DIAKONIE KOSOVA DIAKONIE TRAINING CENTER

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Mitrovica, March 2026

Friendsletter

Dear Sir or Madam, dear friends,

The political and security situation

At the moment, we are (unfortunately, once again) experiencing a political roller coaster. The last parliamentary elections took place on December 28 of last year.

The winner of the election was the party Vetëvendosje (Self-Determination), led by Prime Minister Albin Kurti. The party received 51% of the votes. We at Diakonie Kosova, along with many citizens, were pleased that the political stalemate had finally come to an end. On February 11, a new government was elected, with Albin Kurti as Prime Minister.

In March, however, a new rapid downturn began. Since the parliament was unable or unwilling to elect a new president, President Vjosa Osmani dissolved the parliament. According to the rules, new elections should take place within a maximum of 45 days after the dissolution of parliament. The Constitutional Court, which was called upon to review the matter, examined the procedure and suspended the dissolution by President Vjosa Osmani until March 31, 2026. As a result, the parliament is no longer dissolved, and the election of a president can continue.

In the north, in the Serbian municipalities, the situation is calm. At present, there have been no attacks. As already reported earlier, there are now also Albanian shops and restaurants in North Mitrovica. Serbian citizens come to the southern part of the city, while Albanians and other ethnic groups go to the northern part. The new bridges are actively used in both directions.



The new pedestrian bridge



The bridge for motor vehicles

The social situation

The social situation remains difficult. The unemployment rate has improved and is currently around 10%, but a large part of the population (not only members of minority groups) still lives in poverty. In February, we had an inflation rate of 6%, the highest in Europe. As a result, many families depend on financial support from relatives living abroad.

The situation is particularly precarious for minorities such as Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians, as well as for many elderly people, some of whom receive only the basic pension of €150 per month.

At our community center in Fushë Kosova, our staff see every day what poverty means for families in their daily lives.

Another major problem is the lack of a general health insurance system. Recently, we had a serious illness within our staff. Only a life-saving operation in Belgrade could help, costing €20,000. For comparison: a teacher at the Diakonie Training Center earns €565 net per month. Often, since the wife does not work, this income must support the entire family.

You may now ask how an employee could possibly pay €20,000. Those who are fortunate have children living abroad. Families pool their resources, and loans are taken out. We also have a small social fund, into which employees contribute €2 per month. In case of emergency, an employee can receive €150 from this fund. Unfortunately, that is all we can provide.

The Diakonie Training Center (DTC)

We have now been active for more than a quarter of a century and have experienced many highs and lows. Former students work in Kosovo and in many countries across Europe. At the same time, students also come from European countries to complete a practical, intensive, and relatively short training program with us. Most recently, we had a young woman from London (with Kosovar roots) who completed two courses here: hairdressing and nail design. While she was studying here, her husband converted their garden house in London into a hair salon.

At the moment, we have 72 students enrolled in the different courses. All of them have very good chances on the Kosovar labor market. It is quite strange: although unemployment is around 10–11%, construction sites still need workers from Pakistan and Bangladesh to fill the gaps. Of course, construction work is physically demanding, but the wages are also higher than in many other sectors.

Planned for several years and worked on for months, the Oda is now completed—the traditional Albanian room that was once reserved only for men. Before the Kosovo war (1998–1999), almost every house had an Oda, but today there is only one in Mitrovica: the one at the DTC. Many women reject this space because it symbolizes the patriarchal system in which women were excluded. Men used to spend the entire day in the Oda, smoking, drinking tea and schnapps, and discussing various matters. I also had discussions with colleagues who clearly told me: “Bernd, this Oda is only for men!”

Since the idea of establishing an Oda came from a German, I explained to everyone that this would be a modern Oda, for both men and women. At the opening (photo), our female colleagues were of course present. After a lovely shared meal, the women danced. The men told me that this was the very first Oda in which women had ever danced.

Several visitors have already spent time sitting in the Oda, and everyone has been enthusiastic.



The opening



Almost like in the old days



The dance in the Oda

The kindergarten

Our kindergarten is a success story. What began 11 years ago with just one child has developed into a kindergarten that children and parents appreciate and love.

Since January, we have had a new director, Krenare Prekazi, who leads the institution with great energy and full commitment. The kindergarten now has five groups and 105 children.

In the meantime, children from other kindergartens are coming to us because parents value our educational approach, the freshly prepared meals every day, the outdoor playground, and many other aspects. We have also just been able to renew our license for another three years.

We would like to thank the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and Bread for the World (BfdW), who financed the construction of the new kindergarten.





November 28 – Day of the historic Albanian flag





The children celebrate Kosovo's Independence Day (February 17)

On Independence Day (February 17), there was a celebration with various activities for all the children across the different groups.

The donation campaign “Ein Herz für Kinder” supported us with a generous donation. With this support, we were able to purchase equipment and dishes for the kindergarten kitchen as well as new playground equipment.



The Playground



The tunnel is very much loved.

EIN HERZ FÜR KINDER

Many ♥felt thanks!

Sustainable return and reintegration for returnees from Germany to Kosovo

At the end of December, we completed the first year of our joint cooperation with the Bavarian State Office for Asylum and Repatriations (LFAR) and the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF).

We support returnees from Germany with their reintegration in Kosovo. For all returnees, the situation is initially difficult. Their dreams of a “carefree life” in Germany have burst. In most cases, they had been staying in Germany illegally or, as is the case for quite a few, they had been in prison.

With our many years of experience in reintegration (since 2007) and our wide range of support services (Psychosocial Center, family doctor, training center), we are usually able to find good solutions together with those affected.

We place special emphasis on families with children and also on single parents.

In February, I personally visited the LFAR and was able to report on the past year as well as take into account the opinions and wishes of our project partner. We have been working together since 2018.





Startup support for a tailoring business

Many returnees start again from the very beginning in Kosovo.

They receive a food package to help them get started.

The farm

It is just like in the old folk song: “In March the farmer harnesses his horses. He ploughs the soil, harrows it, and sows.”

In our case, it is not a little horse, but a steel horse named Fendt. Bekim, our farmer and “tractor driver” (though he truly loves the old Deutz), saddles up his steel horse early in the morning, ploughs, harrows, and sows. Unfortunately, we only have a little more than 12 hectares of land otherwise he would be out all day long with one of our two green steel horses.

In the second verse, the song speaks about the farmer’s wife. That fits us perfectly as well. Since January 2026, we have had a trained agricultural specialist as the head of the farm. In our somewhat male-dominated society, this led to a few discussions.



Lavdim and Esra really active

“They can’t do it, a woman cannot manage that.” All of this only motivated me even more to give it a try with her. And so far, I really cannot complain at all. Just a few days ago, Lavdim, Esra (that is the name of our new farmer), and I pruned trees together. It wasn’t that many, only about 100 trees. And Esra worked with full commitment, great dedication, and a lot of joy. And since it is currently Ramadan, both Lavdim and she were also fasting.



And we have goat kids again. At the moment there are 40, and more are expected. Some were born so early that we already have milk and are able to produce cheese.

At this point, I would like and must express my thanks to the expert Eberhard Westhauser from the **Senior Expert Service** in Bonn. Eberhard was with us again last year and greatly advanced our knowledge and experience in goat farming.

The Rhineland Regional Church supports our farm (which provides jobs for people with disabilities) through a joint project with the Protestant parish of Wadern-Losheim in Saarland. With funds from the church development fund, we were able to purchase necessary agricultural machinery and build a new barn for hay. Together with many colleagues and with the help of the Protestant military chaplain Roland Baron von Engelhardt and his parish assistant, the new barn was completed quickly.



Together we are strong and even carpenters



Only the rails for the gates are still missing

A little bit of country knowledge

I have now been living in Kosovo for 15 years and feel completely at home here. And just when I think I already know almost everything, I see or learn something new, often something that makes me smile. Recently, I was driving through our beautiful mountains when I noticed a water bottle stuck in a pothole right in the middle of the road. Of course, it is not an officially recognized European road sign, but here it is a clear signal: beware of the pothole, don't drive into it. Cheap to make and very versatile.



The Psychosocial Center for Trauma Therapy

In 2007, together with the Diakonisches Werk in Trier, we began our work in Kosovo (Diakonie Kosova). Both public and private actors pointed out to us the high percentage of traumatized people in Kosovar society, especially women and children. More than one fifth of the population (22%) was traumatized and suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Drawing on our experience at the Diakonisches Werk in Trier, where we had established psychosocial and trauma-therapeutic services, we began similar work in Kosovo. There was a lack of therapists and a lack of professional training in trauma therapy.

In 2010, after difficult negotiations with the responsible ministries, we started a three-year training program together with child and adolescent psychiatrist and trauma therapy trainer Lutz Besser. The program consisted of 10 modules, supervision days, and peer group work. Lutz Besser is also the director of the Center for Psychotraumatology in Lower Saxony. From 2010 until today, we have trained more than 150 therapists.

At the same time, we worked with teachers, social workers, and educators in the field of trauma-informed education and informed countless students about the topic.



Group work with one of our therapists Fatmir Azemi



Trauma-informed education in a school in Fushë Kosova with the psychologist Berna Ramaxhiku (left)



Trauma-informed education in North Mitrovica
with our Serbian therapist Milena Dabetic

We work with all ethnic groups in Kosovo: Albanians, Serbs, Ashkali, Egyptians, and Bosniaks. Currently, two of our psychologists are in Bavaria attending training with Mr. Lutz Besser. For many years, Mr. Besser has been offering us this training in Germany free of charge. Many thanks!

For several years now, the Kosovar Ministry of Justice has been supporting our Psychosocial Center. The most recently serving minister, Ms. Albulena Haxhiu, her State Secretary Ms. Anita Kalanderi, and other staff members appreciate and support our work.

REPUBLIKA E KOSOVËS
MINISTRIA E DREJTËSISË

The **German Embassy** in Prishtina supported us last year with project funding and has also approved funding again this year. We would like to sincerely thank the responsible staff members at the embassy, as their support helps ensure that our work can continue.

The **Protestant Agency for Diakonia and Development** (Evangelisches Werk für Diakonie und Entwicklung e.V.) in Berlin, through **Bread for the World**, has been supporting us since 2021. Many thanks!

Brot für die Welt

LACHEN helfen e.V.

The association "**Lachen Helfen**," in which soldiers and police officers are actively involved, supported us last year. Through this support, we were able to purchase therapeutic materials, office furniture, books, and toys for children, which helped us greatly.

Thanks to the donors mentioned above, as well as individual donors, our important work here can continue. We hope that a future government will introduce a general health insurance system. If psychotherapeutic support is then also covered by health insurance, our future will look brighter.

It must be said that without our donors, trauma therapy work would not be possible.

The Diakonie Youth Center (DYC)

The youth center has been and continues to be a home for many young people. Sometimes I meet young women and men in the city who used to visit our youth center. Now they are adults, working, married, and have children.

It always makes me happy to see that they have found their path in life. And for quite a few of them, we were able to help with love and patience so that they could find their own way.

The youth center is open six days a week. Young people come and go, can play, and meet with others. It is busiest on weekends, when visitors do not have school. We offer different groups and activities, such as German classes, crafts, movie nights, and courses in nail design and artificial eyelashes.

Recently, we have a new director, as the previous one wanted to work as a psychologist and therapist in the psychosocial center.



Watching a film



Visit from Adler Management from Berlin with the little "eagles"



Clothes for people in need



The new mayor of the city of Mitrovica, Mr. Faton Peci, visited us at the youth center

And what else has been keeping us busy…

- On November 29, 2025, we held a wonderful Christmas market, which we have organized together with the German Embassy for many years. The embassy had invited the vocal group VIP from Dresden, who performed both traditional and modern Christmas carols. A big highlight was Grandmother Baumgarten's mulled wine. Yes, indeed, she lived to be 101.5 years old. Perhaps it was the mulled wine?



The vocal group VIP from Dresden



Staff members of the German Embassy, with Ambassador Rudolph (wearing glasses) in the center

- On December 25, 2025, we held our annual Christmas celebration. The Protestant military chaplain, Roland Baron von Engelhardt, gave a short sermon, and during the shared meal colleagues danced together. Dancing during Christmas celebrations is something I learned to love here in Kosovo.

And it is not so unusual after all. In the Old Testament (Samuel 6:14–16) we read that King David danced with great devotion before the Ark of the Covenant.
Which, by the way, his wife did not like at all. Well, I will not go into that any further!



Miitary chaplain Roland Baron von Engelhardt during the sermon, with Driton Topxhiu as translator



The Christmas dance with drums and trumpets

- It only happens about once every 33 years that Ramadan and the Christian fasting period take place at the same time and overlap. This year they even began on the same day. In addition to the Christmas celebration with gift exchanges, we also shared a communal breaking of the fast (iftar). This took place on February 27, 2026, and our kitchen (led by a new director and her team) prepared a very delicious evening meal.



And after Christmas, Easter is well known to follow. And if there is a Christmas market, why not an Easter market as well? At the moment, a Catholic priest, Father Stefan Bauhofer, is stationed at the KFOR camp in Filmcity/Prishtina. He visits us regularly with soldiers, supports us, and often comes up with good ideas. Together with his parish assistant, he had the idea of organizing an Easter market in the camp.

So on Saturday (March 7, 2026), we organized an Easter market in Filmcity with grilled sausages, waffles, pastries, homemade lemonade, our diaconal “holy water” (plum brandy), painted eggs, and stuffed animals. Our dance group, the “little eagles” (Shqipet e vogla), also performed. It was a wonderful distraction and a special experience for the soldiers. Austrian and Swiss soldiers also helped very enthusiastically. All proceeds went to support the diaconal work.



Our diaconal grilled sausages are very famous



The dance group Shqipet e vogla (little eagles) in front of the German support facility in Filmcity

- Genesis 7: „…and the windows of heaven were opened“

The rain may not have been as heavy as in Noah’s time, but after several days of continuous rain, the small river Sitnica behind our property turned into a powerful stream.

The water came through the railway embankment and reached about 50 cm high at the entrance to the DTC. It was impossible to enter or leave on foot. The children in the kindergarten and all the staff were effectively trapped. Before the parents could become too worried, we organized a shuttle service and transported parents, staff, and children through the “floodwaters.”

There was a risk that the water might push into the kindergarten building, but in the end we were spared by just a few centimeters.



Behind the kindergarten



Our driveway

We are supported by:

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Bayerisches Landesamt für Asyl und Rückführungen

Ev. Militärseelsorge

Church congregations and church districts in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria.



Please let us know when you have received our friends' letter.

faleminderit, thank you, danke, merci, mille grazie

for your support and your donations.