

The implementation of the 'strategic development plan of prishtina' has started

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The Strategic Development plan will be implemented as a whole, while plans are already drafted in paper. I reassure you all that these plans are not 'utopian', said president Beqiri

The Iniciativa Kosovare për Stabilitet (IKS) and the European Stability Initiative (ESI) held a debate on the subject 'What future for Prishtina? Governance and planning in Kosovo's capital'. In this debate took part the President of Municipal Assembly of Prishtina, Ismet Beqiri, the Minister of Environment and Spatial Planning, Ardian Gjini, and some citizens.

The subject of the debate organized by the Iniciativa Kosovare për Stabilitet was the 'Strategic Development Plan of Prishtina', which IKS called 'utopian'.

Verena Knaus, European Stability Initiative analyst, emphasised that the Strategic Plan 2020 is very unclear about the reality in Prishtina. She also said that the implementation of this strategy is hard to imagine. 'This plan uses wild assumptions. Moreover, this strategy claims that there are no reliable figures for the population of Prishtina,' said Ms. Knaus.

Besa Shahini, Executive Director of the Iniciativa Kosovare për Stabilitet, emphasised that according to the plan, further urban development will enlarge the city from the 2,200 hectares that it occupies today up to 10,000 hectares in 2020. She also mentioned that the industrial land that today occupies 120-130 hectares is planned to be enlarged up to 60 hectares. 'This plan proposes demolishing a large number of existing buildings. Private houses in Kalabria neighbourhood, old settlements in Tophane neighbourhood together with Llapi Mosque and the commercial zone in Hajvalia. Many private investments to establish basic infrastructure have been made in these areas', underlined Ms. Shahini.

Moreover, the Iniciativa Kosovare për Stabilitet recommends that the departments of the municipality must cooperate closely. They make this recommendation also to local and central institutions, and organizations still dependent on the KTA. This organization remarked that such cooperation has been lacking to date. Finally, IKS activists asked president Beqiri how much time is still needed for Prishtina to become like Ljubljana?

On the other hand, the President of the Municipal Assembly of Prishtina, Ismet Beqiri, emphasised that 'he is pleased that somebody finally organized such a debate to discuss the challenges, problems and the achievements of the capital city.' To IKS's question president Beqiri answered that 'Prishtina cannot become like Ljubljana in the near future. First we must become a state.' Beqiri then spoke about the challenges facing the capital city.

He said that Prishtina inherited catastrophic planning conditions, because many neighbourhoods in Prishtina have not been urbanised. 'The lack of earlier planning

caused a lot of the problems that we face now.' He also mentioned some other problems which face the Municipality of Prishtina. 'The lack of legal infrastructure, the multi-layered power structures without clear competences. Which competences belong to the central level, which to the local level and which to the super management of the KTA.' Beqiri informed that the municipality has submitted tens of cases to court, but has still not received an answer for any of them. He also mentioned that a big obstacle to the implementation of long-term and short-term projects is the undefined status of Kosovo. For that reason we cannot have access to loans from abroad. He also emphasised that the municipality of Prishtina has the smallest budget in the region.

'If we compare the budget of Tirana, which has 85 million dollars. They have executive mechanisms which we do not have, such as construction, tax and municipal police etc.' Beqiri also said that Prishtina is a capital city only by name, because this is not regulated neither judicially nor financially. The Number One of Prishtina also spoke about the plans drafted by the municipality.

'In 2004 we drafted a vision for Prishtina, which it did not have before. We also drafted regulatory plans for three ring roads, and also a project for the urban train.' He further informed that after 'the drafting, the realization phase of some of these plans has started.' Beqiri expressed his confidence that this strategy will be implemented. It is not 'utopist' as long as these plans have been put on paper. Nobody will help us without these plans. I reassure you all that these plans are not utopist,' Beqiri said to the audience.

Ardian Gjini, Minister of Environment and Spatial Planning, emphasised that 'Among many other problems, Prishtina also faces the problem of a growing of population'. Mr. Gjini mentioned that some of the problems facing the citizens need faster solutions. 'In order to offer faster solutions to the daily problems of citizens, besides the Department of Planning and Urbanism, there must be a clear division between a unit for long-term planning and one for urban management,' said Mr. Gjini.

On the other hand, Lulzim Nixha, Director of the Department of Urbanism said that the Strategy for Prishtina was drafted in a short period of time. 'A German institute was also engaged in the working group that drafted the strategy for Prishtina. They have great experience in such planning engagements, especially in South-East Europe,' he said. Mr. Nixha said that all local professional experts were involved in drafting this strategy. He said that this plan is very realistic and that it will be implemented in the future.