



REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA
MINISTRY FOR EUROPE
AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS

**CONFERENCE OF THE AMBASSADORS
OF THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA
DIPLO 2024**

Palace of Congresses, Tirana
26 - 28 August 2024

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26 August 2024

The path to and dynamics of the EU integration process

Keynote speakers:

H.E.Mr. **Igli Hasani** *Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs*

Mr. Hasani is a diplomat, security expert, and since September 2023 holds the position of Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania, in the government of Prime Minister Edi Rama. Before starting his duties as Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, in the period October 2021 - September 2023, Igli Hasani held the position of OSCE Coordinator for Economic-Environmental Issues. This was the highest position held by an Albanian citizen in the OSCE, since Albania's membership in the Organization in 1991. Igli Hasani joined the Albanian diplomatic corps in 2018, as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Albania to International Organizations in Vienna, a position he held until September 2021.

H.E.Ms. **Tanja Fajon**, *Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia* is a politician, former leader of Social Democrats, part of the Party of European Socialists and former Member of the European Parliament (MEP) from Slovenia. She has been serving as the minister of foreign and European affairs in the government of Prime Minister Robert Golob since 1 June 2022. She was first elected to the European Parliament in 2009 on behalf of the Social Democrats, and again in 2014 and 2019. She has made a name for herself in the Western Balkans, where, among other things, she played a key role as the European Parliament's rapporteur on visa liberalisation for the countries of the region and as an advocate of respect for democracy, the rule of law, human rights and equality. She was also one of the most active MEPs on asylum and migrant policy and the reform of the Schengen legislation.

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Towards 2030 - Albania in the European Union

Guests:

Ms. Majlinda Dhuka *Minister of State and Chief Negotiator in Albania*

has performed several management functions as a civil servant in directorates and departments such as legislation; development and strategic planning in the Municipality of Tirana, as well as in development cooperation and foreign aid; development programming – strategic planning; good governance and public policy, in the Prime Minister. Also, Mrs. Dhuka played the role of Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Ministers. She graduated from the Faculty of Law, University of Tirana, and holds the "Master's in European Studies" degree.

Ms. Federica Mogherini, Rector of the College of Europe

Federica Mogherini *Rector of the College of Europe*

Previously, she has served as the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission (2014-19).

Prior to joining the EU, she was Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (2014), and a Member of the Italian Chamber of Deputies (2008-14). In her parliamentary capacity, she was Head of the Italian Delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and Vice-President of its Political Committee (2013-14); member of the Italian Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (2008-13); Secretary of the Defence Committee (2008-13); and member of the Foreign Affairs Committee. She also coordinated the Inter-Parliamentary Group for Development Cooperation.

She has co-chaired the United Nations High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement from January 2020 to September 2021.

Ms. Jorida Tabaku, *Chair, Parliamentary Commission of European Integration*

She has over 10 years of experience in politics, serving as the deputy mayor of Tirana from 2011 to 2015, and as the chair of the European Affair Committee and a member of the Financial and Economic Committee since 2021. She was the chairwoman of the Incinerator Inquiry Committee who was the best inquiry committee in the Albanian parliament since 1992. After this Committee several high ranking officials and politicians are being indicted and arrested. She is a conservative politician with the Democratic Party of Albania, and is committed to advancing Albania's integration into the European Union and improving its economic and social conditions.

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Mr. Ioannis Armakolas, *PhD (Cantab), Associate Professor in Comparative Politics of Southeast Europe at the Department of Balkan, Slavic and Oriental Studies, University of Macedonia*

Senior Research Fellow & Head of the South-East Europe Programme at the Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP); He joined the University of Macedonia in 2010 as lecturer. Ioannis Armakolas is a member of the Europe's Futures network of the Erste Foundation, member of the Independent Tripartite High Level Group on EU Neighbourhood Interdependencies, Editor of the 'Political Trends and Dynamics' the regional journal of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. He serves as a member of the Working Group for the formation of the Bilateral Youth Cooperation Office between Greece and North Macedonia, on the basis of the Prespa Agreement that solved the so-called 'name dispute'.

H.E. Mr. Ferit Hoxha *Ambassador Mission of the Republic of Albania to the European Union*

Mr. Hoxha joined the Albanian Foreign Service in 1991 and since then has been active in Foreign and International Relations. He is a diplomat who, as ambassador of the mission in Brussels, was entrusted with the process of Albania's integration into the EU and the translation of the homework done by Albania into positive decisions. From March 2018 to October 2021, he served as Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Albania to UNESCO, in Paris. On September 30, 2021, he was appointed Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Albania to the United Nations in New York, as well as Non-resident Ambassador of Albania to Cuba. Hoxha returns as a diplomat in Brussels after the mission he had in 1998-2000. Hoxha is also Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Albania to the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, non-resident.

Moderator: Mr. Blendi Fevziu *Albanian journalist, writer and host of the political TV talk show Opinion.*

Fevziu graduated in literature and Albanian language at the University of Tirana in 1991. In December 1990 and February 1991, he was an active participant of the Student Movement that brought about the change of regime in Albania. On January 5, 1991, he was the co-founder of the newspaper Rilindja Demokratike, the first organ of the free press after almost 70 years in Albania. Opinion is the most watched political show on Albanian screens which first went on air on August 31, 1997 with comments, analyses, debates, interviews, characters, testimonies and concrete facts.

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New challenges of security policies, boundaries in cyber security, misinformation, and disinformation.

Guests:

Mr. Pirro Vengu, *Minister of Defence of Albania*

from July 2024 he holds the position of Minister of Defense. He held important positions during the government of Prime Minister Edi Rama. Vengu has held the position of Director of the Port of Durrës since 2019. He was also the Director of Anticorruption in the Prime Minister and previously held the position of Chief of Cabinet in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Ernst Noorman *Ambassador at Large for Cyber Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands*

Ambassador Ernst Noorman has a long career within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as within other ministries. Before taking up his new position as Ambassador at Large for Cyber Affairs, he has served the past 13 years as ambassador for the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Burkina Faso, Suriname, Afghanistan, and Colombia respectively. Before that he worked amongst others at the Ministry of Finance in the Euroteam, responsible for the introduction of the euro in the Netherlands, and for the Ministry of Home Affairs and Kingdom Relations, where he was responsible for the financial negotiations leading to the constitutional changes of the Caribbean part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. As a junior diplomat he has served in India and Tanzania. Ambassador Noorman obtained his master's degree in economics at the University of Amsterdam, the city where he was born.

H.E. Mr. Ilir Gjoni *Ambassador of the Republic of Albania to NATO.*

Mr. Gjoni has almost thirty years of experience in various government and non-government institutions. He has worked in diplomacy (MFA) for almost ten years, (1985-1994), in journalism as international news editor in one of the country's biggest independent newspapers ("Koha Jonë"). Mr. Gjoni has also worked for international organizations such as UNHCR as Liaison Officer in Tirana (1997-1999). Mr. Gjoni's working experience includes also a relatively long period as senior government official serving as Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister (1999-2000) as well as both Defense and Interior Minister respectively (2000-2002). Mr. Gjoni has served as Ambassador of the Republic of Albania to the Swiss Confederation and Principality of Liechtenstein from 2014 to 2023. From September 2023 Mr. Gjoni is appointed Ambassador of the Republic of Albania to NATO.

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Mr. Remzi Lani, *Executive Director of the Albanian Media Institute.*

A graduate of Tirana University, Faculty of Philosophy. He has a long career in journalism: “Zeri i Rinise” (Tirana), “El Mundo” (Madrid), “Zeri” (Pristina) etc. Author of articles on Balkan affairs for different local and foreign papers and magazines such as: “El Mundo” - Madrid, “The Guardian” - London, Quimera - Barcelona, The International Spectator - Rome, etc.

Lani has collaborated with Aspen Institute- Berlin, Istituto Affari Internazionali-Rome, CESPI-Rome, Center for International and Strategic Studies-Washington, Carter Center- Atlanta, Hellenic Foundation-Athens, CIDOB-Barcelona, Bertelsmann Foundation in different projects on Balkan issues. Lani has been also an expert for the International Commission on the Balkans (Amato Commission). He was also a founding member of the first Human Rights Group in Albania (The Forum for Human Rights), 1990.

Moderator

Mr. Igli Tafa, Director of the National Cyber Security Agency

Mr. Tafa has a varied academic career serving as a lecturer at the Polytechnic University of Tirana in the field of technology and information. With over 16 years of experience in the academic and information security fields, Mr. Tafa has contributed to the advancement of research and the development of new technologies to address threats in this field. He has been a leader in many projects, has served as an advisor to various organizations, and has contributed to international panels and conferences. Since October 2022, Mr. Tafa serves as the General Director of the National Authority for Cyber Security as well as the National Coordinator for Cyber Security. Under this leadership, AKSK has undertaken a series of important initiatives both at the strategic and operational level, ranking Albania among the first countries that have adopted the NIS2 directive.

Stability and current challenges in Southeast Europe

Guests

Ms. Mimi Kodheli, *Chair, Parliamentary Commission of Foreign Policy, Parliament of Albania*

She has been the Chairperson of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Albanian Parliament and the Head of the Albanian delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly for five years now. Mimi Kodheli was elected as Vice-President of the NATO PA in November 2020. Ms. Kodheli entered politics in 2002. In 2002 she was appointed Deputy Mayor of Tirana Municipality and in 2005 she became the Prefect of the Tirana Region. From 2009 to 2013 she held the position of Deputy Chairperson of the Economy and Finance Committee. In 2013 she became Minister of Defense of the Republic of Albania until 2017. Ms. Kodheli holds a PhD in Economic Sciences from the University of Verona, Italy, in cooperation with the University of Tirana. She holds an MBA from Lincoln University, Nebraska, USA, in cooperation with the University of Tirana. She graduated from the University of Tirana, Economics Faculty in 1986. Since 2007 she has been a member of the Headship of the Socialist Party.

Mr. Bujar Osmani, *former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia*

Bujar Osmani graduated in medicine, Faculty of Medicine, at the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, Skopje, in 2004. He completed part of his residency in London, United Kingdom, officially becoming a specialist surgeon in 2012. In 2014, Mr. Osmani began his doctoral studies in Skopje. Ss. School of Doctoral Studies at Cyril and Methodius University, from where he graduated, receiving his PhD in July 2018.

In the period 2008-2011 he was the Minister of Health. In June 2017, Mr. Osmani was appointed deputy prime minister in charge of European affairs. As the head of the Secretariat for European Affairs, Mr. Osmani simultaneously performed the duties of the National Coordinator for the coordination of Foreign Aid and IPA Funds. In July 2018, Mr. Osmani was appointed Head of the National Delegation and Chief Negotiator with the European Union, under whose leadership the explanatory review process with the European Union was successfully started, carried out and completed. On August 30, 2020, Bujar Osmani was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia. After the official start of negotiations for EU membership, in September 2022 Osmani was once again appointed Head of the National Delegation.

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Ms. Majlinda Bregu, *Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council*

Ms. Bregu is an accomplished Albanian Politician, a strong EU believer, and a promoter of women's rights and empowerment. She also has a prominent career as university professor and journalist.

Mrs. Bregu was elected as a Member of Parliament for three consecutive legislatures, (2005-2017) as a Democratic Party member, Centre Right. From March 2007 to September 2013, she served as Minister of European Integration and the Government Spoke-person. Both duties, which she passionately accomplished, allowed her to domestically steer the increasing challenges of European Integration membership, and promote abroad the importance of the membership perspective for the stability of the region. As from April 2018, Mrs. Bregu is appointed as the Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council, which mission is to sustain focused regional cooperation in Southeastern Europe through a regionally owned and led framework that also supports European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Mr. Ardian Hackaj, *Cooperation and Development Institute, Research Director and Coordinator of the Tirana Connectivity Forum*

He is the coordinator of Tirana Conference on Berlin Process, and has authored many research works on connectivity, youth and migration. Mr. Hackaj has held management positions at the College of Europe-Bruges, the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations, and with the EU Commission. He holds an MA from College of Europe, a Maîtrise in International Economics from the Université Lumière, Lyon II, and a Diplome Universitaire from the Institut d'Etudes Politiques, Lyon.

Moderator:

Mr. Baton Haxhiu, *journalist and editor.*

Currently the founder and owner of Albanian Post, Haxhiu started his career in 1987 as a journalist with "Bota e Re.". He rapidly gained recognition through his work with "Zeri" from 1991 to 1993 and subsequently with KOHA Albanian Weekly, leading to his appointment as Editor-in-Chief of KOHA Ditore in 1999, the same year he was honored as the Best Journalist of the Year by the Committee to Protect Journalists.

In 2002, his career extended to television, assuming roles as Director and News Director at Dukagjini TV. He has then been serving as the Executive Director of the Association of Professional Journalists of Kosova (APJK) since 2003, and the General Director of Klan

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The Albanian Space in the Geopolitics of the Region

Guests:

H.E. Mr. Igli Hasani, *Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs*

Mr. Izet Mexhiti, *First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Environment and Physical Planning of the Republic of North Macedonia*

Mr. Mexhiti is a prominent politician and economist. Mexhiti completed his higher education at the Faculty of Economics in Skopje, in 2000, where he obtained a diploma in the field of fiscal management and accounting. In 2018, he also completed his master's education with the thesis "Modern Challenges of Local Economic Development - Case Study of Chair Municipality". His professional career began as a professor at the "Arseni Jovkov" high school of economics in Skopje, where he taught from 2001 to 2004.

From 2005 to 2017, Mexhiti was the mayor of Cair Municipality, where he was continuously elected for three terms. During his time as mayor, he worked to promote local economic development and improve infrastructure and public services in the municipality. In 2020, Mexhiti was elected MP to the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia, where he continues to work on the advancement of legislation and policies that support economic growth and development.

HE. Mr. Nikolla Camaj, *Vice President of the Parliament of Montenegro*

Nikollë Camaj was born in Podgorica, on December 4, 1960. He completed his higher studies at the Faculty of Literature and Albanian Language, in Pristina. He completed his postgraduate studies at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Zagreb. He also attended the School of Democratic Leadership, Podgorica, Lillehammer, Strasbourg, Brussels, the Diplomatic Academy of the Government of Mount Podgorica; Black Freedom, House Fellowship Program - USA, Washington, Sacramento. Over the years, he has been involved in the integration process of Montenegro, holding key positions. He has a rich career in education, local government, and international organizations. He is currently the Vice-President of the Parliament of Montenegro.

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Mr. Nevzad Luftiu, *Chair of the National Council of Albanians in the Preševo Valley*

Mr. Luftiu is an outstanding figure and dedicated to the Albanian community in Bujanoc, but not only. He has made a significant contribution to the preservation and promotion of the Albanian cultural heritage in the Valley.

During his four years as president of the Hope Organization, Luftiu led a number of important community development projects, empowering the role of youth and improving local infrastructure. As Cultural Coordinator at the House of Culture in Bujanoc, he organized and promoted cultural activities that reflected and preserved the region's rich heritage.

From 2020 to 2022, Luftiu served as a Councilor in the Bujanoci Municipal Assembly, where he continued to support initiatives for the advancement of the Albanian community. Since 2022, he holds the position of Chairman of the Albanian National Council in Serbia, where he continues to work with dedication to protect and promote the rights of Albanians in this region.

Mr. Ibrahim Gashi, *Prof.Dr. Universiteti i Prishtinës*

Ibrahim Gashi is a historian from Kosovo. He completed his education at the University of Pristina, receiving his Master's degree in 1994 and his Ph.D. in the political history of the Balkans in 2003. He served as an assistant professor and later an associate professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Pristina. Gashi was appointed rector of the University of Pristina in 2012. He was the vice-president of the AKR party and a member of the Assembly of Kosovo from 2007.

Moderator:

Mr. Sokol Balla, *journalist and analyst*

He completed his higher studies at the University of Tirana for journalism and started his career as a journalist in the external editorial office of Albanian television in August 1992. During his career he worked on several daily newspapers such as *Gazeta Shqiptare* and *Koha Jone*. He is the author of 6 books, among which

Antialbanian - Messy Diary of the Hot Months Winter 2003 - Winter 2004

Free speech, European challenge - On freedom of expression when we seek European integration. He currently hosts the political show *Realstory* with political debates accompanied by the latest and most important events in the political and social life of the country.

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Diplomacy and tourism

Guests:

Mrs. Mirela Kumbaro, *Minister of Tourism and Environment*

Ms. Mirela Kumbaro is by profession a lecturer, translator, publicist and international expert in academic projects, in university research programs, undertaken by international organizations such as the European Union, the International Organization of Francophonie, the Council of Europe. She comes from a long academic career and an active engagement in civil society, where she has contributed to the fields of culture, education and social problems. In 2013, she was appointed Minister of Culture of the Republic of Albania, a position she held for more than 5 years, being appointed Minister of Culture again in 2017 in the second term of the Rama government. In the parliamentary elections of 2017, Mrs. Mirela Kumbaro Furxhi was elected deputy of the Socialist Party for the District of Gjirokastra.

In the parliamentary elections of 2021, she won the 2nd mandate as a deputy of the Socialist Party in the Assembly of Albania for the District of Gjirokastra. In 2017, she was honored with the "Honorary Officer in Art and Culture" Order from the Ministry of Culture and Communication of France, with the motivation for high contribution in the field of culture and Albanian-French cooperation.

Mr. Mario Tobias, *Chairman of the Management Board/CEO at Messe Berlin*

Dr. Tobias with over 20 years of leadership experience, serves as Chairman of the Management Board/CEO at Messe Berlin since September 2023. Previously, he held the position of Chief Executive Officer at the Potsdam Chamber of Commerce and Industry from 2014 to 2023. As Secretary General of the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies from 2011 to 2014, he led research on environmental issues. Prior to this, he held executive roles at Bitkom, focusing on information technology and telecommunications. Dr. Tobias, born in Wolfenbüttel (Germany) in 1971, holds doctorates in natural sciences and political science. He has been an Honorary Professor at the Technical University of Braunschweig since 2015.

Mr. Igor Radič, *Advisor to the Minister for Tourism and Sports of the Republic of Croatia*

Igor Radić is currently a Member of the Management Council of the Croatian agency for SMEs, Innovations and Investments in HAMAG-BICRO - the Croatian agency for SMEs, Innovations and Investments. Igor Radić brings experience from previous roles in the Ministry of Tourism and Sports since 2020 now as Advisor to the Minister, from 2019 to 2020 as Advisor to the Minister in the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, OTIF. In 2018, he

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was a Member of the Administrative Committee at the Intergovernmental Organisation for International Carriage by Rail. From 2018 to 2019, he was Head of the Sector for railway and intermodal transport in the Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure. Igor Radić holds a BSc 2003 – 2008 in maritime transport, Faculty of Maritime Studies, University of Split. With a powerful skill set that includes marine, shipping, ports, project management, strategic planning and more.

Mr. Ermal Dredha, *Mayor of the Municipality of Vlora*

Mr. Dredha is an experienced Albanian diplomat and politician. He has served as Director of State Protocol, Albanian Consul in Bari and in recent years as Ambassador of Albania to the United Arab Emirates. With postgraduate qualifications in various countries of the world, he is fluent in English and Italian. In April 2023, he was selected as a candidate of the Socialist Party of Albania for mayor of the Municipality of Vlora. Ermali comes from a family of intellectuals from Vlora, he is married and the father of two daughters.

Mr. Gezim Olaj, *Bajraktar Tower*

Gëzim Olaj is an Albanian entrepreneur who, after 26 years in London, decided to return to Albania to invest in his homeland. He has set up a successful resort in Boga, leaving behind a successful career in a travel agency in the British capital. His ambitious project in Qafë Thore, after the demolition of the guesthouse "Buni i Bajraktari", is a proof of his passion for nature and his hometown. Olaj, who started the construction of the resort after a period of reflection and a strong connection with Albania, has managed to create a space that honors the natural beauty of this region.

Moderator: Ms. Rudina Xhunga, *Journalist*

Rudina Xhunga is a well-known Albanian journalist and moderator, who has had a successful career in the media. She has directed important political shows such as "Shqip" on Top Channel and "Dritare" on TVSH, where she has provided a platform for debates and analyzes on current issues. With a long experience as a cultural journalist, Xhunga has also contributed to the newspaper "Koha Jonë" and is the author of several books. Currently, she moderates the show "Dritare", continuing her influence in the media.

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Does economic diplomacy work? Analysis of its impact on trade and investment. What more needs to be done?

Guests:

Mr. Petrit Malaj, *Minister of Finance*

Mr. Malaj serves as Minister of Finance. Prior to this task, from January 2024, Mr. Petrit Malaj served as the Executive Director of the National Agency for Natural Resources, where under his leadership the Agency launched a series of initiatives related to the development, supervision of the rational use of natural resources, based on government policies, and the monitoring of their post-use, in the mining, hydrocarbon and energy sectors. From 2010, Mr. Malaj held the position of Executive Director of BDO Albania, part of the BDO Group, the fifth largest group in the world in the field of financial consulting, audit and tax. The experience of Mr. Malaj is connected with several other banks in Albania, such as Raiffeisen Bank and the Italo-Albanian Bank, Intesa Sanpaolo Banking Group. In 2004, Mr. Malaj was part of the German government program that focuses on capital markets, qualifying for the Frankfurt Stock Exchange and the Berlin-Bremen Stock Exchange.

Mr. Blendi Gonxhja, *Minister for Economy, Culture and Innovation*

Blendi Gonxhja was born in Tirana on June 15, 1970. From January 2024, he holds the position of Minister of Economy, Culture and Innovation. Before this task, from November 2018, Blendi Gonxhja directed the General Directorate of Road Transport Services, an institution under the Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy. Blendi Gonxhja was among the leading protagonists of the Student Movement for Democracy and among the founders of the first opposition party. In 1991, he led the student strike for the demolition of the cults of the dictatorship.

Laura Plaku (Saro), *Executive Director at the Albanian Investment Development Agency (AIDA)*

Ms. Saro has completed her Bachelor's degree in Law at the University of Kent, Canterbury, United Kingdom and Master of Science LLM in International Law and International Relations at the University of Kent, Brussels. Following on from several other international postgraduate qualifications and engagements in the same fields, in the UK and Brussels.

She has 12 years of work experience in several public and private institutions, mainly in the field of management and legal and strategic consultancy.

During the same period and currently, she continues to make her personal contribution to active citizenship, starting from lecturing and managing various projects from/in Civil Society,

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networking various actors with the aim of developing our country in the future European. These shares are part of several publications and guides authored and co-authored by Mrs. Saro. Ms. Laura Saro holds the title and profession of "Lawyer" in the Republic of Albania since 2017.

Ms. Ines Muçostepa, *President of the Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Albania*

Ms. Muçostepa from 2002-2007 has been working in Palmieri Law Firm, Milan, Italy, as a Second Lawyer in litigations concerning immigration matters. From 2006-2009 has worked as legal adviser and Mediator in commercial agreements near to Albanian - Italian Chamber of Commerce in Milan. From 2009 – present she works as legal representative of “Albacall” sha. Since July 2015 she works as President of the Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Albania (UCCIAL). From 2015 – present, she is member of the board of the Agency for Research, Technology and Innovation (AKTI), member of the Council of Consumer Protection, member of (COD) Centre for Openness and dialogue, member of the board of Directors of Council of Albanian Investment Development Agency (AIDA) and managing board of Chambers Investment Forum of Western Balkan (CIF).

From 2016 - present, she is a member of the European Parliament of Enterprises. From 2017-present, she is the Chairwoman of National Copyright Council, Member of the Stock exchange of titles “ALSE” and from 2018, she is a member of the National Trade Facilitation Committee.

How can cultural diplomacy help in shaping bilateral and multilateral relations?

Guests:

Lira Pipa, *Deputy Minister of Economy, Culture and Innovation*

Born in Tirana on June 24, 1991, she is the Deputy Minister of Economy, Culture and Innovation since January 2024. She has a diverse background in public administration, marketing and art. From February 2019, she worked at the General Directorate of Road Transport Services, where she was promoted from Public Relations Director to Cabinet Director, contributing to important projects such as the RETRO digitization initiative, the Automobile Fair and the improvement of digital communication for public services.

Pipa has a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration and a Master's degree in Marketing from the University of Tirana. She also participated in the "Walter Hallstein" scholarship program in Germany. Her professional experience includes roles at Frost & Fire Consulting

and the Directorate of Public Communication of the Municipality of Tirana, where she focused on the organization of promotional materials and public initiatives.

Ms. Lea Ypi, *writer and professor of Political Theory at the London School of Economics*

Lea Ypi was born in Albania on September 8, 1979. She is an Albanian academic and author. Lea is a Professor of Political Theory at the London School of Economics and Political Science and an Honorary Professor in Philosophy at the Australian National University. Her academic work has been recognized with the British Academy Prize for Excellence in Political Science and the Leverhulme Prize for Outstanding Research Achievement.

Mr. Matteo Mandalá, *professor of Albanian Literature and Head of the Albanology Research Unit, University of Palermo*

Matteo Mandalà is a scholar of Arbëresh and Albanian literature in general, as well as the language, dialectology, culture, and traditions of the Arbëresh people. A professor at the University of Palermo, he was born in Hora e Arbëreshëve (Piana degli Albanesi) in Sicily. Since 1987, he has been a lecturer in the Albanian Language and Literature Department at the Faculty of Literature and Philosophy at the University of Palermo. Professor Mandalà has initiated and implemented numerous research projects funded by the European Union and regional structures in Sicily.

Mr. Rame Lahaj, *Tenor*

Rame Lahaj was born on November 3, 1983.

He is a Kosovar operatic tenor and is known for his regular performances at some of the world's most prestigious opera houses. Lahaj is considered one of the first Kosovar opera artists to perform at the most renowned stages globally, sharing the stage with opera legends like Plácido Domingo, who later honored him with the prestigious "Operalia" prize at The World Opera Competition.

Moderator: Mr. Blendi Salaj, *journalist*

Blendi Salaj is an Albanian Journalist, Lecturer and Social Activist who has been on the forefront of Online Media since the mid 1990's when he was a student in the United States. Born in Tirana in 1979, Mr. Salaj is one of the founders of Peshkupauje.com, (Fish Out of Water), one of the leading Albanian language Blogs on the Internet. To this day "Peshku" serves as platform for citizen driven media and a Censorship Free Zone. After 12 years in the USA, Blendi returned to Tirana in 2008 upon earning a degree in Communication Sciences

and New Media from Worcester State University in Massachusetts. He has since become a strong voice for activism and human rights. For the past six e has been hosting one of the most popular radio morning shows in Albania on Radio Club FM and lately has begun hosting a Weekly Talk Show on Friday Nights on TV.