

Traffic Accidents in Kosovo – A Major Concern for Kosovo

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Abstract

The number of traffic accidents in Kosovo is increasing rapidly from year to year. As a result of traffic accidents the number of injured and deaths has increased. During the period of January-December 2016 there were 18541 accidents, which resulted in 110 casualties (Kosovo Police Annual Reports). Campaigns undertaken by the Government of Kosovo, Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport and the Kosovo Police, as well as various video-spots intended to raise awareness of the dangers of traffic accidents have not accomplished the expected results and did not reduce the number of accidents. Therefore, we can conclude that the number of accidents taking place in Kosovo is concerning. Despite the best efforts of relevant institutions, despite the increased engagement to pass legislation, which would be in line with the European standards, and despite substantial improvements and major investments on the infrastructure, and despite all the measures taken, reducing the number of road accidents remains a significant challenge. With this paper, I will try to draw attention to the actions, measures and activities that I consider the relevant institutions of Kosovo should focus on in order to prevent and to reduce the high number of traffic accidents.

Keywords: accident, damage, death, driver, safety, people, traffic.

Introduction

Although statistics show that Kosovo is not worse than the regional countries, nevertheless, these traffic accidents' statistics in Kosovo are a cause for concern. The most common causes of traffic accidents remain speeding and disregard of road conditions by the drivers. In order to address this issue, awareness campaigns should be conducted directed at drivers based on the Law on Road Traffic Safety. Pursuant to the current legislation, the Government of Kosovo has approved the 2016-2020 Road Safety Strategy and Action Plan for Kosovo 2016-2018. This strategy aims to increase the traffic safety and demands engagement and accountability within the competencies and responsibilities, and a more robust interaction by all institutions to act preventively and to reduce the number of accidents.¹ The number of people that have lost their lives in traffic accidents is also increasing. Awareness campaigns and appeals of the local safety institutions are unable to raise the awareness amongst the careless drivers, in particular amongst the immature onedriven to enormous speeding even in urban areas.

¹ Government of Kosovo/Ministry of Infrastructure: "Road Safety Strategy 2016-2020".

Please see below the table of traffic accidents revealed by the Kosovo Police sources:

Description/Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Number of Accidents	<i>18030</i>	<i>18888</i>	<i>19754</i>	<i>19954</i>	<i>16300</i>	<i>17722</i>	<i>18541</i>
Number of Accidents with Fatalities	<i>158</i>	<i>130</i>	<i>116</i>	<i>104</i>	<i>111</i>	<i>117</i>	<i>99</i>
Number of Deaths	<i>175</i>	<i>157</i>	<i>121</i>	<i>119</i>	<i>127</i>	<i>129</i>	<i>110</i>
Number of Injured People	<i>7730</i>	<i>8321</i>	<i>8561</i>	<i>9817</i>	<i>9713</i>	<i>10671</i>	<i>12009</i>

Table 1 - Data on the number of traffic accidents. Source: Kosovo Police

According to Kosovo Police reports, “since 2002, there were 225571 traffic accidents in Kosovo with 2118 fatalities.” These figures are considered to be alarming by the Police and safety experts. On average, there are about 18000 traffic accidents (2010-2014) that on average result in 8000-9000 injuries, and material losses because of traffic accidents reach a percentage (%), which is a considerable amount of national revenues.

January – December 2015 No.		January – December 2016 No.	(+/-)	%	
Accidents with fatalities	117	Accidents with fatalities	99	-18	- 15.38
Fatalities	129	Fatalities	110	-19	- 14.73
Accidents with injured people	5275	Accidents with injured people	6130	855	16.21
Injured people	10671	Injured people	12009	1338	12.54
Accidents with damages	11145	Accidents with damages	12312	1167	10.47
Hit and run	1185	Hit and run		/	/
Total Accidents	17722	Total Accidents	18541	819	4.62
Tickets issued	303971	Tickets issued	326515	22544	7.42

Comparison of accidents in Kosovo for the January – December 2015/2016

Despite the best efforts of the Police, unfortunately, “in 2015, there were 17722 accidents recorded; which compared to 2014 depicts an increase by 8.72%. Increase was noted in all all types of accidents, including those with fatalities, which recorded an increase by 5.41%, injuries by 8.18% and material damages by 7.86%. In these traffic accidents, 129 people lost their lives, which compared to 2014 shows an increase by 1.57%. The number of people injured in traffic accidents increased by 9.86%. (Source: Kosovo Police Annual Report 2015). In 2016, the number of accidents with fatalities has decreased, thus, there were 110 fatalities, or 19 less or 14.7% less than in 2015. (Source: Kosovo Police Information Office). Another concern is the age of those involved in traffic accidents since young people between the ages of 25-30 years-old were involved mostly in the road traffic accidents in different roads of the country, either by causing the accidents or suffering in them.²

Road traffic accidents incur major damages. They happen for instance because of poor maintenance of roads, use of technically unsuitable or old vehicles, poor signalling, etc. However, the largest number of accidents happens because of error and mistakes on the scene, such as speeding or unauthorised take over. Further, frequently traffic accidents happen because of an enormous increase of number of vehicles. It could be concluded that the number of fatalities and injured people in traffic accidents is concerning, and raising awareness among the drivers would have more impact in eliminating the dangers that vehicles bring. The large number of accidents, not just in our country, but all over the world, often happens because of excessive speed or driving under influence of alcohol.

It is an indisputable fact that among the most common causes of deaths in majority of countries in the world are traffic accidents. Every year, 1.2 million men, women and children all over the world lose their lives in traffic accidents; half of them are from the EU countries. Also, at the same time, more than 1.5 million Europeans suffer bodily injuries; with over 150000 suffer permanent disabilities (invalidity). Based on statistics from the EU, the norm of traffic deaths is highest in Greece (689) and Portugal (630), whereas the lowest norm is in the United Kingdom (146) and Sweden (147). Also, based on statistics in Europe there are more than 40000 deaths. EU has started drafting a programme, Road Safety Action Programme, which aims to cut the number of traffic victims by 40% by the year 2020 compared to the year 2011.

Although decrease of number of accidents remains a major challenge, upon thorough analysis of this issue, this paper concludes that consistent campaigns should be devised to raise awareness among the participants in the traffic (*in particular, drivers between the ages of 25-30 years-old and pedestrians, especially children*) by informing regularly the public about the safety conditions on the roads, informing them about the possible hazards and advising them how to avoid those hazards.

² Kosovo Agency of Statistics/Kosovo Police.

Conclusions

Current situation demands the need for implementation of all measures to increase the traffic safety and to enable a safer traffic in Kosovo. Thus, more engagement is needed by Kosovo institutions and implementation of the below listed actions, activities and measures:

- Better signalisation on the roads, in particular in the most dangerous parts;
- Increase surveillance throughout the territory by the Traffic Police and imposing fines for irresponsible drivers (tickets);
- Continuous efforts to raise the awareness among citizens as participants in traffic (producing brochures and video spots to raise awareness among citizens and schoolchildren);
- Education of youth in schools about behaviour in traffic;
- Increase of level of preparation of young drivers, strengthening the criteria for driving tests (*according to me, this is almost the most important link*);
- Placement of traffic signs in areas where citizens' safety is endangered (in quantity, but also visibility for participants in traffic);
- Increase of technical checks for vehicles (spot checks, elimination of irregular vehicles from traffic, etc.).

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