DIAKONIE KOSOVA DIAKONIE TRAINING CENTER

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Mitrovica, November 2025

Friends' Letter

Dear Sir or Madam, dear friends,

The political and security situation

In the last two Friends' Letters, April and August, I wrote about the elections in February. Today I am writing again, because even at the present time we still do not have an elected/new government. It is an endless story.

The security situation is very relaxed. The situation in the north is good, the tensions between Albanians and Serbs have subsided. Pedestrians (Albanians, Serbs, Roma, Ashkali) cross the main bridge in both directions. The fear many Albanians had of crossing the bridge to the northern part of Mitrovica, including colleagues of the Diakonie, has eased.



The new bridge

In the north, Albanian shops have now also established themselves, attracting clients from the southern part. Thus, what was artificially separated is slowly growing together.
The new bridge, right next to the youth center, is being used extensively.

A non-governmental organization (Community Building Mitrovica/CBM) asked our kitchen to set up a cold buffet in the middle of the bridge. The whole event was initiated and financed by the organization “Cusines sans frontiere/Kitchens without Borders”, headquartered in Switzerland.
15 young people and representatives of Csf came into our kitchen and cooked together with our staff. In addition to Christmas cookies, they prepared large trays and burek and devoured everything eagerly.

In the afternoon, under the eyes of many police officers and the Italian Carabinieri, we set up our buffet. Because there had been repeated conflicts in the past, the security forces were very vigilant. Everything went smoothly, and the many guests enjoyed our products.

We will gladly continue working with CBM and Cusines sans frontiere in the future.



„Dinner on the bridge“



The buffet

The farm



Since the beginning of the year, our farm (workplaces for people with disabilities) has been supported by the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland in cooperation with the congregation of Wadern-Losheim. This finally enabled us to buy a new tractor (“neu ist Treu”) and a manure spreader.

On the occasion of the 25-year anniversary celebration, Pastor Nikodemus from the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland and Ms. Silke Schaum from the presbytery of the congregation Wadern-Losheim visited us to inspect the project.

In September we learned from the Waldensian Church in Italy that we will also be supported next year by “Otto per Mille” (8 per thousand). We thank the sisters and brothers of the Waldensian Church for their enormous support.

A small miracle has happened. In the last Friends’ Letter (August) I reported: “The corn is too hot!”. It looked very bad, and the head of our farm had already given up on it. Then it rained a little here and there (far too little), and in September, almost overnight, the cobs became thicker and thicker. We were able to harvest 10 tons of corn! All neighbours had no proper corn at all.

Now the neighbours suspected that the German had brought some special seeds from Germany. And now they want to buy them. I said to Xhavit, our farm director:
Sell them the same corn we always sow and tell them the German magically treated and transformed it.

In midsummer we had several strong infestations of fleas on our goats. The local veterinarians neither knew what kind of insects they were nor the correct treatment. The craziest advice was: spray them all with diesel.



Our friend and senior expert for goat farming, Mr. Eberhard Westhauser from Bavaria, advised us very prudently. He invited us to visit some goat farms in Bavaria with him and ask for advice.

Eberhard Westhauser (left), Senior Expert, and
Xhavit Shala, head of the farm, during a visit to a goat farm in Bavaria



We used our good homemade schnapps, caught 4 fleas and preserved them in our “healing water”. A laboratory in Bavaria quickly discovered that they were cat fleas. They had felt very comfortable in the warm and humid climate of our stable and multiplied extremely. Dr. Jäger from Paradocs explained to me that these fleas also like other host animals.
And then we remembered that in spring a cat had given birth to her babies in the stable. Now we are extremely careful that no cats enter the stable anymore. And for months we had so much trouble with the little jumpers.

We (Xhavit and I) spent a few days as guests of Eberhard Westhauser and his dear wife Marianne. Thanks to Mr. Westhauser’s contacts, we were able to visit 4 goat farms and learn a great deal. As Goethe already said: “Travel educates!”

As a non-governmental organization (NGO), we could not apply for state subsidies. I have already reported on this earlier. After 3 years of applications, we finally managed to register the farm as its own NGO. This was a prerequisite for receiving recognition as a social enterprise. If we obtain this status, hopefully it will not take another three years, we will be able to receive subsidies like private farms and cooperatives.

Perhaps the saying applies: “Good things come to those who wait.”

25 Years of the Diakonie Training Center

On 13 September 2025, we celebrated the 25-year anniversary of our Diakonie Training Center (DTC). For a quarter of a century, we have been training students for the Kosovar labor market. Trained in a craft, they earn good wages and are sought-after employees.

Many now work in several European countries, primarily in Germany. We did the calculations and reached around 15,000 students trained over 25 years.

Under radiant sunshine (30 degrees), more than 400 guests attended. The Prime Minister, Mr. Albin Kurti, and the German Ambassador, Mr. Jörn Rohde, gave greetings. From Germany, Church Councilor Rafael Nikodemus, representatives of Diakonie Saar Oliver Kremp-Mohr and Matthias Ewelt, and Ms. Silke Schaum from the congregation Wadern-Losheim joined us.

Our dance group, the “Little Eagles,” and the children of our kindergarten performed dances.

The colleagues at the grill were not freezing; they grilled and distributed 460 sausages.



Handmade bunting from the youth center



The young dancers from the kindergarten





Greetings from Prime Minister Albin Kurti and the German Ambassador Jörn Rohde



Students with self-sewn dresses in the fashion show



Dancers from Fushë Kosova/community center



In conversation with the Prime Minister, Mr. Albin Kurti (left), and the Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Faton Peci



The sausage stand is steaming and smoking



The anniversary Cake



The joint cutting of the cake: B. Baumgarten, L. Zeqiri, R. Nikodemus, and J. Rohde

The Community Center in Fushë Kosova

With the fraternal support of Diakonie Biberach/Ochsenhausen and “Hoffnung für Osteuropa” (Hope for Eastern Europe) / Diakonie Rheinland-Westfalen-Lippe, we were able to purchase the community center: a meeting and training place for Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians in Fushë Kosova (Amselfeld).

On 12 September 2025, together with representatives of “Diakonie Saar” (Church Councilor Rafael Nikodemus and Ms. Silke Schaum from the presbytery of the congregation Wadern-Losheim) and many guests, we officially opened the community center.

Children and young people from the dance courses performed and delighted the audience. The cooking course prepared a cold buffet, the tailoring course and the hairdressing course demonstrated their skills. Together, a red ribbon was cut for the official opening.

Together with our visitors and students, we thank all who supported us and made the community center possible.



Guests waiting for the official opening



From left: S. Schaum, R. Nikodemus, B. Baumgarten, D. Gllogu and little H. Kongjeli during the ribbon cutting



Dancers from Fushë Kosova



The dance group “Shqipet e vogla” / the Little Eagles



In the classroom for seamstresses



Starting an event makes you hungry

The kindergarten

The children and the educators feel very comfortable in the new building, financed by “Bread for the World” and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The rooms are bright and spacious, and the underfloor heating installed by our heating engineer, Lavdim Zeqiri, and his team ensures a pleasant warmth.

In August, the State Secretary of the BMZ, Mr. Johann Saathoff, visited us together with the department head, Ms. Heike Backofen-Warnecke. They were able to see for themselves that the funds invested by the BMZ were used well and as intended.

All rooms are wonderfully furnished, thanks mainly to the organization “Ein Herz für Kinder” (A Heart for Children).



From left: Ms. Backofen-Warnecke, Mr. Baumgarten, Mr. Saathoff, and the school director Mr. Zeqiri in the heating installation classroom



This photo does not need a description



On the playground in front of the new panda tunnel



A heart from children for “Ein Herz für Kinder”!

The Diakonie Youthcenter (DYC)

Autumn has arrived, which again brings more children and young people to our youth center. The leisure and group activities have increased significantly after the (hot) summer.

In the groups, many products/gifts for the Christmas market are being made.

We said goodbye to Ayda Asgari, who worked actively and with great commitment as a volunteer in the DYC for one year.



Ayda Asgari (in the middle)

She met and fell in love with the man of her life here — an American volunteer. It would not be the first marriage that has come about here, more or less as a spin-off.



The nail design and artificial eyelashes courses are running very well. With Gresiana Mustafaj, we have found a gifted instructor.

Gresiana Mustafaj in the nail design course

Leonita Shabani and her team are very active in various schools, conducting training sessions on the use/misuse of vaporizers (vapes), electronic cigarettes.



Leonita Shabani (Head of the Youth Center)

Further Training

The Austrian Protestant military chaplain, Pastor Tom Stark, invited the head of the youth center, Leonita Shabani, and me to a very special training session at the headquarters of the Kosovo Force (KFOR) in Film City in Prishtina.

It was about balloon modelling. It was my first seminar of this kind in my life and in Film City.

After a short theoretical introduction, we began modelling.
Ms. Shabani modelled wildly and enthusiastically with the other participants. I was rather hopeless.

Then Tom Stark came with other modelling helpers to our kindergarten, and everyone (except me) modelled to the great delight of the children.



L.Shabani with balloon dogs



Pastor T. Stark with comrades modelling on our playground
The children loved it!

Miscellaneous

In 2016, the city of Mitrovica (the mayor) promised us a financial grant of €4,000 for the youth center. In 2017, we filed a lawsuit in court because the city did not pay despite the agreement. On 29 October 2025, we were able to reach a settlement before the district court. We will receive €5,654.00 including interest and attorney fees.
As it says in the Second Epistle of Peter: "…that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day."

To obtain this urgently needed money, we have now instructed the bailiff.
Even a legal agreement signed by the city's lawyers does not necessarily mean that the agreed amount will be transferred.

We notice that donations to us are decreasing. There are certainly legitimate reasons for this — for example Ukraine, Gaza — but even 26 years after the end of the Kosovo war, we still need your

support. This is especially true for our work with minorities. Throughout the year, we need financial means to purchase medication and to provide free medical treatment and medicines in Fushë Kosova.

On 08 November 2025, 12 German soldiers prepared traditional dishes in our kitchen. First there was an introduction to the diverse work of Diakonie Kosova; then the knives were sharpened. The day was organized by the military chaplain, Mr. Roland von Engelhardt. At the end, everyone ate what they had prepared — no one had any complaints afterwards. After cooking, the farm and the youth center were visited.



The introduction to Diakonie Kosova



We bake burek



The military chaplain with comrades making cinnamon rolls



Consumption without stomach problems!

I thank the many donors and the parishes for their collections!

We are delighted if you would like to visit us in Kosovo. We would be happy to discuss and plan a trip with you to get to know the country and its people.

I already wish you a blessed Advent season.

Bernd Baumgarten

We are supported by:

Parishes and church districts in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria.

Spenden können Sie an das Diakonische Werk der Kirchenkreise Trier und Simmern-Trarbach gGmbH überweisen, sie erhalten dann eine Spendenbescheinigung.



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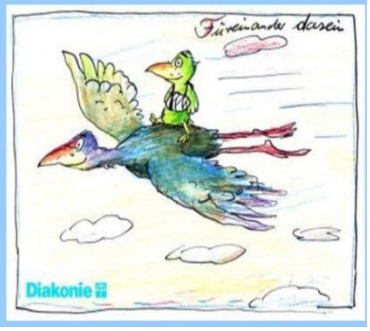
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Please let us know if you have received our Friends' Letter.

faleminderit, thank you, danke, merci, mille grazie

for your help and your donations.