

Espresso.Insight

No. 02/2022

February 2022

Message is clear: It's
time to act on all
organized crime cells in
Kosovo

—
Rreze Hoxha Zhuja



GROUP FOR LEGAL
AND POLITICAL
STUDIES



GROUP FOR LEGAL
AND POLITICAL
STUDIES

Group for Legal and Political Studies

is an independent, non-partisan and non-profit public policy organization based in Prishtina, Kosovo.

Our mission is to conduct credible policy research in the fields of politics, law and economics and to push forward policy solutions that address the failures and/or tackle the problems in the said policy fields.

legalpoliticalstudies.org

Message is clear: It's time to act on all organized crime cells in Kosovo

By: Rreze Hoxha Zhuja – Senior Research Fellow, GLPS

Mid last year, President Biden recognized the fight against corruption as a core national security interest of the United States. As a result, on December 8, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) published a report targeting 16 individuals and 24 entities across several countries in Europe and the Western Hemisphere, including Kosovo. The report lists 13 Serbian entrepreneurs residing in Kosovo upon which US has imposed financial sanctions. Few of them - including the leader of Srpska Lista, the Kosovo Serb party controlled by Aleksandar Vucic, President of Serbia - have been identified as the most notorious corrupt figures in Kosovo. The report finds them being involved in large-scale bribery schemes jointly with Kosovar and Serbian security officials whom made it possible to smuggle goods, money, narcotics, and weapons, among other. They have been accused of conspiring with various politicians to allow safe pages for smugglers and goods. The report goes further on exposing the deals done behind electoral campaigns and their large contributions to the party candidates and also the deals behind the large tenders on infrastructure contracts. In addition, some of them have been identified as the main suspects involved in the murder of Oliver Ivanovic, a Serbian politician in Kosovo. Following the investigation and the publication of the report, the U.S. blocked all property located in U.S. soil of all 13 Kosovo Serbs identified as heads of organized crime cells in Kosovo, and U.S. citizens are prohibited to work with them.

The content of this report did not come as a surprise in Kosovo. For years, the aforementioned entrepreneurs have been subject to many reports of investigative media exposing their criminal activity. Just lately, the Kosovo Police seized a large number of illegally traded goods in the north as part of a huge police operation on several municipalities across Kosovo. The action was followed by violent incidents and a lot of reaction. Among those who reacted was also Mr. Borrell, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy thorough a tweet saying that: "Violent incidents in the north of Kosovo should be stopped immediately. Unilateral and uncoordinated actions that endanger stability are unacceptable. All open issues should be addressed through the EU-facilitated Dialogue." Nevertheless, Kosovo Government considered the police action as one of the acts on their serious engagement on fighting organized crime and corruption, considering that PM Kurti recognizes it as its main priority.

But one must acknowledge that the failure of the justice sector to fight these criminal organizations is alarming and requires rapid steps on addressing it. For many years now, the north has been a grey area serving the interest of politicians, organized enterprises and groups. Furthermore, any interventions taking place in that part of Kosovo have always been followed by controversial political declarations and clashes between Kosovo and the EU, as not only Serbia but also EU seems to be interested in maintaining the status quo instead of properly addressing criminal activities. This was the case on the abovementioned intervention, which took place not only in the north but in several regions of Kosovo. Nonetheless, the most attention was unfairly given to the intervention in the north considering it as good ground for political drama.

Going back to the OFAC report, Kosovo is portrayed to have huge potential to fight corruption and organized crime cells not only in the north but in its entire territory. The OFAC report has also mentioned the connections of the named organized crime heads with Kosovo officials and furthermore has elaborated the illegal actions taken throughout the years, be it for contraband, money laundering and involvement during- electoral campaigns. And the message is clear. It's time to show commitment on fighting corruption and organized crime in the entire territory.

Kosovo should not allow itself to be further identified as a place where such cells prevail. The Special Prosecution (SPRK) must immediately act and seize all illicit wealth and prosecute all suspects ensuring them a fair and timely trial, if they have not acted yet. One must recall that this is a great chance to strike transnational crime in Kosovo and Serbia and also in Western Balkans. Moreover, it is the right moment to show concrete actions against these criminal organizations and not only. Kosovo must join the international fight against organized crime and corruption and ensure its democratic values are intact.

Espresso.Insights

Espresso.Insights are aimed at decoding the policy research of our Fellows to a broader audience. Espresso.Insights present short summary of analysis and information that help readers and policy-makers in particular, to understand the relevant research, as they suggest possible policy options and argue for certain path of action. Aiming to intensify the debate about policy issues and general public concerns, Espresso.Insights will, in addition, serve as gears to aid an informed decision-making process.



GROUP FOR LEGAL
AND POLITICAL
STUDIES