluded that Serbia and its president, Aleksandar Vučić, are behind the armed attack in Banjska.¹³

Meanwhile, the United States Embassy in Kosovo, in its response, strongly condemned this attack, supporting the Kosovo Police, which has full legitimacy to enforce the rule of law in Kosovo. The American Embassy had called that the perpetrators of this attack to be brought to justice. Following the US Embassy in Kosovo, other international embassies and missions had also reacted against the terrorist attack.¹⁴

Kosovo Police confiscated the arsenal of weapons, uniforms and logistical equipment that had been found in Banjska and belonged to this organized terrorist group.¹⁵ Furthermore, the Kosovo Police had also found documents belonging to Milan Radojčić, which, according to Kosovo institutions, prove that he had been a direct participant in this attack.¹⁶ In addition, a few days after the attack, the Kosovo Ministry of Internal Affairs published video footage clearly showing Radojčić armed

⁷ Idem.

⁸ Special Prosecution of the Republic of Kosovo. PPS.nr.75/2023, September 11, 2024, Indictment for the attack in Banjska.

⁹ Koha Net. [A Kosovo police officer and three insurgents are killed in tensions in the north](#). September 24, 2023.

¹⁰ Radio Free Europe. [The arrested in Banjska. "citizens of Serbia"](#). September 25, 2023.

¹¹ Special Prosecution of the Republic of Kosovo. PPS.nr.75/2023, September 11, 2024, Indictment for the attack in Banjska.

¹² Koha Net. [Video footage showing Serbian attackers fleeing Banjska Monastery](#). September 26, 2023.

¹³ Betimi për Drejtësi- Oath for Justice. [One year since the terrorist attack in Banjska - What happened the day Sergeant Afrim Bunjaku was killed until the indictment was filed?](#) September 24, 2024.

¹⁴ US Embassy in Kosovo. [Statement by Ambassador Jeffrey M. Hovenier](#). September 24, 2023.

¹⁵ Koha Net. [The arsenal of weapons found in Banjska, in pictures](#). September 25, 2023.

¹⁶ Telegrafi. [What does Radojčić's document contain, found during the action in the north? i?](#)

at the Banjska Monastery along with other insurgents when the terrorist attack took place.¹⁷

Serbia was under international pressure regarding the Serbian terrorist attack in Banjska under the command of Radojčić. The latter is politically close affiliated to Serbian President Vučić, with whom he has consulted and met repeatedly in Serbia regarding the activities of the Srpska Lista in Kosovo.¹⁸ Faced with the evidence and facts published by state security institutions in Kosovo that the vice president of the Srpska Lista had directed the terrorist attack in northern Kosovo, Radojčić publicly admitted that he was the organizer of the terrorist attack in Banjska, in a statement read by his lawyer in Serbia on September 29, 2023.¹⁹ Through this public statement, his lawyer announced that Radojčić had submitted an "irrevocable resignation" from the position of vice-president of the Srpska Lista, respectively his formal resignation from this function came a few days after he had organized and led the terrorist attack in northern Kosovo.²⁰

Though, a speedy trial was organized in Serbia against Radojčić, initially being arrested on October 3, 2023 by Serbian police,²¹ but being released from custody the next day (October 4, 2023). The Serbian High Public Prosecutor's Office proposed a measure of detention, but this was rejected by the High Court in Belgrade. The Serbian court had only imposed a measure prohibiting Radojčić against leaving Serbia without the court's approval, forbade him from going to Kosovo, his travel document, namely his passport, was temporarily confiscated and warned that he could be placed in detention if he violated these measures.²²

Meanwhile, less than a year after the armed Serbian terrorist attack in Banjska, on September 11, 2024, the Kosovo Special Prosecution Office filed an indictment against 45 persons for the terrorist attack in Banjska, including Milan Radojčić.²³

a. The forms of support and training of terrorist groups from Serbia

Serbia, through its state institutions and illegal structures, has mobilized and supported armed groups with the aim of creating tensions in the four northern municipalities of Kosovo. These Serbian state structures instructed and supported individuals and organizations such as the "Civil Protection- Civilna zaštita" and the "North Brigade - Brigada Sever" with the aim of destabilizing Kosovo, particularly in the four northern municipalities of the country. This action was intended to hinder the enforcement of law and order in the north, creating opportunities for destabilizing actions. Such activities comprised armed attacks against KFOR, the

¹⁷ Koha Net. [Svečla shows images of Radojčić in Banjska](#). September 26, 2023.

¹⁸ Telegrafi. [Milan Radoiçi alongside Aleksandar Vučić in the meeting threatening Kosovo](#).

¹⁹ Koha Net. [Radojčić admits organizing terrorist attack in Banjska](#). September 29, 2023.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Telegrafi. [Milan Radoicic arrested in Serbia, ordered to 48 hours in detention](#).

²² Voice of America. [Milan Radoičić released from detention, banned from entering Kosovoë](#). October 4, 2023.

²³ Radio Free Europe. [Indictment filed against 45 people for the attack in Banjska – including Radoičić](#). September 11, 2023.

Kosovo Police and the civilian population. Serbia has provided continuous support to criminal and extremist structures operating on the territory of Kosovo, contributing to maintaining a climate of insecurity and tension. The organization, support and sponsorship of terrorist groups from Serbia have been carried out in numerous and sophisticated ways. These actions included:

- Planning for the creation of this terrorist group;
- Financing extremist groups;
- Providing training to members of extremist groups such as Civil Protection;
- Equipment and supply of weapons and combat ammunition, most of which can only be found in military barracks;
- Providing logistical and intelligence assistance;
- Providing support for military planning of operations, divided into phases for the invasion of the north, presented on military maps with tactical and operational details;
- Protection and security of premises (shelters), allowing the group to operate within the territory of Serbia and in the border area with Kosovo, being uniformed and armed;

These are just some of the many forms of support that Serbia has provided and is providing to extremist groups, which aim to destabilize Kosovo, especially in the northern part of the country. The organization, support and sponsorship of terrorist groups from Serbia have been carried out in numerous and sophisticated ways, including a wide range of activities to ensure the development and empowerment of these groups. The activities have included planning and creating such groups, financing their operations, and providing the necessary training for new recruits. This process has been supported by the Serbian authorities and military and police structures, which have provided the means and logistical support for terrorist operations, contributing to the empowerment of these groups.

One of the main ways of support was the training of group members at the military and training bases of the Serbian Army and Gendarmerie. The training encompassed the use of weapons, military drills and other operations related to combat actions and terrorist tactics. These trainings have been conducted mainly at training compounds such as "Pasuljanske Livade", where groups have been prepared to use heavy weapons, explosive devices and drones. Further, the insurgent groups conducted intensive training in the Pešteri military complex and in the Raška military barracks, in order to strengthen their capacities in the mountainous and difficult terrains of Kosovo and Serbia.

After the declaration of the organizations "Civil Protection" and "Northern Brigade" as terrorist organizations by the institutions of the Republic of Kosovo, most of the members of these groups have fled to Serbia. There, they continued intensive combat

and military training at military bases located in Serbia. A key role in this process was played by Milan Radojčić, who offered high salaries to individuals who agreed to remain part of the "Civil Protection" structures."²⁴ This effort aimed to strengthen the ties and operational continuity of these organizations, despite them being declared terrorist organizations by the Kosovo authorities. Furthermore, these individuals have intensified combat preparations with the aim of organizing well-coordinated attacks against the institutions and constitutional order of Kosovo.²⁵ According to data from the Government of Kosovo and the indictment of the Special Prosecution of the Republic of Kosovo, the members of the "Civil Protection" who participated in the armed attack in the village of Banjska in September 2022 are directly related with the state structures of Serbia with valid employment contracts. These individuals are on the payroll of the Republic of Serbia and operate under the direct instructions of Serbian government structures. Their actions have raised deep concerns about Serbia's interference in Kosovo's internal affairs and the role these structures are playing in destabilizing the situation in the north of the country.²⁶ This development constitutes a serious challenge to the security and stability of Kosovo, prompting the need for coordinated action between local institutions and international partners to address threats from groups supported by foreign state structures.

b. A year after the attack in Banjska: what the investigations of the Kosovo judicial institutions say?

It is worth noting that the plotter of the terrorist attack in Banjska is on the black list of the United States of America since 2021,²⁷ as well of the United Kingdom ²⁸ in 2022 for corruption and organized crime. Moreover, in December 2023, the media in Kosovo, citing the Minister of Communities and Returns of the Government of Kosovo, Nenad Rašić, announced that the International Crime Police Organization, otherwise known as INTERPOL, had issued a "Red notice", respectively issuing arrest warrant for Radojčić in connection with the terrorist attack in Banjska.²⁹

However, the leaders of Kosovo's institutions have declaratively requested Radojčić's extradition to Kosovo several times,³⁰ but this has been rejected by Belgrade.³¹ Furthermore, the Assembly of Kosovo, through a resolution adopted on September 28, 2023, has, among other things, requested "an international investigation into the Republic of Serbia regarding the organization of terrorist activities and the continued existence of training camps for terrorist groups on the territory of Serbia."³²

²⁴ Special Prosecution of the Republic of Kosovo. PPS.nr.75/2023, 11 September 2024, Indictment for the attack in Banjska.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Balkan Insight. [US Imposes Sanctions on Controversial Kosovo Serb Businessman](#). December 8, 2021.

²⁸ UK Government - Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. [UK sanctions target 30 corrupt political figures, human rights violators and perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence around the world](#). December 9, 2022.

²⁹ Koha Net. [INTERPOL-issues a warrant notice for Radojčić](#). December 7, 2023.

³⁰ Radio Free Europe. [Svećla: We will demand the extradition of Radojčić and not only him](#). September 29, 2023.

³¹ Telegrafi. [Dačić reiterates: It is impossible to extradite Radojčić. Serbia does not recognize Kosovo](#).

³² Radio Free Europe. [Kosovo adopts resolution for international investigation into attacks in Banjska](#). September 28, 2023.

The indictment of the Kosovo Special Prosecution charges the Serbian terrorist group with two criminal offenses ³³:

- Well-founded suspicion that they have committed the criminal offense, “Commission of the terrorist offense” sanctioned by Article 129 paragraph 3 in conjunction with paragraph 1 in conjunction with Article 128 par.1, points 1.1, 1.3, 1.7 and 1.10 of the Criminal Code No. 06/L-074 of the Republic of Kosovo
- Well-founded suspicion that they have committed the criminal offense, “Aggravated offenses against the constitutional order or security of the Republic of Kosovo” sanctioned by Article 126 paragraph 1, sub-paragraphs 1.1 and 1.2 in conjunction with Article 118 of the Criminal Code No. 06/L-074 of the Republic of Kosovo.

As far as Radojčić is concerned, the indictment for the terrorist attack in Banjska states that there is a well-founded suspicion that he has committed several criminal acts ³⁴:

- There is a well-founded suspicion that he has committed the criminal offense, "Facilitation and financing of the commission of terrorism" sanctioned by Article 131 of the Criminal Code No. 06/L-074 of the Republic of Kosovo, in connection with Article 57 of Law No. 05/L -096 on the Prevention of Money Laundering and Combating the Terrorist Financing.
- There is a well-founded suspicion that he has committed the criminal offense of "Money Laundering" sanctioned by Article 302 of the Criminal Code No. 06/L-074 of the Republic of Kosovo, in connection with Article 56, paragraph 1, subparagraph 1.1 of the Law No. 05/L -096 on the Prevention of Money Laundering and Combating the Terrorist Financing.

According to investigations conducted by the Special Prosecution of Kosovo, the aim of this armed terrorist group was " the secession of the north part of the territory of the Republic of Kosovo, namely the municipalities inhabited by the majority Serbian population, and the annexation of this part of the territory to Serbia, in which case, as a result of the violence used, police officer Afrim Bunjaku was killed and the lives of other police officers and the civilian population were endangered.”³⁵

The 158-page indictment highlighted that during the years 2017-2023, Radojčić, as the leader of the structured terrorist group, was indirectly involved in securing income and most of it was used for: heavy weaponry (purchase and supply of heavy weapons for the terrorist group), military uniforms (providing information for the group's participants), logistical support (providing equipment and logistical services for the group's operations) and payment of group participants for financing the participants of the terrorist group to ensure their continued involvement and

³³ Special Prosecution of the Republic of Kosovo. PPS.nr.75/2023, 11 September 2024, Indictment for the attack in Banjska.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

engagement in criminal activities in order to facilitate and finance terrorist acts, namely the creation of the necessary capacities for committing terrorist acts.³⁶

The planning of the terrorist attack in northern Kosovo by the armed group led by Radojčić, according to the indictment of the Special Prosecution, was prepared and organized at least two years earlier, precisely dating back to October 2021. The evidence provided in the indictment serves to reveal how the organization of this terrorist attack in northern Kosovo began. It mentions a meeting held in Rashka, Serbia, on October 13, 2021, between the leaders of the highest state institutions of Serbia, with presence of Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and the representatives of illegal Serbian structures that were operating in the northern municipalities of Kosovo at the time, including Milan Radojčić and Vladimir Radivojević, who were present at this meeting.³⁷

In the meeting, Radojčić and Radivojević “demanded the arming and the beginning of armed resistance against the institutions of the Republic of Kosovo in the four northern municipalities of North Mitrovica, Zvečan, Leposavić and Zubin-Potok”. In addition, Radojčić, threatening the state security institutions in Kosovo, stated “that next time we will defend ourselves, until the end, until death.” According to the Special Prosecution Office in Kosovo, the statements of the then vice-president of the Srpska Lista during the meeting imply that he had the major role in leading criminal groups in northern Kosovo, that he was the organizer of all events and incidents that occurred in Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo, and confirms or warns of the intention for future organizations and resistance “until death”. In the wake of his threats against Kosovo, on July 5, 2022, Radojčić appears in a video recording from Leposavić, declaring that “the real terror against the Serbian people is just beginning. For my people in the north and for all Serbs, and others too, let me tell you that I am here, I am back and you know what that means because there's no going back from here...”³⁸

The Special Prosecution's file regarding the terrorist attack in Banjska clearly establishes that these warnings and declarative threats were followed by various attacks in northern Kosovo from December 2022 until the day of the terrorist attack on September 24, 2023 in Banjska. The indictment indicates frequent attacks during this period with firearms against Kosovo police, the Municipal Election Commission and the Central Election Commission, attacks on the media and journalists, set up of the barricades and planting explosive devices on the barricades, attacks on KFOR soldiers, the discovery of weapons in June 2023 similar to the weapons used in the Banjska attack, followed with other attacks culminating in the terrorist and armed attack against the Kosovo Police in Banjska. The indictment states that these attacks were organized, as it is said, “by the head of illegal structures in northern Kosovo, the defendant Milan Radojčić.”³⁹

³⁶ Idem

³⁷ Idem.

³⁸ Idem.

³⁹ Idem

In the preparatory hearing for the terrorist attack in Banjska held on October 9, 2024 at the Basic Court in Pristina, two of the defendants, Vladimir Tolić and Blagoje Spasojević, did not enter pleas, while the other defendant, Dušan Spasojević, pleaded not guilty. These three defendants were arrested by the Kosovo Police, while the other defendants are on the run.⁴⁰

c. Terrorist attacks in the North after the Rashka meeting held on October 13, 2021

Following meetings held in Rashka, Serbia, on October 13, 2021, regarding the “armed resistance” planned to be organized against Kosovo institutions to prevent enforcement of the law and order to the northern municipalities of Kosovo, Serbian extremist organizations increased the intensity of armed attacks against Kosovo institutions, the civilian population, the Kosovo Police, KFOR, and EULEX, causing casualties among civilians and police officers, injuring many KFOR soldiers, damaging public and private property, and hindering the development of normal life in the northern part of Kosovo. Herein below you can see a chronology of armed extremist attacks, organized by the Civil Protection led by Milan Radojčić.

- On April 11, 2022, in the village of Zubç, Zubin Potok Municipality, the Kosovo Police was attacked with firearms. Reportedly there were no injuries or material damage in this attack.⁴¹
- On April 15, 2022, Kosovo Police patrol unit in Zubin Potok was attacked with a hand grenade. The attacks were carried out by extremist and radical groups in the north, with the aim of obstructing the official work of the Police. Reportedly there was no material damage or casualties from this attack.⁴²
- On April 16, 2022, two bomb explosions took place near Kosovo Police patrols in Leposaviç. The attacks were carried out by extremist and radical groups in the north, with the aim of obstructing the official work of the Police. Reportedly there was no material damage or casualties from this attack.⁴³
- On July 11, 2022, in an attempt to stop smuggling in the north of the country, 5 police officers of the Kosovo Police were injured in Zveçan, by individuals of the radical extremist group operating in the north of Kosovo.⁴⁴
- On December 6, 2022, a bomb explosion occurred in the MEC building, in the north of Kosovo. This attack was carried out by members of extremist groups active in the north, in order to prevent the organization of free elections in this part of the country. Reportedly there was material damage on this attack.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Koha Net. [Three Serbs arrested for terrorist attack in Banjska plead not guilty](#). October 9, 2024.

⁴¹ Official public data of the Kosovo Police December 2022

⁴² Official public data of the Kosovo Police December 2022

⁴³ Official public data of the Kosovo Police April 2022

⁴⁴ Official public data of the Kosovo Police July 2022

⁴⁵ Official public data of the Kosovo Police December 2022

- On December 9, 2022, in the village of Serbovc in the Municipality of Zveçan, extremist groups attacked the Kosovo Police, injuring a police officer. The aim of the attack was to prevent the organization of local elections in that part of the country.⁴⁶
- On December 10, 2022, in the north of Kosovo, individuals associated with extremist groups and with organized crime groups set up barricades on the main national roads leading to the border crossing in Jarinje and Bërnjak. This happened following the arrest of Dejan Pantiq, of Serbian nationality, accused of organizing the attack on the CIC in the north of Kosovo. Roadblocks with heavy vehicles prevented the movement of personnel of security institutions in the designated area and of citizens for a period of about 20 days.⁴⁷
- On December 11, 2022, a EULEX unit was attacked in Rudare, in the municipality of Zveçan, with a shock bomb in the north of Kosovo by criminal and extremist groups active in this area. The attack was intended to increase fear and insecurity in this part of the country.⁴⁸
- On December 20, 2022, it is reported that a bomb explosion occurred in the Boshnjak neighborhood in North Mitrovica. The bomb was planted by individuals of extremist groups in the north to obstruct the organization of municipal elections. There was no damage or casualties from this explosion. Reportedly that there was no material damage or casualties on this attack⁴⁹
- On May 29-30, 2023, violent protests were organized in the north of Kosovo. During these protests, individuals associated in extremist groups attacked KFOR soldiers with firearms and other tools. Over 90 KFOR soldiers sustained seriously and lightly injuries during the riot control process. These were one of the most violent protests that KFOR soldiers have encountered during the riot control process.⁵⁰

4. Terrorist attacks in the north after Banjska: terrorist acts in Zveçan and terrorist attack in Ibër-Lepenc

Although after the terrorist attack in Banjska, the security situation in northern Kosovo look to be calmer and the security factor had stabilized, but the north of the country once again became the target of terrorist attacks. This happened due to the fact that extremist groups did not accept the loss of control in this part of Kosovo and were attempting to change the reality in the north through attacks on critical state infrastructure. Their goal was to intimidate the country's institutions and forcing the withdrawal of Kosovo security forces from this region. At the end of November 2024, institutions in Zveçan were attacked, whereas there was also an attack with explosive on the Ibër-Lepenc aqueduct in the village of Varage, Zubin Potok. These events

⁴⁶ Official public data of the Kosovo Police December 2022

⁴⁷ Official public data of the Kosovo Police December 2022

⁴⁸ Official public data of the Kosovo Police December 2022

⁴⁹ Official public data of the Kosovo Police December 2022

⁵⁰ Official public data of the Kosovo Police May 2023

brought northern Kosovo back into the spotlight of Kosovo's security institutions, the international community, and local and foreign media. Each of these incidents is discussed in chronological order below.

a. November 26, 2024: Attack on the police station in Zvečan

Late on the evening hours of September 26, 2024, according to an official announcement by the Kosovo Police, a police station in Zvečan was attacked by unknown persons who threw grenades at the police station. As a result of this explosion, material damage was caused, and the State Prosecutor has ordered that the case be initiated as “causing general danger.”⁵¹

According to senior Kosovo government officials, the suspect in the attack on the police station in Zvečan is Nemanja Radivojević. Kosovo First Deputy Prime Minister Besnik Bislimi had claimed that Radivojević is Milan R. Radojčić's “right-hand man”.⁵²

b. November 28, 2024: Attack on the Municipality Building of Zvečan

A few days after the attack on the police station in Zvečan, another explosion occurred in Zvečan, more precisely in the municipal building. Similar to the explosion at the police station, this attack also occurred in the late hours of September 28, 2024, whereas a hand grenade was thrown at the Zvečan Municipality building. As a result of the attack, the municipal building and four cars belonging to Serbian citizens parked near this northern municipality were damaged. According to the Kosovo Police, it is suspected that the explosion was caused by an M-75 hand grenade, qualifying it as “causing general danger.”⁵³

These two attacks in Zvečan were condemned by the state institutions of Kosovo. The government of Kosovo described the explosions in Zvečan as “criminal and terrorist acts”, and that the attacks “in the north are an expression of the desperation and cowardice of criminal gangs led by Belgrade”.⁵⁴

Following these attacks, the Kosovo Police announced that it had increased “security measures in the country, including the north of the country where several serious criminal attacks/incidents have occurred in recent days.” According to the Police, these police operational plans will have focus on increasing police presence in the public, with more patrol units in critical areas, with more checkpoints and increasing

⁵¹ Radio Free Europe. [Police station in Zvečan attacked with two hand grenades](#). November 27, 2024.

⁵² Koha Net. [Bislimi: Radojčić's right-hand man, suspected of the hand grenade attack in Zvečan](#). November 30, 2024.

⁵³ Koha Net. [Zveçani Municipality building attacked with hand grenade](#). November 29, 2024.

⁵⁴ Idem.

cooperation with citizens. Furthermore, through these actions, the Police had announced that “it will aim to maintain public order and peace, prevent criminal acts, and investigate and bring to justice all those who dare to violate security, law, and constitutional order.”⁵⁵

However, less than 24 hours after the attack on the Zvečan Municipality building and enforcing these police actions, the largest terrorist attack on critical infrastructure in Kosovo since the post-war period (1999) had occurred, respectively on the Ibër-Lepenc canal, in the village of Varagë, Zubin Potok Municipality,⁵⁶ which is examined as a separate section below.

c. November 29, 2024: Terrorist attack on critical infrastructure on the Ibër-Lepenc canal

The Ibër-Lepenc water canal, located in Varaga, a village in the Zubin Potok Municipality, was the target of a serious terrorist attack on November 29, 2024.⁵⁷ This channel, of important strategic importance as a critical infrastructure asset in Kosovo, through Lake Ujman, provides water to several cities in Kosovo and serves as a vital component in cooling process for the power plants of the Kosovo Energy Corporation.⁵⁸ The attack on this canal in late November 2024, as reported by the Kosovo Police, was carried out using explosives weighing up to 20 kilograms placed in a black bag, and was activated by a mechanical detonator through a slow-burning fuse.⁵⁹ After the explosion of the canal in Ibër-Lepenc, the water flow from the damaged canal began spilling uncontrollably and consequently the Regional Water Supply Company “Mitrovica” announced an immediate halt to the drinking water supply due to damage to the canal. ⁶⁰ Kosovo Police and NATO mission forces in Kosovo (KFOR) immediately reported at the scene.⁶¹

The damage caused by the explosion in the Ibër-Lepenc water supply network was restored, although not completely, in a short time by the relevant Kosovo institutions ⁶² to ensure a regular supply of electricity for the country, in order to cool the power plants, as well as to avoid possible problems with central heating system for the citizens of Pristina. In the meantime, water supply until the damage is repaired has been compensated by lakes Batllava and Badovci, as well as by water trucks.⁶³

⁵⁵ Kosovo police. [Security measures are stepped up to guarantee public order and safety nationwide.](#) November 29, 2024.

⁵⁶ Koha Net. [Explosion in the Ibër-Lepenc canal in Zubin-Potok.](#) November 29, 2024.

⁵⁷ Idem.

⁵⁸ Telegrafi. [Terrorist attack on the Ibër-Lepenc canal, water restrictions again in Fushë Kosovë, Obiliq and Drenas.](#)

⁵⁹ Telegrafi. [Police Director: Around 15 to 20 kilograms of explosives were used in last night's attack.](#)

⁶⁰ Telegrafi. [Powerful explosion in Zubin Potok, damages the Ibër-Lepenci water canal.](#)

⁶¹ Kallxo. [KFOR troop presence increases in the north.](#) November 30, 2024.

⁶² Telegrafi. [Kurti: In record time they largely repaired the damage caused in Ibër Lepenc, we will overcome any challenge together.](#)

⁶³ Telegrafi. [Rizvanolli: Regular electricity supply has been ensured, Ibër Lepenci has installed six temporary pipes in record time.](#)

After the explosion in Ibër-Lepenc, the Kosovo Security Council held an extraordinary meeting. The statement published by the Kosovo Government states that “the latest attack was orchestrated by the Serbian state, which has the capacity for such a criminal and terrorist attack”. Elements of the terrorist organizations “Civil Protection- Civilna zaštita” and “North Brigade - Brigada Sever” and the criminal mastermind Milan Radoičić, under the direction of the President and Government of Serbia, planned and trained in Serbia for such professional attacks”. Herewith, the Government of the country qualified the attack as terrorist and directly held Serbia responsible as the author of the attack against Kosovo, respectively the critical infrastructure of Kosovo. In addition, the Kosovo Security Council has linked the terrorist attack in Ibër-Lepenc to similar Russian attacks in Ukraine on Ukrainian energy capacities on the eve of winter. The Security Council meeting, approved additional measures to strengthen security around critical facilities and services in the country, such as bridges, transformer stations, antennas, lakes, canals and other facilities, engaging the Kosovo Police and the Kosovo Security Force to be activated on the ground for this purpose.⁶⁴

The international community, including foreign embassies in Kosovo, KFOR and the EU Office in Kosovo, reacted and in strongest terms condemned the attack on the critical infrastructure of the Iber-Lepenc canal, demanding investigations in order to clarify the details of this criminal attack and bring the perpetrators of the attack to justice. Moreover, in addition to local institutions, the attack was also qualified as terrorist by the European Union. “The EU condemns in the strongest terms the terrorist attack committed on Friday on the Ibër-Lepenc water canal in Zubin-Potok in north Kosovo. It is a despicable act of sabotage on Kosovo’s critical civilian infrastructure, which provides drinking water for considerable part of Kosovo’s population and is a vital component of Kosovo’s energy system”, says the statement of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, the US ambassador to Kosovo has stated that it is still too early to say who is behind the attack in Ibër-Lepenc, but saying that “no group or state can be excluded.”Ambasada e SHBA-së në Kosovë ka kërkuar hetime të thukëta për të identifikuar përgjegjësitë dhe ngjashëm si BE-ja u ka ofruar ndihmë institucioneve të Kosovës.⁶⁶ The US Embassy in Kosovo has called for thorough and careful investigations to identify those responsible, and similarly, the EU has offered assistance to Kosovo institutions.⁶⁷

A day after the terrorist attack on the Ibër-Lepenc canal, the Kosovo Police took action to shed light on this case by conducting ten raids in north Kosovo. During the raids, the Police found heavy weapons and various uniforms, more precisely, over

⁶⁴ Office of the Prime Minister of Kosovo. [The Security Council of the Republic of Kosovo holds an extraordinary meeting](#). November 30, 2024.

⁶⁵ European Union External Action – The Diplomatic Service of the European Union. [Kosovo: Statement by the High Representative on the water canal attack in Zubin Potok](#). November 30, 2024.

⁶⁶ Radio Free Europe. [Hovenier on the attack in Ibër-Lepenc: it is still too early to say who is behind the attack, no group or state can be excluded](#). December 2, 2024.

⁶⁷ Radio Free Europe. [Vučić: We have nothing to do with what happened in the north, and Pristina knows this too](#). November 30, 2024.

200 military uniforms, 6 rocket launchers or Zolja rockets, 3 hand grenades, 2 AK47 rifles, 1 revolver, ammunition of various calibers, weapon parts, detonators for initiating explosives, military helmets, masks, knives, cash in euros and dinars and other equipment, and in a separate case in Zvečan, law enforcement forces found a significant amount of weapons. According to the head of the Kosovo Police, most of the people whose properties were raided and searched are suspected of belonging to the “Civil Protection- Civilna zaštita” organization, declared terrorist organization by the Government of Kosovo in 2023, not excluding the possibility that the Ibër-Lepenc case is also related to Radojčić. According to the Kosovo Ministry of the Interior, the vast majority of these military weapons are Serbian, which are difficult to find on the black market.⁶⁸ According to this ministry, part of the weapons found by the Kosovo police were left over from the terrorist attack in Banjska, and the rest were brought from Serbia.⁶⁹

In addition to the searches and raids in the north of the country, the Kosovo Police, in cooperation with the Special Prosecution of Kosovo, have arrested ten suspects in the Ibër-Lepenc case. According to the Special Prosecution, they are suspected of the criminal offenses of committing a terrorist offense and unauthorized possession, control or possession of weapons. The two arrested persons by the Police with the initials D.V. and D.M., are from the Serbian community, and by decision of the prosecutor, were detained, D.V. was ordered under detention for one month by the Court, while the other suspect D.M. was released in a regular procedure. Meanwhile, on December 1, 2024, with the prosecutor's decision, the suspect J.V. from the Serbian community wanted in this case was also detained ⁷⁰ against whom the Basic Court in Pristina has ordered a detention of 30 days.⁷¹

The media in Kosovo reported about the file of the Kosovo Special Prosecutor's Office that describes how the terrorist attack in Ibër-Lepenc took place. Based on the investigations conducted by the Prosecution Office, there is a well-founded suspicion that on November 29, 2024, at around 18:50 hrs, in the Ibër-Lepenc canal section, the suspect Jovan Vićentijević (as mentioned above with the initials J.V.) in in co-perpetration with the suspect Dragisha Vićentijević (his brother, as mentioned above with the initials D.V.), with the aim of seriously disturbing the residents and violating the constitutional order and public security in the country, deliberately damaged the equipment of the public water supply and committed a criminal terrorist act by using explosives and explosive devices directly in the part of the canal and concrete infrastructure. Based on media reports, the Prosecution finds that the suspects have activated the explosive and as a result have severely damaged and made the water unusable for further use, consequently have prevented citizens from

⁶⁸ Telegrafi. [Everything that was found during the raids in the north: Weapons, rocket grenade launcher and over 200 military uniforms.](#)

⁶⁹ Indeksonline. [Svečla for the captured weaponry in the North: Part left over from Banjska, another part new entry.](#). November 30, 2024.

⁷⁰ Special Prosecution of the Republic of Kosovo. [Media release from the Special Prosecution.](#) December 2, 2024.

⁷¹ Kallxo. [30 days of detention for Jovan Vigentijevic, suspected of the terrorist attack on the 'Ibër Lepenci' canal.](#). December 3, 2024.

being supplied with drinking water and have endangered the production of electricity at the national level and by acting in that way have committed the criminal offense "Commission of the terrorist offense" pursuant to Article 129, paragraph 1 and Article 128, paragraph 1.1 in conjunction with Article 31 of the Criminal Code of Kosovo. Furthermore, the Special Prosecution Office states that in the house of the defendant Jovan Vićentijević, in the village of Prevlaka, during the house search carried by the Kosovo Police were found and seized 3 BRM 75 hand grenades, 500 bullets of 7.9 mm caliber, various bullets of different calibers still uncounted, two knives for combat rifles, two AK-47 magazines, one magazine for a rifle, a mechanism for loading an MK-16 hunting rifle, a hunting rifle, a knife with a sheath, which the defendant was in possession without authorization and legal permission issued by the competent authorities, violating the legal provisions in force of the Law on Weapons. The suspect is hereby suspected of having committed the criminal offense of "Unauthorized ownership, control or possession of weapons" pursuant to Article 366, paragraphs 2 and 1 of the Criminal Code. The investigation into the terrorist attack and explosion in Ibër-Lepenc will now be continued by the Kosovo Special Prosecution Office in cooperation with law enforcement agencies.⁷²

5. The potential for destabilization of the security situation in Kosovo

Following the launch of the Russian military occupation in Ukraine in 2022, the leaders of Kosovo's institutions raised the alarm about the threat to the security situation and destabilization, especially of the north of Kosovo, by Serbia with the help of Russia. The heads of state, the president ⁷³ and prime minister ⁷⁴, in interviews in foreign media and public appearances in the country and abroad, called to place pressure on Serbia not to provoke the security situation in Kosovo.

Serbia employs various forms of influence on the Serbian community in northern Kosovo. They embrace elements of hybrid warfare (disinformation narratives against the Kosovo state and security institutions, distortion of the situation of the Serbian community in Kosovo, fake news with unverified or false content, etc.),⁷⁵ but further with other more direct methods, such as barricades set up by illegal Serbian structures operating in the northern region of Kosovo ⁷⁶ boycott of Kosovo state institutions ⁷⁷ by the Serbian community in the Police, Judicial and Prosecutor's Office, resignation of Serbian mayors of northern Kosovo municipalities (North

⁷² Betimi për Drejtësi- Oath for Justice. [Exclusive - Prosecution File: The Vigentijevic Brothers Are Suspected of Committing a Terrorist Act Using Explosives in the Ibër-Lepenc Canal](#). December 3, 2024.

⁷³ CNN. [Kosovan President accuses Serbian leadership of orchestrating deadly shootout](#). October 3, 2023.

⁷⁴ CNN. [Kosovo prime minister says he will not surrender country to Serbian 'fascist militia' after clashes in north](#). May 31, 2023.

⁷⁵ Hibrid.info. [Behind the Screens: Annual Report on the State of Information Disorder](#). July 2024.

⁷⁶ Telegrafi. [Vuçiq: The removal of barricades will start on Thursday morning](#).

⁷⁷ Kallxo. [Serbs boycott the institutions of the Republic of Kosovo, police officers take off their uniforms – FOTO](#). November 5, 2022.

Mitrovica, Zvečan, Leposaviq and Zubin-Potok), boycotting of elections for mayors of these northern municipalities,⁷⁸ violent protests in the north, etc.⁷⁹ These developments in the north of the country and the boycott of Kosovo institutions by the Serbian community were carried out under the dictates and threats of the Srpska Lista, whose vice-president at the time was Milan Radojčić, as well as under the orders of official Belgrade, which exercises complete political control over the Srpska Lista.

On the other hand, Serbia's refusal to impose sanctions on Russia over the war in Ukraine, good relations between Serbia and Russia during the war in Ukraine, balanced Serbian policy with Russia and China on the one hand, as well as with the West, respectively the European Union and the United States on the other,⁸⁰ e has placed Serbia in a more favorable regional position compared to other Western Balkan countries, including Kosov. The soft policy of Western countries towards Serbia, with the aim of separating official Belgrade's policy from Russia and focusing on building good neighborly relations with the aim of integration into the EU, has not been successful, at least not so far. The Serbian government continues to cultivate close and friendly relations with Moscow, not only political, but also economic (through Russian gas, for example) and cultural (the religious influence of the Orthodox religion as a common denominator for both countries).⁸¹

As for the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue facilitated by the European Union, despite the readiness of the Kosovo authorities to reach an agreement with Serbia, the latter continues to fail to implement the dialogue agreements and has not shown that it is a party interested in being constructive in concluding the process of normalizing relations with Kosovo. Furthermore, restrictive measures have been imposed on Kosovo by the EU, as a result of the refusal of the Kosovo side to draft the Statute of the Association of Serb-majority Municipalities and the establishment of this association according to the Brussels Agreement (the vast majority of the articles of this agreement are not in accord with the Constitution of Kosovo according to the ruling of the Constitutional Court of Kosovo). Meanwhile, apart from criticism and criticism of foreign diplomats and Western politicians, Serbia has not been sanctioned nor have measures been imposed for the armed terrorist attack in Banjska against the Kosovo Police, despite the fact that it was organized and prepared in Serbia against the legal and constitutional order of Kosovo.

In spite of the terrorist attack in Banjska, Serbia has continued with its provocations in two directions:

- i. Investing in advanced military weaponry by purchasing military equipment and arming its army.

⁷⁸ Radio Free Europe. [Srpska Lista calls for boycott of elections in Kosovo](#). April 21, 2023.

⁷⁹ Koha Net. [Violent protesters injured 25 KFOR soldiers in Zvečan](#). May 30, 2023.

⁸⁰ Radio Free Europe. [Vucic's Delicate Balancing Act](#). September 9, 2024.

⁸¹ Associated Press. [Serbia's president thanks Putin for gas supplies and vows he'll never impose sanctions on Russia](#). October 20, 2024.

- ii. Military threats by deploying the Serbian army near the border with Kosovo and conducting military drills on Kosovo's northern border with Serbia.

Regarding the issue of rearmament of the Serbian army,⁸² although it can be said that it is not related only to Kosovo specifically, but within the framework of a militarization of Serbia to demonstrate its regional power in the field of defense towards its neighbors in the Western Balkans and as a result of military neutrality in relation to NATO however, the destabilizing potential on the part of Serbia exists. This militarization of Serbia continues to be seen as a threat by the countries of the Western Balkans, with particular emphasis on Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which are not members of NATO (in comparison to Montenegro, North Macedonia and Albania, which are NATO members). Another correlation of these military investments is as a result of an “arms race” between Croatia and Serbia for dominance in the Western Balkans with the aim of balancing Serbia's power in the Western Balkans region.⁸³

Before and after the attack in Banjska, Kosovo institutions introduced as their main priority the enforcement of the rule of law in northern Kosovo and return to normality following a long period of smuggling, crime and organized crime in that part of the country, which was instigated and controlled by Serbia and criminal groups linked to Serbia to keep the Serbian community under control through various forms of pressure and intimidation. Various illegal routes that had served for the development of smuggling by different organized crime groups have been closed by the Kosovo Police,⁸⁴ while many police actions undertaken by the Police in northern Kosovo in the function of enforcing law and order have resulted positively in reducing crime in the north, which was the central source of smuggling of various goods entering from Serbia into Kosovo through illegal routes or even border crossing points until it was brought the control of the relevant Kosovo institutions.

Despite these moves to normalize the situation in northern Kosovo, Serbia has made various attempts to create the perception that it can create and provoke tensions in northern Kosovo even after the attack by the Serbian terrorist group in Banjska, Zvečan. The investigations that will be conducted by law enforcement and justice authorities in Kosovo will determine whether Serbia is behind the terrorist attack in Ibër-Lepenc. What is known is that after the terrorist attack in Banjska, Serbia had deployed military troops along the border with Kosovo⁸⁵ and the Kosovo Government reacted by demanding that Serbia withdraw military troops from the border with Kosovo, namely on the northern, northeastern and eastern borders. According to the Kosovo Government, Serbia deployed military and gendarmerie

⁸² Deutsche Welle. [What's behind Serbia's rearmament?](#) July 11, 2024.

⁸³ Kosovo Center for Security Studies. [What is Serbia's "Project 5000" and why should we be concerned?](#) March 2024.

⁸⁴ Telegrafi. [Smuggling and crime in the north, police block around 20 illegal roads on the border with Serbia.](#)

⁸⁵ Radio Free Europe. [Kosovo calls Serbia to pull all military troops from its border.](#) September 30, 2023.

capacities across 48 front operational bases, which are located along the border line with Kosovo, a few kilometers away in Serbian territory.⁸⁶ This move of the Serbian army towards the border with Kosovo had prompted a reaction from the international community. The United States of America described it as a “highly destabilizing development”, demanding that Serbia withdraw its forces from the border with Kosovo.⁸⁷ The European Union had also asked Belgrade to immediately stop the buildup of the army along the border with Kosovo and withdraw the deployed troops.⁸⁸ As a result of these international reactions, Serbia withdraw military forces from the border with Kosovo.⁸⁹

Regarding the Serbian army's operational bases along the border with Kosovo, the Minister of Defense of the Kosovo Government has warned that they are a permanent danger to Kosovo because three out of four Serbian infantry brigades are deployed there. According to him, the 48 Serbian army bases are located at a close distance to Kosovo, from 300 meters to 5 kilometers within the border on the territory of Serbia, and within them are about 4,000 Serbian military troops, equipped with weapons and means for military attacks.⁹⁰

Correspondingly the Parliamentary Committee for the Oversight of the Kosovo Intelligence Agency (KIA), following a meeting with the head of KIA a few days after the terrorist attack in Banjska, had raised the alarm that Serbia is building a military base near the border with Kosovo, namely near Izvor on the Serbian side.⁹¹

In March 2024, the Prime Minister of Kosovo released a video footage, stating that “specialized units of the Serbian army were observed just a few meters from the border with Kosovo”, near the village of Banje in Zubin Potok. Further prime minister stated, Kosovo institutions are closely monitoring whether Serbian military forces will attempt to cross the border towards Kosovo, describing this Serbian army drill as a provocation against Kosovo.⁹² After this movement of the Serbian army near the border with Kosovo, representatives of the KFOR mission in Kosovo stated that the situation in Kosovo is calm, but that it remains fragile.⁹³ Following these developments, the President of Serbia reacted by stating that “Serbia will not rush into war conflicts, it will wait for a favorable moment for political action.”⁹⁴

⁸⁶ Koha Net. [Serbian army moves from three directions to the border with Kosovo](#). September 30, 2023.

⁸⁷ Radio Free Europe. [White House: Serbian army deployment near Kosovo border highly destabilizing](#). September 29, 2023.

⁸⁸ Radio Free Europe. [Borrell calls on Serbia to withdraw its army from the border with Kosovo](#). September 30, 2023.

⁸⁹ Radio Free Europe. [Movement of a military convoy is observed in southern Serbia](#). September 30, 2023.

⁹⁰ Telegrafi. [Serbia has 48 military bases on the border with Kosovo Magedonci: They are waiting for a favorable moment to attack](#).

⁹¹ Kallxo. [After meeting with the director of the KIA, Musliu: Serbia is building a new military base near the border with Kosovo](#). October 2, 2023.

⁹² Koha Net. [Kurti: Serbia provokes with army near the border with Kosovo](#). March 22, 2024.

⁹³ Radio Free Europe. [What is known about the presence of the Serbian army near the border with Kosovo??](#) March 22, 2024.

⁹⁴ Idem.

a. The security situation in the north, following the interventions to extend law and order

For many years, the north of Kosovo was a hotbed of organized crime structures and smuggling of weapons, drugs and other illegal activities. These criminal structures were never impeded, despite the presence of international security mechanisms such as UNMIK, EULEX and KFOR, due to the pragmatic approach of these institutions, which prioritized political and inter-ethnic stability in the country, often at the detriment of the rule of law and the sovereignty of Kosovo.

In this unstable environment, criminal structures have exploited the room created by the reluctance of international and local mechanisms to intervene. Continuous and systematic support from official Belgrade – including the supply of weapons, financing of operations, and training of members of these groups –helped to consolidate these structures. They have evolved into powerful, well-funded and armed extremist and criminal networks that not only operate outside the law, but often set their own rules in that part of the country. This situation has not only hindered the integration of the north into Kosovo's state structures, but has also posed a major risk to national and regional security.

The period 2021-2023 marks an important turning point in efforts to extend law and order to northern Kosovo. The Government of Kosovo, through law enforcement institutions such as the Kosovo Police, the Prosecution Office and other security institutions, intensified their activities to combat these criminal structures. Law enforcement operations have aimed not only at arresting individuals involved in criminal and terrorist activities, but also eradicating this phenomenon, by disrupting the funding lines and logistical operations of these groups.

Despite numerous challenges, including active resistance from criminal groups and political and diplomatic pressures, the efforts of Kosovo institutions have begun to yield concrete results that have minimized the activities and presence of these groups in that part of the country. Many of the heads of these criminal structures have been arrested or are on the run, mainly in Serbia, while their networks have been significantly weakened. In addition to cracking down on organized crime, progress has also been made in strengthening cooperation with local communities, addressing the legitimate concerns of Serbian citizens and other communities living in northern Kosovo.

However, these efforts remain insufficient. More meetings with the local community, both Serb and other ethnic groups, need to be organized to better understand their security concerns and to identify concrete interventions that need to be taken to address these concerns. Until now, Kosovo institutions have focused mainly on extending law and order to the north, which has been continuously challenged by criminal and extremist structures. However, activities of promoting social dialogue

and cooperation with the civilian population of Serbs, Albanians, Bosniaks and other communities in that area have been limited.

This approach must change. The Government of Kosovo should start implementing development, economic and social projects in the north, as well as organize dialogue activities with the local community. These efforts are necessary for two main reasons:

- 1 Increasing institutional presence and building trust: Kosovo institutions must strengthen their presence in the north, creating a sense of security and stability for the civilian population, which for many years has lived under pressure and fear from criminal and extremist structures.
- 1 Strengthening ties between the community and state institutions: It is necessary to build and strengthen the trust of citizens living in the north towards Kosovo institutions. This can be achieved through open dialogue, investments in infrastructure and economic projects, and ensuring support for all communities, regardless of ethnicity or other affiliation.

b. Efforts to strengthen law and order in northern Kosovo

Efforts to extend law and order to the northern part of Kosovo have significantly contributed to increasing security for Serb citizens living in that area. According to official data from Kosovo institutions, Serb citizens of the north have begun to demand more responsibility and secure services from Kosovo institutions, in particular from the Kosovo Police.

An important indicator of this progress is the increase in reporting of criminal cases by citizens. Cases such as thefts in private properties have been reported in larger number, showing trust in security structures. In addition, there has been an increase in reports of domestic violence and violence against women. The Kosovo Police has responded in a timely manner to these cases, arresting the individuals responsible and bringing them to justice. These examples show a positive trend where Serb citizens and other communities living in the north municipalities are cooperating more with law enforcement institutions, contributing to the improvement of overall security.

c. Progress in combating organized crime and smuggling

In recent years, countless achievements have been made in the fight against propaganda, organized crime, and illegal activities such as smuggling in drugs, fuels, and narcotics in northern Kosovo. Kosovo Police, with number of police operations, has managed to close various drug production laboratories and detained groups engaged in illegal activities.

Another important aspect has been the prohibition of illegal activities related to the production of cryptocurrencies, where various companies operating in this field have been investigated and shutdown. This action has helped to stop financial resources that are often used to finance illegal activities. These operations are just some of the examples where significant progress has been made in preventing and combating organized crime. At the same time, they have contributed to strengthening rule of law and security, fully integrating the north into the authority of Kosovo.

However, the job is not fully done. The situation in northern Kosovo remains challenging and requires continued engagement, both at the local and international levels. One of the biggest challenges remains building trust between local communities and Kosovo institutions. For this reason, in addition to law enforcement measures, it is necessary for the government and international partners to draw focus on economic development, improving infrastructure, and providing quality public services in this part of the country.

6. Security challenges in the north and the way forward?

The coming months are expected to bring a tense and uncertain period for Kosovo's security, especially in the north, where the situation could worsen due to internal and external factors that will affect governance and public order in this part of the country. These risks relate to a multitude of elements, ranging from the activities of criminal and terrorist groups, the influence of external actors, and the possibility of political and institutional destabilization.

Extremist groups, relying on nationalist ideology, may try to use the coming period to intensify destabilizing activities. They may carry out new sabotage attacks targeting Kosovo institutions, especially those engaged in strengthening the rule of law in the north. Incursions can be physical in nature or armed attacks, such as attacks on security facilities and critical infrastructure, but can also extend to other areas, such as the spread of propaganda through social media and other disinformation activities.

This could undermine Kosovo's ability to fully integrate the north and ensure full control of the authorities over this part of the territory. Such interventions, in addition to physical and economic threats, could create a general insecurity that would undermine citizens' trust in the state authority and increase division between ethnic groups in the region.

a. The Influence of International and Political Factors

Another aspect that is expected to affect the security situation in the north is the transition of the presidential administration in the United States. Pending to the US administration transition, a vacuum may be created in US international policy towards Kosovo, giving criminal and extremist groups the opportunity to take destabilizing actions to take advantage of the period of uncertainty that may follow. Another factor that will influence security developments is the upcoming election

period in Kosovo. The parliamentary elections will create a heated political climate, where many institutions and political actors will focus on election campaigns. This could result in the Kosovo authorities focusing their resources and attention on political and electoral issues, creating the opportunity for increased destabilizing activities by criminal and extremist groups. In view of the fact of the focus being away, it may increase the possibility that those groups will use this period to intensify their destabilizing operations and undermine the authority of Kosovo security institutions in the North.

To address the future security challenges and risks that the country may encounter with, especially in the northern part of Kosovo, it is necessary to continue close coordination with international security partners. This coordination is essential for maintaining stability and confronting threats that could jeopardize overall security in the country. Key partners in this process include the US, NATO and the European Union, which have an important role in supporting Kosovo's institutions to confront internal and external threats.

One of the most important elements to ensure stability is the continuation of close cooperation with KFOR, which has a key role in maintaining peace and security in Kosovo. This coordination will help improve rapid response to potential threats, as well as increase the efficiency of security operations on the ground. KFOR, as part of its mandate, is tasked for providing a safe and secure environment for all citizens of Kosovo, including the most sensitive regions such as the north.

Furthermore, the focus of this coordination should be on addressing the risks that may threaten critical state assets, which are located in the northern part of Kosovo. These assets include strategic infrastructure, rivers and lakes, telecommunications installations, security facilities, as well as important natural resources. The risks arising from these activities are numerous and include potential attacks on these assets, attempts to sabotage critical infrastructure, as well as the possibility of spreading instability in the region through the operations of criminal or extremist organizations.

Strengthening social dialogue and implementing development projects for the community is another aspect that requires the focus of the Government of Kosovo. The government should develop concrete plans to provide a clear economic and security perspective for the civilian population living in the north, which, in addition to physical security, also needs an improvement in economic conditions. This will include the development of projects that provide employment opportunities, investments in infrastructure and public services, as well as support for other sectors that directly impact the well-being of the community. At the same time, it is important that these projects include and support cooperation between different ethnic and social groups living in the north. Social dialogue and cooperation between institutions, local organizations and international partners will ensure a coordinated and effective approach to addressing the challenges facing this region, enabling the local population to benefit from the opportunities offered by economic development.

7. Recommendations

- Security institutions should develop sufficient capacities to prevent possible future terrorist attacks in Kosovo. While police actions following such terrorist attacks (Banjska and Ibër-Lepenci) were successful, however, Kosovo state institutions failed to prevent those attacks in northern Kosovo.
- Additional security measures should be taken to protect critical infrastructure facilities in the northern region of Kosovo to avoid similar attacks in the future by criminal and terrorist groups, as well as to install surveillance cameras in these facilities. A better planning, coordination and collaboration with KSF, KFOR and EULEX is essential in this regard.
- Independent investigations should be conducted by justice institutions in Kosovo regarding the terrorist attack on the Ibër-Lepenc water supply canal.
- The NATO mission in Kosovo - KFOR, should cooperate with the Kosovo Police for stricter control of Kosovo's border crossing points with Serbia to prevent the smuggling of weapons into Kosovo from Serbia.
- The European Union and the United States of America should demand accountability from Serbia regarding the terrorist attack in Banjska by extraditing the perpetrator of this attack, Milan Radojčić, and his associates to the Kosovo justice institutions, along with holding Serbia accountable and taking measures against this attack on the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Kosovo. At the same time, the restrictive measures against Kosovo by the European Union should be lifted.
- The Kosovo side in the dialogue with Serbia should rethink how it will approach the dialogue process after the terrorist attacks in the north, especially after the presidential elections in the US and the new representatives elected in the European Union. The dialogue facilitated so far by the envoy Miroslav Lajčák was uneven and without taking into account the changes created on the ground.
- In addition to the security aspect, Kosovo institutions, in cooperation with the international community, should develop a proactive approach by establishing direct dialogue with the Serbian community in the northern municipalities of Kosovo for the integration of this community into the public and institutional life of Kosovo.
- Among the key priorities of the Government of Kosovo in the north of the country should be to guarantee a socio-economic perspective for the north of Kosovo through a concrete and realistic plan for economic development, whether through small and medium-sized businesses, various subsidies and the promotion of economic stimulation in this region of the country.

