

# LOCAL PREVENTION COUNCILS FOR STRENGTHENED LOCAL COOPERATION

## LESSONS LEARNED

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# ESTABLISHMENT OF FRAMEWORK OF LOCAL PREVENTION COUNCILS IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

After the military conflict in 2001 in North Macedonia, within the framework of the policing program and the Department of Police Development at the OSCE Mission to Skopje, the need for the establishment of local prevention councils (LPCs) was highlighted. Their goal is the active involvement of relevant stakeholders in the process of dealing with the challenges and problems that citizens face in their local communities, and to enable a better quality of life.

Local prevention councils began to be established in 2002 in most municipalities in the country. The idea behind these local councils is to represent bodies for joint action of stakeholders and relevant actors in the field of public security at the local level, for the efficient implementation of activities aimed at solving local problems and challenges, as well as a tool to encourage the implementation of the concept "community policing".

The basis for their establishment is contained in the Law on Local Self-Government and the Law on Police. First of all, it is important to point out that in practice LPCs are not regulated in national legislation. Article 25 of the Law on Local Self-Government does not foresee a legal obligation for the mandatory establishment of local prevention councils, but the importance of citizens in deciding on issues of local importance is recognized. Therefore, despite the absence of a legal obligation to form LPC, there is no doubt the importance of local governments recognizing them as an essential tool for developing an inclusive approach in building a safe living environment<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, Article 11 of the Law on the Police<sup>2</sup> foresees the cooperation of the police with citizens, with state authorities and with citizens' associations. In order to achieve cooperation and enable the strengthening of the influence of the public in the work of the police (paragraphs 1 and 2 of this article), advisory and coordinating bodies (councils and commissions) can be formed, in order to build joint recommendations and partnership relations are established between citizens and the police to improve public safety in the area of a certain municipality and to successfully prevent incidents that directly affect the safety of citizens and the community.

Eurothink, in the period December 2021 - January 2022, conducted a survey<sup>3</sup> on the representation of LPC in municipalities in N. Macedonia through requests for access to information addressed to the municipalities. The results showed that 31 municipalities had an established and functional LPC, 18 municipalities had an established but inactive LPC, 16 municipalities had not formed a LPC, and one municipality was in the process of forming a LPC. Furthermore, 12 municipalities did not respond to the request for access to information, and 3 municipalities did not accept the request for access to information about the functioning of the LPC.

Regarding the public's familiarity with the LPC concept, a national public opinion survey published by Eurothink and conducted in December 2022<sup>4</sup> showed that 10% of all respondents are familiar with the role and work of the LPC in their municipality, which is an increase by 5 percentage points compared to 2021. At the same time, younger respondents and those with higher education are familiar with the role and work of LPC in a higher percentage.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LOCAL PREVENTION COUNCILS

The local prevention council is a body for joint action of stakeholders and relevant actors in the field of public safety at the local level, as well as the successful implementation of the concept of "community policing". It networks all the key entities in a municipality that can affect the quality of life of citizens, enabling consideration of security and other local problems through a multidisciplinary prism, based on numerous interrelated causes and subject to different intervention practices.

From the position of the local self-government, the local councils are a tool that should gather at a common table all the institutions and stakeholders that have a part in social administrative processes and procedures, which take place in the local environments where they have jurisdiction. From the police perspective, LPC should network all the key entities that will "help" the police to carry out their preventive activities, that is, they will help the police to be proactive in solving citizens' security problems and in maintaining public order and peace. When solving problems, LPC should take into account different needs in the community, especially those related to marginalized and underrepresented social groups.

# ABOUT THE PROJECT ACTIVITIES

## Call for selection of municipalities for inclusion in the project

The project "Local prevention councils for strengthened local cooperation" was implemented in the period from September 1, 2022 until September 30, 2023. The project activities, building on the results of the above-mentioned research, were based on the cooperation with three selected municipalities whose LPC activities were monitored and analyzed, which were then provided with expert support and direction to improve their work. On November 11, 2022 an open call for registration of interested municipalities was published, which received 34 applications.

Профилот на општините што ги избравме за имплементација на проектните активности се состоеше од неколку карактеристики.

The profile of the municipalities that we chose for the implementation of the project activities consisted of several characteristics. First, municipalities with different levels of LPC functioning were needed:

- A municipality that has an active and functional LPC;
- A municipality that has an established but inactive LPC (the definition of an established but inactive LPC meant that there were no activities in the last 6 months or more);
- A municipality that has not formed an LPC.

Furthermore, the following characteristics of the municipalities were also important to us:

- The geographic position of the municipality (attempt to select municipalities from different statistical regions of the country) and
- The demographic-ethnic structure of the municipality (attempt to select larger and smaller municipalities with different ethnic structure)

As a result, the three selected municipalities were: Gostivar Municipality, Kisela Voda Municipality and Strumica Municipality. Memorandums of cooperation were signed with them, on the basis of which the implementation of the project activities continued.



## Survey of public opinion in the three municipalities

As part of the project activities, it was planned to conduct a public opinion survey of local citizens in the three municipalities regarding their attitudes and perceptions of local security. The research was in the form of a telephone survey of a representative sample of respondents from the territory of the three municipalities. The research questions were designed in collaboration with local municipal representatives and covered the following thematic areas:

- Attitudes related to perception/sense of security;
- Attitudes about problems in the municipality;
- Evaluation of security risks;
- Attitudes about availability and efficiency of emergency services in the municipality;
- Views on key priorities in the municipality;
- Attitudes about the police in the municipality;
- Expectations from the municipality.

The results of the research were aimed at providing quality and reliable information about the opinion of the local public and about the security situation in the municipality, and thus represent a basis for further problem mapping and planning of the work of the LPC.

## Monitoring of LPC sessions in Gostivar, Kisela Voda and Strumica

The project team attended all the sessions of the local prevention councils in the three municipalities during the project implementation period and made regular contacts with the LPC management members in order to gather information and encourage and guide them in their work.

## Strumica

LPC of the municipality of Strumica was established in 2008. During the duration of the project, three sessions of this council were held - in February, April and August 2022. The topics that were considered in these meetings were the following: the illegal felling and trade of trees in the area of the municipality of Strumica, the poisoning of local dogs, the logging machines and their presence on the roads in the municipality, begging by minors on the streets of the city and topics in the area of the education. The municipality of Strumica recently became a member of the Strong Cities Network (Strong Cities Network: <https://strongcitiesnetwork.org/>) - an independent global network of cities, dedicated to addressing problems of hate, extremism and polarization at the local level.<sup>5</sup>

## Kisela Voda

The municipality of Kisela Voda established its council in 2022 (a few months before the implementation of the project activities) and it was still in its early stage of development. During the duration of the project activities, three LPC meetings were held. The first meeting was founding and the second was dedicated to peer violence in schools. At the third meeting, they discussed the establishment of cooperation with the Municipality of Studeničani and the improvement of prevention in several areas of common interest in both municipalities.<sup>6</sup>

## Gostivar

In Gostivar, the first session of the LPC was held within the duration of the project activities, and the project team was present and followed the work of the founding meeting. At the first Local Prevention Council, challenges and problems that the municipality faced during the summer period during the return of expatriates to their native regions were discussed. A plan was made to deal with the traffic congestion and other problems were discussed, the solution of which is in the interest of the municipality and the citizens of Gostivar. The municipality of Gostivar is a member of the Strong Cities Network.<sup>7</sup>

## FINDINGS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Through the undertaken project activities and through the communications with the municipal representatives, the project team identified several weaknesses in the functioning of the local councils and in their structural arrangement. They can be identified in several roughly defined categories:

- lack of resources for work;
- lack of standardized internal work mechanisms;
- need to strengthen inter-institutional cooperation;
- insufficient visibility of the work and the results achieved by the LPC, insufficient knowledge of the role of the LPC in the local public.

Based on these insights, we have formulated a "Lessons Learned" package, in which we attempt to offer ideas and guidance to overcome identified common LPC weaknesses.

### Allocation of budget funds

One of the most important reasons for the failure to establish the work of local prevention councils is the absence of financial support from the municipality, which would significantly increase the quality of their work and the motivation for the engagement of council members. The provision of budget items intended for the work of the LPC would also help this body fit better into the larger structure of the municipality and would ensure better coordination of activities between the LPC and the municipality.

According to our knowledge, currently no LPC in N.Macedonia has not secured financial resources from the municipality. The budget items would cover compensation for the organizational team and fees for the permanent and temporary members of the LPC, and the LPC should request from the municipality financing of the projects and activities decided upon in it.

It is important that the LPC participates in the preparation of the draft budget for the next year and makes proposals in the budget discussion for specific projects for prevention and security. If in the strategic plans the municipality did not include the projects that reflect the security segments in the community, then it is the obligation of the LPC members to ask the municipality to include them in the short-term and long-term budget projects and strategies, that is, action plans adopted by the municipality. Finally, it is recommended that the LPC has the right to seek external funding for its projects.

## **Leadership of LPC**

### **(the roles of the Mayor of the municipality and the LPC Coordinator)**

During the monitoring of the LPC sessions, one key factor for successful functioning and unification of the various present parties was highlighted - the presence and activity of the mayor. It shows the importance of having a unifying figure of authority whose interest and engagement will motivate and focus the parties present to take the discussion of the given topics seriously. The mayor also attracts the trust of the stakeholders that what was decided will really be implemented and that their voice and efforts will not be useless and ignored. In reality, municipalities are highly centralized organizations where all initiatives, projects and undertaken activities are based on the explicit emphasis by the mayor. Therefore, his advocacy for solving local security issues is of great importance. In addition, this role will provide the mayor with valuable information and insights on issues of importance to local citizens, on the functioning of the community from the lowest levels up, on the systemic actors that make up that community and their mutual relations. However, it is crucial to point out that this necessity and visibility of the figure of the mayor does not mean that he is the element "at the top of the LPC pyramid" and the one who should make the decisions and pull the strings, but that he is only one of the link that completes the chain of bound and powerful institutions. He should slightly push the LPC mechanism, which functions through the established procedures and techniques. Additionally, its presence contributes to the structural continuity of the mechanism.

Apart from the mayor as the leading figure of the LPC, the second important role belongs to the coordinator of the local council, who is actually the one who does the biggest "heavy lifting" in the work of the LPC. He conceptualizes and in a practical sense organizes the event: bringing and coordinating the representatives of the stakeholders, enabling a fruitful and equal discussion, ensuring cohesion and cooperation between the stakeholders, forming thematic groups for discussion, initiating techniques for analysis and decision-making, timeliness in the development at the stages of planning, decision-making and implementation. Experiences from neighboring countries have shown that councils that have a coordinator organize their activities better and more successfully. The allocated fee for the coordinator can enable him to deal with this area on a daily level and on an ongoing basis and to deepen local, national and international contacts.<sup>8</sup>

The first noted weakness in the coordinator's role is that he is often not provided with a support structure of collaborators to whom he can delegate part of the scope of work. Organizing LPC meetings involves investing time in organizational work and human relations, and since the coordinator is simultaneously engaged in other jobs in the municipality, he has difficulties in fully dedicating himself. It is advisable to allocate funds in the municipality's budget that will enable the engagement of two more assistants.

The second common weakness is his lack of training and experience in the role of moderator of the discussion, because of which the discussions develop spontaneously and uncontrollably branch in often unrelated directions. Such various lines of development of the discussion the moderator fails to unite and purposefully focus them to result in usable insights and practical suggestions for progressing in the analysis and solving the problem.

It must be mentioned that often the LPC coordinator is the person responsible for running the LPC sessions. Very often the absence of a figure with higher authority such as the mayor of the municipality or the president of the municipal council, combined with the absence of rules of procedure for the LPC, results in a loss of momentum or strength to address certain issues and problems that are the subject of discussion at the LPC sessions. The coordinator, as the most knowledgeable in the technical mechanisms of the functioning of the LPC, should strive to lead the process and at the same time try to give an equal voice to all parties and institutions present, and at the same time direct their capacities and competences to solve the issues. The presence of one of the leading persons in the municipality would complement this process and lead to an increase in the probability that a problem or challenge will be promptly addressed by the relevant institutions.

## Formation of thematic working groups

Apart from the joint council in which the permanent members of the LPC are members, a very effective practice is the formation of thematic/problem working groups. These groups are formed when there are one or more individual problems before the council that require a certain level of experience and expertise and that need to be considered in more depth. Thematic working groups are composed of representatives of different organizational units of the police, the local government and other concerned actors in the community, with the task of defining the security problems in the specific area of interest of the local community and proposing action plans for preventive and repressive action, which clearly define the approach to the given problem.

Not every Local Prevention Council in every municipality should be divided into the same working groups. In different municipalities, the thematic/problem working groups of the Local Prevention Council will depend on the characteristics of the municipality, but also on the agenda determined for the LPC session. The practice of forming thematic working groups for certain issues particularly emphasizes the advantage of LPC, which consists of targeted work of experts in a given area. These working groups meet outside of the regularly scheduled sessions of the LPC.

## Inter and intra institutional cooperation

A safe local community implies coordination and proactivity of the various social entities, with the aim of essentially addressing the complex nature of the local problems they are considering. The development of partnerships that will be distinguished by long-term, trust, creativity, transparency, responsibility and conscientiousness in work essentially affects the effectiveness and the will of actors in the community, and encourages democratic work and the development of democratic ideals and principles. At the same time, the communication approach is key here, i.e. the exchange of information and experiences in favor of a preventive approach to problems; the willingness to allocate resources to deal with problems within the framework of jointly adopted decisions in order to synthesize an interactive approach of stakeholders; and overcoming party and personal disagreements in favor of successful work of LPC to improve the quality of life in the community. Unfortunately, the quality of the inter-institutional cooperation depends a lot on the personal relations between the representatives of the local authorities and the institutions, that is, on the current political situation in the municipality or city.

To ensure sustainable relations, it is useful to establish structures and mechanisms that will ensure responsiveness and responsibility of the parties involved. The memorandum of cooperation is often the first step towards cooperation between municipalities and institutions, as a non-binding declaration of the desire and readiness for cooperation and a basis for further upgrading and evolution of the relationship. The memorandum is recommended to include the definition of cooperation practices such as: exchange of information, joint undertaking of activities, allocation of relevant human resources, definition of feedback mechanisms, etc. Other forms of cooperation with institutions are participation in the formulation of local strategies and strategic documents, creation of clusters and contact organizations for implementing individual strategies and contracting services.<sup>9</sup>

The most effective mechanism for achieving inter-institutional cooperation is certainly the provision of a legal obligation for the functioning of LPC with mechanisms for active engagement of all stakeholders, which would be easily and quickly regulated and established through intervention in the Law on Local Self-Government.

## Development of rules of procedure

The selection of the members and their meeting are not enough to ensure the efficient work of the LPC if there is no standardized procedure for the work of this body. Some of the areas that the rules of procedure should define are: the purpose of the LPC's work; the ways of communication between LPC members, as well as with the public; the format and models of decision-making; the method of selection of the members and the organizational team; the roles of the municipality and other stakeholders; and LPC transparency and accountability mechanisms.

In addition, the LPC should work on the basis of other documents created by the local self-government units, such as: various types of thematic strategies and work plans, communication strategy, annual budget of the municipality, etc.

## Visibility and communication

Informing the local citizens is a prerequisite for realizing other forms of public participation in the work of the LPC. The purpose of communication with the public is to raise awareness and support for the work of the LPC and active contribution of the public to its work. In doing so, it is important to define: the type of information that will be transmitted, the target group, the method/form of transmitting the information as well as measuring the impact of the published information. The regular and proactive communication with the institutions that are stakeholders in the work of the LPC should not be neglected, with a specific definition of the mechanisms for communication and information.

The opportunity for public insight into the topics considered by the LPC and the decisions made is very important. The planned meetings of the LPC, the composition of the members and the topics that will be discussed, as well as notifications to the public about the course of the discussions, the exchanged opinions and the decisions made, should be reported in a timely manner. Such information should be communicated through the channels of the municipality, the channels of the represented institutions in the composition of the LPC and through the local media.



Apart from information, which is a one-way mechanism for communication with the public, LPC can also use mechanisms at a higher level to involve citizens and other local actors in its work. Dialogue with citizens can be realized through press conferences, discussion panels, public hearings, meetings, etc. Consultations are a form of participation in which LPC requests feedback, opinion, comment, advice or similar from the community regarding specific issues. Partnership is the highest form of participation of local actors in decision-making processes, and implies their participation in all stages of the decision-making process.

## **MATRIX WITH INDICATORS FOR SELF-ASSESSMENT OF THE WORK OF LOCAL PREVENTION COUNCILS**

In the last stages of the project, a matrix with indicators for the work of the local prevention councils was developed, which should serve as a roadmap and a tool for self-evaluation of LPC. The indicators were developed based on insights from the monitoring and analysis of LPC sessions, as well as through conversations with LPC members.

The indicators are divided into three groups:

- functionality - refers to aspects of the way LPC works;
- community visibility and involvement - refers to LPC's relationship with the public;
- effectiveness - indicators for measuring the results of LPC work.

## INDICATORS FOR FUNCTIONALITY, VISIBILITY AND EFFICIENCY IN THE WORK OF THE LPC

### FUNCTIONALITY

1	LPC holds regular sessions at least once every two months
2	An administrative-coordinating team of LPC was appointed by the mayor's decision
3	Presence of the mayor at the sessions of the LPC
4	Presence of municipal councilors at LPC sessions
5	Presence of representatives from the regional SIA at the LPC sessions
6	Thematic working groups are formed to consider and deal with individual topics and problems identified by the LPC
7	Budgeted funds in the municipal budget that are intended for the functioning of LPC
8	LPC submits a report to the municipal council regarding the implementation of sessions and achieved results

### VISIBILITY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

9	On the website and social networks of the municipality, announcements about the sessions of the LPC as well as information about the role and competence of the LPC are regularly published.
10	Reports/minutes from the sessions of the LPC are regularly published on the municipality's website and social media
11	There is a mechanism for citizens to propose topics for LPC consideration
12	Local media follow the work of LPC

### EFFECTIVENESS

13	Number of actions taken after the conclusion of the LPC
14	Periodic evaluation of implemented activities after the conclusion of the LPC
15	Quality of service: the extent to which the activities undertaken meet the needs and expectations of the local population
16	Changes in local policies/procedures as a result of LPC actions
17	Improvement of local security as a result of LPC actions
18	There is a mechanism for monitoring/feedback from LPC members for the activities that were decided to be implemented
19	Coverage: percentage of the targeted population that was affected by the actions taken following the decision of the LPC
20	Participation: percentage of the target population that took part in LPC activities
21	LPC engages in solving long-term, complex problems by defining strategies and policies

## CONCLUSION

Local prevention councils (LPC) represent a key tool in the chain of mechanisms for effective management of local communal, security and other daily problems and challenges, but also a tool for effective democratic policing. Its key features are the focus on preventive activities and the basis of a multi-perspective approach involving all local actors. The successfully established LPC system has great potential for increasing citizens' trust in the local government and the police.

Despite the long-term efforts to establish LPC in the municipalities, the concept is still on the margins of the activities of the local authorities and the interest in its development is low. The authors of this publication see the main obstacle in the implementation of the LPC in the absence of an enabling structure for the establishment of the LPC in all municipalities and its placement on a voluntary basis. From there, the formation and active functioning of LPC is necessary to be regulated in national legislation as an obligation, instead of just an opportunity, for local authorities, with mechanisms for active engagement of all stakeholders. This would be the easiest and fastest regulated and established through intervention in the Law on Local Self-Government. This process should start with direct actions and steps taken by all concerned social actors, in order to raise the level of mutual cooperation, which should be aimed at solving local security challenges and other problems and issues.

## REFERENCES

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<sup>2</sup> Law on Police, Skopje, 2015 p.4, <https://www.mvr.gov.mk/Upload/Documents/Zakon%20za%20policija,%20precisten%20tekst%2015.04.2015%20.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Stojanovski, A. Angelevska, K. Nikolovski, D. “Inclusiveness in decision-making in the work of the police in the Republic of North Macedonia“, Eurothink – Centre for European Strategies, 2023

<sup>4</sup> Stojanovski, A. Nikolovski, D. „Perceptions and attitudes of citizens about the work of the police“, Eurothink – Centre for European Strategies, 2022, <http://eurothink.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Percepii-i-stavovi-na-graganite-za-rabotata-na-policijata-2022.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Publications on the website of the Strumica Municipality about the sessions of the LPC:

- <https://shorturl.at/bFGQ9>
- <https://shorturl.at/oOQT9>
- <https://shorturl.at/byMV8>

<sup>6</sup> Publications on the Kisela Voda Municipality website about the LPC sessions:

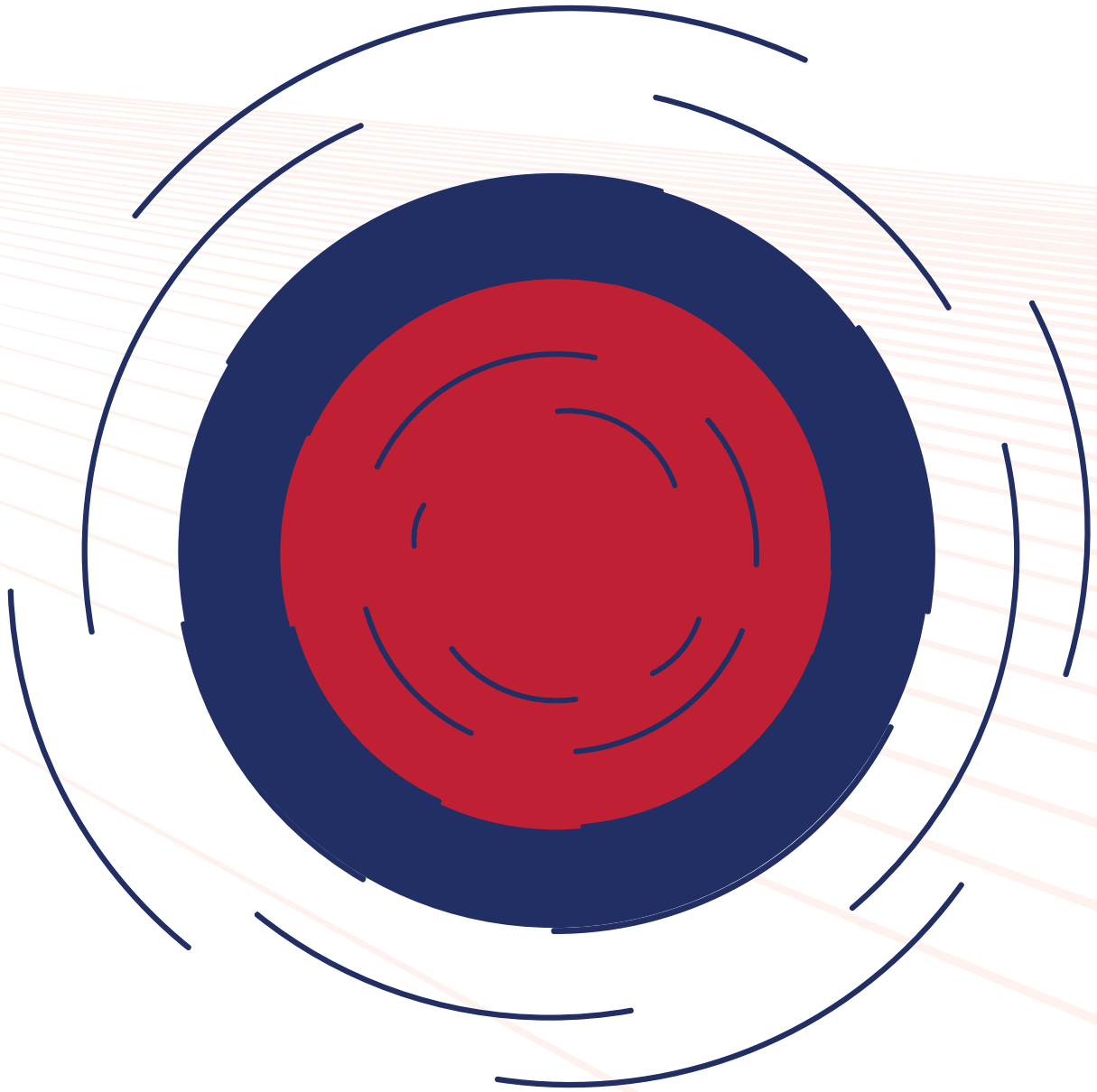
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<sup>7</sup> Publications on the website of Gostivar Municipality about the sessions of the LPC:

- <https://t.ly/imq4P>
- <https://t.ly/Y1kJb>

<sup>8</sup> Source: Bjelos, M., Brozovic, Z., Djordjevic, S., “Prirucnik za rad lokalnih saveta za bezbednost”, Belgrade Centre for Security Policy

<sup>9</sup> Bjalos, M. etc. “Prirucnik za rad lokalnih saveta za bezbenost”, Centre for Women Support from Kikinda, 2011



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