Kosovo

by Krenar Gashi

Capital: Pristina
Population: 1.8 million
GNI/capita, PPP: US$9,870

Source: World Bank World Development Indicators.

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NOTE: The ratings reflect the consensus of Freedom House, its academic advisers, and the author(s) of this report. If consensus cannot be reached, Freedom House is responsible for the final ratings. The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest. The Democracy Score is an average of ratings for the categories tracked in a given year. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author(s).
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Kosovo saw small improvements in the judiciary, independent media, and corruption in 2016. There has been no systemic change, however, and political actors continue to show authoritarian tendencies. The constitutional and legal framework, which provides positive discrimination in the representation of national minorities, as well as the diversity of Kosovo’s political scene make it virtually impossible for power to be concentrated. A series of 2011 wiretaps leaked in 2016, however, confirmed that power structures in Kosovo remain informal and external to the state system.

Political parties, especially those in the government, continue to run their own party structures that override the functions of democratically elected institutions. These external structures formulate public policy and positions, which are then merely formalized by the institutions. The wiretaps and subsequent media reports revealed how a few individuals within the governing parties, coordinated by Adem Grabovci, head of the parliamentary group of the ruling Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), had influence over key positions in regulatory authorities and all branches of government. The tapes showed the deep and systemic flaws of Kosovo’s democratic institutions that are controlled by informal groups and political cronies. However, they also raised society’s awareness of corruption and rule of law issues.

Most of the year was characterized by turf wars between the ruling coalition of PDK and the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and opposition parties, a battle that spilled over from 2015. Although the government is formally strong, counting two-thirds of all seats in the parliament, its popularity continues to be low, which weakens its position in tackling key policy issues. Kosovo is also sharply divided over these issues, the most important being the ratification of the agreement with Montenegro over border demarcation. During the year, opposition parties claimed that the Kosovo delegation had made significant errors in the demarcation process leading to a loss of territory. Although the European Union (EU) conditioned Kosovo’s visa-free travel on the ratification of the agreement, the government had to postpone the vote several times due to lack of support among its own members of parliament (MPs). While the debate left Kosovo’s politics in limbo, it indicated the increased influence of nonpartisan societal groups, civil society, and public opinion makers. This places limits on the authoritarian tendencies of political figures in power.

As expected, the governing coalition elected Hashim Thaçi president in February. Thaçi’s election brought some changes within the PDK, with Kadri Veseli, speaker of the Assembly, replacing Thaçi as party chairman. The new party structures also announced a government reshuffle, which had yet to take place at year’s end. In any case, a reshuffle would primarily impact the power structures within the governing parties rather than policymaking as such.

Throughout the year, civil society and media joined their efforts in demanding accountability, fighting corruption, and exposing wrongdoings by public officials. Investigative reports published by Insajderi and documentaries published by Gazeta Express, both online media, have demonstrated the power of the media as well as the freedom of the internet, which in Kosovo remains unregulated. Threats against journalists continue to be a serious issue, although authorities made significant progress in prioritizing and handling such cases in 2016.

Local governance in Kosovo continues to lack resources and funding. The Association/Community of Serb Majority Municipalities, a body that potentially will enable Kosovo Serbs to coordinate their local governments, had yet to be established at year’s end. Its implementation was delayed by complications in Kosovo’s EU-facilitated dialogue with Serbia.

Despite considerable political deadlock, democratic institutions saw small improvements in 2016. The opposition’s firm objections on all policy issues had softened by midyear, which allowed the government to carry out a limited legislative agenda.

The greatest progress in 2016 was made in strengthening the independence of the judiciary. Constitutional and legal changes during the year targeted structural weaknesses and obstacles to judicial independence. The Judicial Council became slightly more independent due to constitutional changes that
enable the majority of the body to be elected by peers, and the Prosecutorial Council gained full independence from the executive after the removal of the minister of justice from its membership.

Kosovo delivered partial results in the fight against corruption. The authorities processed a greater number of cases and treated more of them as a priority during the year. In June, a government minister resigned after being investigated for a corruption scheme in the health sector, while in April, police arrested a powerful MP for leading a criminal organization.

Kosovo continued to strengthen the legitimacy of its statehood abroad. In 2016, the country became a member of the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) and the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), and its national football team will play in the 2018 World Cup qualifier matches.

Score Changes:

- **Independent Media rating improved from 5.25 to 5.00** due to the increased influence of the press and improvement in the way authorities handle threats against journalists.
- **Judicial Framework and Independence rating improved from 5.75 to 5.50** due to structural changes that resulted in more independence for the judicial and prosecutorial councils.
- **Corruption rating improved from 6.00 to 5.75** due to changes in the legal framework, the prosecution of high-profile cases, as well as a general increase in public awareness.

As a result, Kosovo’s Democracy Score improved from 5.07 to 4.96, and its classification changed to Transitional / Hybrid Regime.

**Outlook for 2017:** Kosovo’s institutions will continue to struggle to function in 2017. While the EU is expected to pressure authorities to deliver on major policy issues, such as the dialogue with Serbia or the border demarcation with Montenegro, these issues are reaching a level of unpopularity where the status quo becomes unsustainable, especially given the continuous criticism by the opposition and civil society.

The government will likely remain formally strong, but its approval ratings will continue to be low and depend on short-term and symbolic policy outcomes. The opposition will continue to demand early elections. Since municipal elections are scheduled for November 2017, the chances are high that early parliamentary elections will take place at the same time.

Negotiations with Serbia will likely continue but may face problems. Due to upcoming elections in both countries, tensions are expected to increase. This conflict could jeopardize the dialogue, at least temporarily, and may hinder the implementation of agreements.
**Main Report**

National Democratic Governance

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- Political developments in Kosovo in 2016 were overshadowed by the continued crisis from the previous year.\(^1\) Opposition parties continued to express disapproval with government policies and channeled popular anger over some issues, such as the dialogue with Serbia and border demarcation with Montenegro, through protests and blocking the work of the parliament. Some protests turned violent with Molotov cocktails thrown at police and government buildings.\(^2\) Some opposition deputies also continued the practice of throwing tear gas into the plenary hall to interrupt parliamentary sessions.\(^3\) A May poll by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) showed a slight increase in approval ratings for the government and other state institutions, reaching 24 percent after hitting a record low of 17 percent in 2015, but support for the parliament declined.\(^4\)

- While the governing coalition between the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) and Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), which also includes Srpska Lista (The Serb List), is formally strong with a two-thirds majority in the parliament, the opposition was still able to create a cleavage and block major legislation. This shows the general unpopularity of the governing coalition’s policies and its failure to negotiate with opposition parties on contested matters.

- Tensions and political polarization remained high throughout 2016. In actions that were condemned by both domestic and international organizations, police arrested opposition activists and members of parliament (MPs) on several occasions during the year. In August, an explosive was thrown at the Kosovar Assembly building causing minor damage.\(^5\) Police arrested six activists from the opposition Lëvizja Vetëvendosje! (Movement for Self-determination) in connection with the incident.\(^6\) Vetëvendosje called the arrests politically motivated and raised concerns over the delay in handling the cases (see “Judicial Framework and Independence”). Although the arrests of the elected representatives raised many eyebrows both locally and internationally, the European Commission objectively criticized all political parties for the turmoil and welcomed the return of opposition in the Assembly.\(^7\) Also in the same month, six Vetëvendosje politicians, including former party chairman Albin Kurti, received Albanian citizenship and called for a merger between Albania and Kosovo.\(^8\)

- Two issues relating to Kosovo’s neighbors were particularly controversial. First, the government reached an agreement on the border demarcation with Montenegro, which had been set as a condition for visa-free travel to the European Union (EU). The agreement was highly unpopular in no small part due to nationalist opposition campaigning to stop its ratification. In the end, several MPs from the governing parties also stated they would not support the vote, and the agreement was pending ratification at year’s end.\(^9\) Second, in 2015 Kosovo reached an agreement with Serbia on the establishment of an Association of Serb Municipalities in Kosovo. The agreement, which was part of the EU-facilitated dialogue on the normalization of relations between the two countries, will enable Kosovo Serbs to coordinate their local self-government authorities.\(^10\) Opposition parties, particularly Vetëvendosje, opposed the agreement and vowed to block its implementation.

- The parliament resumed operation after the spring protests and was able to continue its legislative agenda.\(^11\) Two opposition parties, Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) and Nisma (The Initiative), signed a coalition agreement and decided not to support the protests organized by Vetëvendosje.\(^12\) In the second half of the year, the parliament approved, among other legislation, a Law on Strategic Investments that seeks to increase foreign direct investment, as well as a Law on Trepca, the mining and industrial processing giant. The law was not supported by Serb MPs in the Kosovo Assembly, who suspended their parliamentary activities as a sign of protest.\(^13\)
• Hashim Thaçi’s election as president in February triggered significant criticism from opposition parties and civil society organizations, which argued that the state was being captured by PDK structures. Following this criticism, Thaçi made publicized efforts towards ethnic reconciliation. As a former political leader of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) that rebelled against Slobodan Milosevic’s regime, he pledged to uphold minority rights—one of the president’s key competences—and in July laid a wreath at a memorial to Kosovo Serbs. Later in October, he also sent a series of letters to prosecutors demanding a probe into crimes committed during and immediately after the 1998–99 conflict. But Thaçi’s role was virtually nonexistent in addressing the border demarcation dispute, and opposition parties refused to accept him as a unifying figure.

• The EU-facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia continued in 2016, with parties working mainly on implementing agreements reached during the previous three years. The future of the dialogue, however, has become very uncertain. While Kosovo’s leaders continued to receive international praise for their commitment to the dialogue, the policy has never been so unpopular domestically. Fueled by nationalist rhetoric and anti-Serbia discourse, promoted mainly by the opposition, the public has turned sour on the dialogue. According to a February poll, the vast majority of Kosovars do not support the dialogue, and more than 70 percent consider the Agreement on the Association of Serb Municipalities as harmful for the country.

• During 2016, Kosovo further strengthened its international recognition. The number of UN countries that recognized its independence increased to 113, and the country became a full member of the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) in March and the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) in May, with its national soccer team playing in qualifier matches for the 2018 World Cup in Russia. Eight athletes represented Kosovo in the Rio Olympic Games, and judoka Majlinda Kelmendi won Kosovo’s first Olympic gold medal.

**Electoral Process**

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• Kosovo’s constitution and legal framework enable free and fair elections. The electoral system is free of barriers to any political organization, and the registration of political parties is fast and easy. National minorities have guaranteed representation in the parliament—20 out of 120 seats. Following a highly fraudulent national election in 2010, authorities vowed to draft and implement an election reform focused on preventing fraud. While the authorities have since taken several measures, such as sanctioning election fraud in the 2012 penal code and adjusting legislation to ensure a more transparent election process, a full reform has been delayed due to lack of political will.

• On 26 February, the country elected Hashim Thaçi, former prime minister and minister of foreign affairs, as president. The constitution states that the president is elected by the parliament with 80 out of 120 votes—and if the election is not successful after two consecutive rounds, a simple majority of 61 votes is enough in the third round. Thaçi’s election dragged out until the third round since several MPs from the ruling coalition did not support him. In the end, the parliament elected him with the support of 71 MPs. Thaçi replaced Atifete Jahjaga, an independent politician and the first female president of Kosovo who served a full mandate of five years.

• Thaçi’s election was marred by objections from opposition MPs, who threw tear gas into the plenary hall to stop the vote. Criticism of his election extended beyond the opposition, as many in Kosovo believe Thaçi does not represent the unity of the people, arguably the president’s first function. Protests during his February election and April inauguration turned violent.
• Upon becoming president, Thaçi resigned from the chairmanship of PDK. In a party congress in May, PDK elected Kadri Veseli, former head of PDK’s shadowy intelligence service and current speaker of the Assembly, as chairman. Veseli was the only candidate for the post, again raising concerns about the overwhelming influence of political parties over democracy in Kosovo. While Veseli quickly assumed power in the PDK after his election, it remains to be seen whether Thaçi will wield influence over the party from the president’s office.
• In December, mayoral by-elections were held in the municipality of Drenas, where the mayor had resigned following a conviction for war crimes. Since the municipality is in the Drenica region, a PDK stronghold, the election received substantial national attention. Independent local and international organizations monitored the vote extensively and deemed the election free, fair, and democratic. The attention was due to the success of Nisma, a party that emerged from PDK and whose candidate came in second with 26 percent of the vote, preventing an outright victory by PDK for the first time since 1999. Eventually, PDK candidate Ramiz Lladrovci, a war figure and Kosovo’s former ambassador to Albania, won the runoff on 18 December.
• Nisma became an official political party in 2016 and held internal elections. The Vetëvendosje movement also organized internal elections in May. These polls took place throughout Kosovo and on all levels except for the movement’s chairmanship.

Civil Society

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• The civil sector in Kosovo is vibrant and saturated, with more than 2,000 active nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operating throughout the country. The legal framework that guarantees freedom of association, from the constitution to laws, provides for a wide range of freedoms. Civil society organizations may operate freely without government control, formal or otherwise. Administrative procedures for registering and running NGOs are minimal.
• Nevertheless, the EU has continuously criticized Kosovo’s authorities for maintaining only formal relations with civil society organizations and failing to consult them in policy matters. The government addressed this issue in 2014 by drafting a strategy for cooperation with civil society organizations, but its implementation has progressed slowly. To this day, the government refuses to hire civil society organizations for services, even in cases where they have a sufficient track record and expertise.
• The major problem for Kosovo’s civil sector is funding. Whereas most NGOs depend fully on foreign donations, they have spent little effort securing sustainable public funding for the future. Except for the EU, most other major donors have cut their assistance to Kosovo.
• A survey conducted by the NGO FoL Movement shows that public perception of civil society remains positive, with respondents highlighting the civil sector as the least corrupt in Kosovo. A recent study by Albanian Media Institute concluded that the civil sector has extensive cooperation with the media; NGO reports and opinions are featured regularly in the press, and journalists have created a pattern of including civil society activists and leaders in most policy-related stories as independent analysts. According to the same study, “the stances of civil society organizations are very often embraced by the media, creating a synergy of efforts and resulting in policy change.”
• Civil society organizations seemed to have intensified their activities in 2016. NGOs and activists joined forces to highlight a series of leaked wiretaps during the year exposing high-level political corruption, as well as demanding transparency and accountability. In August, a group of NGOs wrote a letter to the state prosecutor demanding a full inquiry into the case—something that the
prosecutor promised in his prompt response. In another instance, several organizations reacted to social policy changes and urged the government to take action regarding pension funds.

- During the year, government ministers also increased their communication and consultations with civil society. Yet, this remained mostly a formality, and civil society organizations expressed continued dissatisfaction with the level of cooperation. In the case of NGO participation in the National Council for European Integration, chaired by President Thaçi, NGOs decided to boycott the sessions due to the exclusion of some organizations and delays in receiving invitations.

- A University of Vienna study concluded that NGOs in Kosovo are undergoing a “paradigmatic shift,” changing from their initial peace-building and conflict resolution orientation towards more direct involvement in rule of law and democratization. The year 2016 underlined this diversification. In addition to democratization, anticorruption, and rule of law efforts, civil society organizations joined forces to advocate for digital rights, scrutinized development and energy policies, and organized protests against domestic violence during the year. NGO representatives also attempted to host a dialogue between political parties to overcome the deadlock in resolving the Montenegro border demarcation issue.

- The long history of moderate and tolerant Islam among the majority of Kosovo Albanians has come under threat in the last few years after certain radical imams started recruiting young people to fight for the Islamic State. The authorities have reacted fiercely, arresting more than 200 people over the past few years and shutting down at least 16 NGOs that were suspected of having ties to international terrorism. In November, Kosovan police arrested seven men suspected of planning terrorist attacks in Kosovo, Albania, and Macedonia.

### Independent Media

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- Kosovo has a high-quality legal framework ensuring freedom of the media and offers on paper some of the highest standards of journalistic protection. The constitution guarantees freedom of expression, the right to access public documents, freedom and pluralism of the media, and forbids censorship. Libel and slander have been categorized as civil offenses since 2006. Implementation of these protections, however, has been weak due to a lack of political will and public understanding of the importance of media freedom. Courts take years to process cases; officials continue to disrespect, insult, and threaten journalists; and access to public documents is restricted. As a result, journalists continue to feel they are neither sufficiently free nor protected in executing their work.

- Kosovo has an oversaturated media scene with 7 daily newspapers, 21 TV stations (including 3 national broadcasters), and over 80 radio stations. The number of online media remains unknown, with estimates of up to 30 websites that provide news and analysis on a daily basis. Blogs, albeit new phenomena, are also flourishing, making the country’s media both vibrant and pluralistic. This crowded market has a direct impact on funding, since only a few outlets are self-sustainable.

- Despite the plethora of outlets, Kosovan media continue to be subjected to political interference. A lack of editorial independence, violence and threats against journalists, and government interference (particularly in public broadcasting) remain some of the ongoing challenges journalists and media professionals face. Due to a heavily politicized media agenda, the public perception is that media are secretly owned and controlled by political interest groups. The quality of reporting is especially low in online media, which remain mostly unregulated with no clear editorial policy and lax editorial standards.

- During 2016, the role of Kosovo media significantly increased after a series of wiretaps and investigative reports published by the online news outlet Insajderi throughout the year. Based on
dozens of leaked telephone conversations from 2011 between senior officials, the reports revealed a web of political scandals and illustrated informal patronage of the ruling PDK over public sector jobs at all levels. The protagonist of the wiretaps—PDK parliamentary head Adem Grabovci, whose phone conversations revealed abuse of power and other potential criminal offenses—resigned as a result of the reports. Virtually all Kosovan media republished the reports and followed up with series of articles, turning the issue into a long-lasting public debate.

- Grabovci sued Insajderi for violation of privacy and asked for a preliminary injunction on further reports based on the wiretaps. Suing journalists and using court trials to discredit them has been a common practice by Kosovar politicians. The Basic Court of Pristina, however, rejected Grabovci’s request to stop further publications and, in this case, media freedom prevailed over informal political power on the judiciary.
- While it is common practice in Kosovo for police, prosecutors, and judges to mishandle cases of violence and threats against journalists, the Insajderi case marked a shift in this regard. Following several threats to the online newspaper upon publishing the reports, the police response was professional, immediate, and quick, providing threat assessment and close protection to the journalists and editors. In a separate case, Gazeta Express editor-in-chief Leonard Kerquki received death threats following the airing of two documentary series. The programs depicted how Kosovar politicians acquired their wealth as well as war crimes committed by Albanians during the 1998–99 conflict. The police took the case seriously and prioritized its handling. The threats against journalists remain a common phenomenon in Kosovo, and impunity continues to plague the sector. The threats are especially high against those who deal with sensitive topics. In August, the building of the public broadcaster RTK was attacked with explosives on two separate occasions. While there were no casualties in either incident, a hand grenade in the second attack went off beside the home of RTK director Mentor Shala. There were no prosecutions in the case by year’s end.

Local Democratic Governance

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- Decentralization of power to municipalities as units of local self-government was one of Kosovo’s commitments as part of its independence deal. Thus, the constitution provides for the direct applicability of the European Charter on Local-Self-Government, ensuring that decision-making takes place closer to citizens. In this legal framework, municipalities are autonomous from the government, and no central authority has power over municipal decisions except for the courts. In reality, however, municipalities depend to a large extent on the central authorities for funding. On average, municipalities can barely generate 20 percent of their budget, with the balance coming in the form of grants from the central government.
- By the end of 2015, the Constitutional Court cleared the way for setting up an Association/Community of Serb Municipalities in Kosovo as part of the EU-facilitated agreement between Kosovo and Serbia. Afterward, Kosovo initiated a working group to draft the statute of this body, which seeks to enhance the lives of Kosovo Serbs through inter-municipal coordination. Its nature, however, is controversial, as many Kosovo Albanians believe the Association would jeopardize the current system of governance by creating a middle tier between the national and municipal levels, and allowing Serbia to create a special entity in Kosovo potentially destabilizing the country. According to a recent poll by UNDP, only 6 percent of Kosovo Albanians support the creation of the Association/Community, whereas support among Serbs is as high as 68 percent.
• The Association/Community was not established during 2016 due to complications in the EU-facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia as well as significant domestic opposition. Kosovar authorities conditioned its establishment on the implementation of other resolutions reached with Serbia, such as the agreement on Kosovo’s international telephone prefix.\(^65\)

• Although the legal framework enables municipalities to cooperate with one another, little effort has been made towards inter-municipal cooperation. While there are some examples of cooperation, such as the creation of five regional economic zones, the potential for improving quality of services has not been sufficiently explored.\(^66\) Meanwhile, experts and civil society have called for a thorough review of the current legislation to overcome some of the challenges, such as lack of funding and the low level of municipal revenue.\(^67\)

### Judicial Framework and Independence

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• Kosovo’s constitution and legal framework guarantee the independence of the judiciary from the executive and legislative branches. In practice, the country has struggled to achieve this, although some positive changes have occurred since late 2015.

• During 2016, Kosovar politicians moved to correct structural issues to ensure the formal independence of the judiciary from other branches of government.\(^68\) According to constitutional amendments that entered into force in February, a majority of members of the Judicial Council of Kosovo will be appointed by their peers, not by the legislature as in the past.\(^69\) The February amendments also guarantee the independence of the Prosecutorial Council, the body overseeing the prosecution system. The minister of justice will no longer have a seat on the council, and the chief state prosecutor will no longer chair its meetings but merely attend as a member.\(^70\)

• The judiciary has also been strengthened in terms of financial independence, as the Ministry of Finance will no longer have control over its financial planning, a competence that now lies with the Kosovo Assembly. This will formally enable the judiciary to be financially independent from the executive, although experts warn that implementing this change will be a challenge.\(^71\)

• In spite of these improvements, the judicial administration is slow and inefficient, officials continue to lack accountability, and political interference over the judiciary remains a significant problem.\(^72\) Judicial institutions have failed, especially in the case of the Vetëvendosje activist Astrit Dehari, who was arrested as a suspect in the attack against the Kosovo Assembly in August and died under unclear circumstances in November while in detention. Authorities provided contradictory statements regarding Dehari’s death and rushed to label it a suicide, delaying investigations on the matter.\(^73\) Thousands marched in November in Pristina seeking justice in the case. After his death, it was revealed that prosecutors had failed to even interview Dehari regarding the attack. While the authorities allowed independent experts to witness the autopsy, civil society organizations and the opposition heavily criticized them for mismanaging the case. As Dehari was an opposition political activist, the matter was highly politicized and the opposition and many independent observers accused the authorities of political bias. Investigations into his death were still pending at year’s end.

• Another prominent case in 2016 was the April arrest of PDK deputy Azem Syla, former commander-in-chief of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and a powerful figure during the 1998–99 armed conflict.\(^74\) Syla was charged with leading an organized criminal network that had manipulated publicly owned properties causing an estimated damage of 30 million euros.\(^75\) The prosecution investigated 50 other suspects in the case, which was pending trial at year’s end.

• The Kosovan political class struggles to understand and respect the division of powers. Following verdicts by the Court of Appeals in the so-called Drenica cases, where senior KLA figures were
corruption of war crimes, the parliament held a plenary session to debate the court’s decision in October. The EU office in Kosovo and the Kosovo Judicial Council both criticized the Assembly for organizing this session, warning that it undermines judicial independence.

**Corruption**

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- Corruption was by far the hottest topic in Kosovo during 2016. The public sphere was inundated with reports by the online news portal Insajderi and others who reported on leaked conversations from 2011 revealing senior state officials fixing public positions, influencing decision-making, and undermining the official channels of day-to-day state operations. Although the leaks pertained to a previous investigation, their publication uncovered numerous wrongdoings, and the sustained media and civil society pressure led authorities to reopen the investigation.
- The leaks and reports revealed for the first time the degree of informality in Kosovan politics and the extent to which external power structures (mainly of one political party, PDK) control and undermine the work of state institutions. The publication of the tapes sparked protests and led to a wider social mobilization against corruption.
- In June, authorities indicted 64 individuals in Kosovo’s biggest healthcare scandal ever. The criminal scheme involved 44 doctors as well as Ferid Agani, minister of environment at the time and former minister of health, all of whom allegedly manipulated patient data and and abused their offices for personal gain. Agani resigned in the same month, setting a new standard in Kosovan politics. Another high-profile case, the arrest and indictment of PDK deputy Azem Syla (see “Judicial Framework and Independence”), also increased societal pressure to fight corruption.
- Corruption remained the second-greatest concern for Kosovar citizens, right after unemployment. Since authorities are slow to tackle the issue, most reports that are based on public perceptions show corruption to be a major problem. In a survey by the NGO Lëvizja Fol, some 70 percent of respondents claimed they believe the government is corrupt, whereas 13 percent stated they had been asked for a bribe in exchange for a public service.
- The authorities’ anticorruption performance improved somewhat in 2016, although the number of dismissed court cases remained high. The European Commission praised the authorities for improving the institutional framework by establishing multidisciplinary teams and setting up a tracking mechanism for high-level crimes. During the first half of the year, authorities handled corruption cases involving 627 individuals, out of which 180 were indicted. While the large number of cases indicates improvement, the high number of dismissals raises concerns about inefficiency and abuse of corruption investigations. A report by Kosovo Law Institute that monitors corruption cases revealed that 29 percent during the first half of 2016 concluded with indictments, 23 percent led to the termination of investigations, and 48 percent ended in dismissals. It remains to be seen if verdicts in high-profile cases will actually put individuals behind bars and confiscate assets and wealth created through corruption.
- In November, a major case against an EU judge in Kosovo, Francesco Florit, who had been suspected of accepting bribes from defendants in at least two cases, was resolved with the prosecution clearing Florit of all accusations.

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32 Institute for Development Policy (INDEP), Bashkepunimi mes qeverise se Kosoves dhe shoqerise civile behet elektronik [Cooperation between the government of Kosovo and civil society goes electronic], http://indep.info/sq/bashkepunimi-mes-qeverise-se-kosoves-dhe-shoqerise-civile-behet-elektronik/
33 See for example European Commission’s Country Reports for Kosovo (formerly known as progress reports), as well as Nations in Transit reports 2010-2016.
40 Ministry of Justice, Minister Dhurata Hoxha organised a meeting with civil society representatives, 28 July 2016, http://www.md-ks.net/?page=1,8,1855; Prime Minister’s Office, Prime Minister Mustafa took part in a workshop organised by civil society, 9 February 2016, http://kryeministr-i-ks.net/?page=1,9,5579
44 Koha, Kosid tregon shkeljet e qeverise per Kosoven e Re [Kosid shows government’s violations in the New Kosovo Power Plant] 7 October 2016, http://koha.net/?id=27&i=136255
46 Author’s interview with Mr Burim Ejupi, executive director of Insititute for Development Policy, and Mr Agron Demi, executive director of Gap Institute, Pristina, October 2016.
51 This estimated data is provided by LENS, an NGO that deals with media and ICT.
57. See Nations in Transit 2011-2015
58. Author’s interview with Mr Vehbi Kajtazi, co-founder of Insajderi and author of most of the reports, Pristina, 4 October 2016.
60. Author’s interviews with Leonard Kerquki from Express and Vehbi Kajtazi from Insajderi, Pristina, October 2016.
69. Ibid
70. Ibid
71. Author’s interview with Mr Betim Musliu, executive director of the Kosovo Law Institute (KLI) which supervises the works of the judicial and prosecutorial councils.
75. Ibid
76. Koha, Zyre e BE-se, KGJK, kritikojne seancen e sotme, Presidenca nuk përgjigjet [EU Office and Judicial Council criticize today’s session, President doesn’t respond], 27 October 2016, http://koha.net/?id=27&l=139530
77. Ibid
78. See Insajderi, Dosja e Shefave [The Bosses’ File], http://www.insajderi.com
81. Author’s interview with Mr Burim Ejupi, executive director of the Institute for Development Policy, a think tank in Pristina, October 2016.
84. Ibid
85. Ibid