

# Parliament-to-Citizen Forum

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# Introduction

The Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM) organized the Parliament-to-Citizen Forum to promote participatory democracy and facilitate dialogue between citizens and the Parliament of Albania. This initiative stemmed from a series of regional workshops and capacity-building activities, which provided civil society actors with the knowledge and skills needed to engage with parliamentary decision-making processes and advocate for local concerns. These activities highlighted several issues regarding the representative and oversight function of the parliament and civic engagement. Civil society actors voiced concerns such as the limited presence of Members of Parliament (MPs) in the community, challenges accessing timely information for public hearings and decision-making, and the need for more transparent and effective consultation processes.

In response to these concerns, IDM introduced deliberative tools such as Citizens Assemblies and issue-based public hearings with parliamentary committees. Taking inspiration from the best practices of the Scottish Parliament, Citizens Assemblies were implemented in Albania to further enhance civic engagement and promote meaningful participation in parliamentary processes. In line with the strategic objectives of the Albanian Assembly, the forum aimed to establish an annual practice of ongoing dialogue and collaboration with citizens and interest groups.

The ultimate goal was to integrate this practice into the parliamentary calendar. Additionally, by leveraging diverse perspectives and expertise from forum participants—including MPs, parliamentary staff, civil society organizations (CSOs), youth, activists, and citizens—the forum provided valuable inputs for formulating strategic objectives and priorities aimed at enhancing public participation, transparency, and responsiveness within the Parliament.

Thus, the Forum served as an important platform for collaboratively shaping the Parliament's approach to public engagement, aligning it with the needs and expectations of citizens. Each panel of the Parliament-to-Citizen Forum featured presentations and interactive discussions, providing participants with opportunities to share insights, exchange ideas, and propose actionable recommendations for enhancing parliamentary engagement and responsiveness.

The Forum brought together more than 70 participants including MPs, parliamentary staff, policymakers, local stakeholders, media and international experts to reflect on the opportunities and challenges for citizen engagement in parliamentary decision-making in Albania. The report summarises the main highlights of the conference panelists and the participants.

Additionally, the report highlights novel participatory elements that can be combined to offer both top-down and bottom-up approaches to participatory and deliberative democracy in the parliamentary decision-making process.

This initiative was part of the project "Increasing Parliament's Responsiveness to Citizens' Concerns," implemented by the consortium of IDM, AIS, and Citizens Channel, with financial support from the British Government.

## Opening Remarks

### **Mr. Sotirag Hroni**

*Executive Director, Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM)*

The engagement of citizens in parliamentary processes as the theme of this Forum creates the first idea that we are dealing with some processes that are mainly related to the enhancement of communication between parliamentarians and citizens.

The intervention of the project consortium consisted of various instruments and activities such as the provision of expertise and support for setting local issues on the parliamentary agenda, trainings with local actors and citizens to better understand parliamentary activity and functions, awareness campaigns with young people in secondary schools in the country and their visits to the premises of the Assembly, etc.

The results in these directions are not lacking thanks to very good cooperation with the Assembly of Albania, the parliamentary committees, and the administration of the assembly.

Despite the levels of distrust towards institutions, the majority of citizens show considerable support for public consultation, an enabling regulatory environment to channel citizens' engagement, which would gradually lead to a more open and inclusive governing culture.

Our experience, it is possible to build on such experiences that will align results in all directions, such as in strengthening public trust in institutions and policy-making processes, supporting a more active role of civil society and interest groups throughout the country, in the institutionalization of sustained communication practice and democratic culture in the interaction of the Assembly with society.

Of particular interest is the fact that this process fully supports the country's integration journey, which is primarily related to the strengthening of good governance, consultation of law-making, oversight, and democratic control.

It is a special pleasure to welcome the Ambassador and MPs and the participants and sincerely thank you for the all-around support that her country gives to these very important processes for strengthening parliamentarism, good governance, EU integration, and functional democracy in our country.

### **Ms. Ermonela Valikaj (Felaj)**

*Deputy Speaker of the Parliament*

Ms. Ermonela Valikaj (Felaj), Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of Albania, expressed her gratitude for the invitation to the event, highlighting her dual role as a representative of the Speaker of the Assembly and as an individual participant. She commended the event's organization, attributing its success to the collaborative efforts within the Assembly of Albania and the substantial support from international organizations, particularly the British Embassy.

Reflecting on her 12 years in Parliament, Ms. Felaj observed notable improvements and positive changes in various areas. She emphasized the significant strides made in enhancing citizen engagement with the Parliament. This progress, she noted, is closely tied to increased transparency and the adoption of the Law on Public Consultation in 2016. This law has empowered civil society organizations (CSOs) and citizens to actively participate in parliamentary debates and contribute to the legislative process, thereby enriching the

Ms. Felaj highlighted the importance of maintaining a strong and serious Parliament, which dedicates ample time to debate, consultation, and listening to interest groups. She cited positive statistics, such as the high number of parliamentary hearings and the substantial public visitation to the Assembly, as indicators of this commitment. However, she acknowledged that more efforts are needed to engage younger citizens, suggesting the development of tailored instruments to attract their interest and participation.

The Deputy Speaker praised the invaluable role of civil society in Parliament, giving a specific example of CSOs' influence in creating a Registry for those convicted of sexual crimes. This initiative, driven by positive pressure from CSOs, led to swift legislative action, resulting in a law that significantly protects the emotional health and safety of children, women, and girls. She underscored the importance of such initiatives in fostering a Parliament that is responsive to citizen needs. Ms. Felaj also discussed the Assembly's efforts to digitize parliamentary documents, thanks to the support from the Swiss Government. This digitization has made reports, minutes, and draft laws more accessible to the public, enhancing transparency. She mentioned the importance of making parliamentary sessions and meetings available online, allowing for better public understanding and engagement with parliamentary debates.

Additionally, she highlighted the Assembly's flexibility in forming voluntary groups of MPs to promote specific policies. These groups, such as the Friends of Children, the Green Group, and the Alliance of Women MPs, allow MPs to work on issues they are passionate about and collaborate with relevant organizations to contribute to the Assembly's work.

In her conclusion, Ms. Felaj reiterated that the sovereignty of Parliament originates from the citizens. She stressed the need for close cooperation between the majority and the opposition to ensure the government remains accountable to Parliament and the citizens. She emphasized that unity on certain issues is crucial for the government to respond effectively to citizens' needs. Ms. Felaj expressed her hope that the event would bring added value to the necessary changes in the Parliament of Albania. She encouraged ongoing reflection on survey results and the adoption of new and up-to-date practices to meet citizens' expectations.

### **H.E. Alastair King-Smith**

*Ambassador, British Embassy Tirana*

The British Ambassador highlighted that including civil society organizations (CSOs) in parliamentary processes is essential for upholding democratic values and ensuring accountability. However, challenges in this regard have been highlighted by recent developments, with insufficient engagement between the government, parliament, and civil society. For more details, reference has been made to the Nations in Transit 2024 report on Albania.

During its first year, the project "Increasing Parliament's Responsiveness to Citizens' Concerns," supported by the British government and implemented by IDM, AIS, and Citizens Channel, facilitated a range of regional workshops and capacity-building initiatives. These efforts were aimed at equipping civil society actors with the essential knowledge and skills required to actively engage in parliamentary decision-making processes, the British Ambassador noted.

The Parliament-to-Citizen Forum has been described by the British Ambassador as an initiative aimed at enhancing citizen engagement, public consultation, and the introduction of deliberative tools in parliamentary practice. The Forum was intended to foster meaningful dialogue between civil society actors and the Parliament of Albania. It has been suggested by

the British Ambassador that integrating this practice into the Albanian Parliament's annual calendar would be highly beneficial.

The British Ambassador stated that a recent learning visit of the Albanian MPs and parliamentary staff to the Scottish Parliament provided valuable insights into best practices for enhancing parliamentary transparency, outreach, and engagement. Notable practices observed at the Scottish Parliament included the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee, specialized staff dedicated to participation and community engagement, Citizens' Assemblies or Panels, lived experience panels, and online platforms for public consultation on bills and gathering citizens' priorities. The Albanian Parliament already has an online public consultation platform for bills, which was noted as an additional mechanism. Its full functionality would be seen as a positive development, particularly if feedback on users' contributions is included.

It was highlighted by the British Ambassador that Involve, a UK-based organization, would contribute its practitioner expertise to establish deliberative processes in Albania that can be used as both oversight mechanisms and additional means to inform parliamentary decision-making.

In conclusion, the main messages conveyed by the British Ambassador were as follows:

- The importance for political actors to express willingness to engage and demonstrate commitment to implementing recommendations in the future was emphasized.
- The necessity of ongoing efforts to ensure that activities are inclusive, with proactive measures in place to facilitate broad engagement, was highlighted.
- Openness and transparency were emphasized as essential for building public trust and promoting public engagement. Therefore, ensuring transparency in processes and providing timely feedback to participants were highlighted as vital components of this endeavor.
- IDM and its consortium partners aim to further strengthen public engagement and parliamentary responsiveness through practical measures. This includes the development of a practical guide on public engagement for MPs and parliamentary staff, the implementation of thematic Citizens' Assemblies in collaboration with Parliamentary Committees, the organization of issue-based public hearings with MPs, and the monitoring of the state budget cycle.

Participants were encouraged by the British Ambassador to actively engage in discussions and contribute towards shaping more transparent, responsive, and inclusive parliamentary processes.

## **Panel I: Citizen engagement and public consultation**

This panel addressed issues related to transparency and effectiveness in consultation processes in parliament. It incorporated insights from the Scottish Parliament's successful endeavors in fostering citizen engagement and public consultation. This panel brought together local stakeholders and youth from Albania to discuss strategies for enhancing citizen participation and inclusivity in parliamentary processes.

### **Mr. Emir Abrashi**

Policy Analyst, Democracy Plus, Kosova

Emir Abrashi's speech during Panel I delved into the nuanced dynamics of civil society in Kosovo, shedding light on the prevailing environment and the level of trust citizens have in institutions, particularly the Assembly of Kosovo. He contextualized his insights by providing

data and anecdotal evidence, offering a comprehensive understanding of the landscape within which civil society operates.

Abrashi explored the Assembly's approach to engaging various stakeholders, including organizations, informal interest groups, and vulnerable communities. He examined whether the Assembly adopts a proactive stance in involving these groups and facilitating meaningful participation in decision-making processes. Through illustrative examples and case studies, Abrashi underscored the pivotal role played by civil society organizations and activists in successful initiatives. He highlighted how these stakeholders bring added value to the consultation process, emphasizing their unique perspectives and expertise.

Furthermore, Abrashi articulated the strategies employed by organizations and activists to interface with the Assembly of Kosovo. He elucidated the methods used to advocate for their causes, navigate bureaucratic structures, and effectively communicate with policymakers. By showcasing successful initiatives, Abrashi underscored the importance of robust civil society engagement in promoting transparency, accountability, and inclusivity within parliamentary procedures.

In conclusion, Abrashi's speech provided a nuanced exploration of citizen engagement and public consultation in Kosovo's parliamentary context. Through empirical evidence, concrete examples, and strategic insights, he underscored the vital role of civil society in shaping democratic processes and ensuring that the voices of all citizens are heard and considered in decision-making forums.

**Mr. Lorin Kadiu**

*Executive Director, Citizens Channel*

Mr. Lorin Kadiu, Executive Director of Citizens Channel, provided a nuanced perspective on the challenges faced by the media in reporting on parliamentary activities. He acknowledged the complexity of his position, highlighting that the media often shares similar difficulties with other societal groups, including limited access to information, particularly concerning laws that directly impact media freedom.

Kadiu cited the prolonged opposition to the anti-defamation package as a significant example where the media's voice felt unheard in parliamentary discussions. Despite participating in hearings, journalists' concerns were disregarded, leading to the enactment of legislation perceived as detrimental to press freedom. He underscored the frustration of not having specific suggestions for amendments acknowledged, even when fundamental objections were raised.

Furthermore, Kadiu emphasized the need for robust public consultation processes beyond mere digitization. He argued that digital platforms alone do not fulfill the obligation to engage stakeholders, especially those directly affected by proposed laws. He urged parliamentarians to actively seek and consider input from communities impacted by legislative initiatives, such as hydropower projects.

In addition, Kadiu highlighted the importance of ensuring that all legal initiatives undergo transparent public consultation processes. He advocated for parliamentary oversight to verify that proposals originating from government offices adhere to consultation procedures. He stressed the necessity of holding institutions accountable for engaging stakeholders throughout the legislative drafting process.

Moreover, Kadiu critiqued the lack of internal democracy within parliamentary groups, where members often vote along party lines without individual accountability. He proposed reforms



to enhance transparency and accountability within the Assembly, emphasizing the need for MPs to prioritize their constituents over party directives.

In conclusion, Kadiu's speech underscored the imperative of media representation in parliamentary deliberations and the broader democratic process. He called for greater accountability, transparency, and inclusivity in legislative decision-making to ensure the effective functioning of democracy.

**Mr. Aleksandër Trajçe**

*Executive Director, Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA)*

Mr. Aleksandër Trajçe, Executive Director of the Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA), delivered insightful perspectives on citizen engagement and public consultation, focusing on environmental advocacy initiatives and the challenges faced by civil society organizations (CSOs) in participating in decision-making processes.

Trajçe began by highlighting several advocacy initiatives led by PPNEA or the network of environmental organizations, with particular emphasis on their efforts regarding the law on protected areas. He elaborated on the strategies employed by PPNEA to advocate for environmental conservation and the protection of natural habitats, showcasing their proactive engagement with parliamentarians and relevant stakeholders.

Moving on, Trajçe addressed the challenges encountered by CSOs, especially informal issue-based groups, in participating effectively in parliamentary and local decision-making. He discussed the barriers such organizations face, including limited access to resources, insufficient networking opportunities, and bureaucratic hurdles in engaging with governmental institutions.

In response to these challenges, Trajçe proposed potential solutions for enhancing interaction between CSOs and the parliament. He emphasized the importance of creating more inclusive and accessible platforms for civil society engagement, advocating for greater transparency and responsiveness from parliamentary institutions. Trajçe also underscored the need for streamlined processes and increased support for grassroots organizations to overcome structural barriers to participation.

Furthermore, Trajçe called for a paradigm shift in the way parliamentary institutions interact with CSOs, urging lawmakers to actively seek input from diverse stakeholders and prioritize collaboration over tokenistic engagement. He suggested concrete actions that parliamentary bodies could take to foster a more conducive environment for civil society participation, such as establishing regular consultations, providing capacity-building support, and ensuring meaningful representation of marginalized voices in decision-making processes.

In conclusion, Trajçe's contributions to the panel underscored the vital role of civil society in promoting democratic governance and environmental stewardship. His insights shed light on the complexities of citizen engagement and offered practical recommendations for overcoming systemic challenges, ultimately advocating for a more inclusive and responsive parliamentary framework.

**Mrs. Fabiola Ndoj**

HANA Centre, Lezhe

In her address Mrs. Fabiola Ndoj provided a comprehensive overview of the challenges and initiatives undertaken by the H.A.N.A Youth Center in Lezhe to actively participate in decision-making processes at the local level.



Ndoj began by expressing gratitude for the forum, recognizing its significance in addressing critical societal issues. She delved into the genesis of H.A.N.A, portraying it as an initiative driven by a deep-seated passion for community mobilization, initially devoid of formal organizational structures. However, a pivotal shift occurred in 2020 when H.A.N.A, recognizing its modest yet influential position within Albanian civil society, resolved to actively engage in observing and evaluating local public functions, particularly in Lezhe.

Despite operating with limited resources and facing challenges in networking and access to information, H.A.N.A remained steadfast in its commitment to promoting good governance and democracy at the grassroots level. Ndoj highlighted the unique difficulties faced by local organizations situated outside the capital city of Tirana, including financial constraints and a lack of support from established institutions, which impeded their meaningful participation in parliamentary processes and decision-making mechanisms.

Throughout her discourse, Ndoj voiced concerns about the lack of transparency in electoral processes, lamenting the absence of candidate debates and the reluctance of political candidates to disclose their manifestos. She also criticized the government's handling of sensitive issues, such as the establishment of reception centers for asylum seekers, emphasizing the necessity of public consultation and dialogue to address community concerns effectively.

To confront these challenges head-on, H.A.N.A adopted proactive measures, organizing community forums and actively engaging with local and central government authorities to foster meaningful interactions and promote transparency. Ndoj provided vivid examples of H.A.N.A's initiatives, including piloting a waste differentiation model and advocating for enhanced youth representation in municipal councils, despite encountering resistance and bureaucratic hurdles.

In her concluding remarks, Ndoj underscored the imperative for more purposeful efforts to promote political pluralism and transparency within both local and central government institutions. She articulated H.A.N.A's vision for the future, which entails continued advocacy for meaningful citizen engagement, alongside robust monitoring mechanisms to hold decision-makers accountable and ensure responsive governance. Through her impassioned address, Ndoj articulated a compelling narrative of grassroots activism and civic empowerment, underscoring the vital role of civil society in shaping a more inclusive and democratic society.

## Panel II: Introducing Deliberative Tools in Parliamentary Practice

This panel provided reflections from the learning visit in the Scottish Parliament on the Citizen Assemblies and explored mechanisms for embedding deliberative democracy within the parliamentary scrutiny function, ensuring meaningful citizen participation in decision-making processes.

**Mrs. Ruth Hart**

*Engagement Lead Capacity Building & Standards, Involve UK*

Ruth Hart, the Engagement Lead for Capacity Building & Standards at Involve UK, shared valuable insights during Panel II on introducing deliberative tools in parliamentary practice. Drawing from Involve's experience, she emphasized that deliberative democracy complements rather than replaces representative democracy, serving as a supportive process for MPs in decision-making.

Hart highlighted the importance of utilizing participatory methods effectively along the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum. Different types of engagement are necessary for various purposes, and finding the right balance is crucial.

From Involve's perspective, she outlined the key components for successful deliberative processes and engagement. These include providing unbiased information from experts, ensuring a diverse group of participants with various viewpoints, and offering genuine opportunities for participants to influence decision-making. Without this opportunity for influence, engagement risks becoming merely informational rather than participatory or deliberative.

Furthermore, Hart emphasized the need for parliaments to identify spaces where genuine opportunities for influencing decision-making can occur. This aligns with recent collaborative efforts between Involve and governmental bodies, such as the Ministry of Justice in the UK, which have shown promising impacts. For example, Chris Shaw, Clerk of the Foreign Affairs Committee at Westminster, highlighted the importance of conducting regular, structured deliberative engagement exercises with the public to enhance decision-making processes.

Overall, Hart's insights underscored the importance of integrating deliberative democracy principles into parliamentary practices, ensuring meaningful citizen participation and enhancing the effectiveness of representative democracy.

**Ms. Ina Zhupa**

*Member of Parliament*

Ms. Ina Zhupa reflected on her role as part of the Transparency and Digitization Commission in the past. She expressed her appreciation for the Commission's objective of fostering transparency and citizen involvement in parliamentary proceedings. Drawing a metaphorical comparison between observing parliamentary activities from afar to watching a reality show like Big Brother and actively participating in them akin to being an actor in the show, she underscored the nuanced differences between these two modes of engagement.

Throughout her speech, Ms. Zhupa highlighted the challenges posed by the Assembly's regulations, which, while intended to facilitate citizen engagement, sometimes hindered the progression of legislative initiatives. She pointed out the lack of specific deadlines or

prioritization for proposed laws within the Assembly's regulations, leading to potential delays in addressing important issues raised by MPs or citizens. This, she argued, risked diminishing the relevance of proposed legislation over time, particularly in rapidly evolving societal contexts.

While acknowledging positive steps taken by various entities, including the Parliamentary Institute and civil society organizations like the Albanian Helsinki Committee and NDI, Ms. Zhupa expressed concern over the inconsistent adoption and accessibility of citizen engagement practices. She emphasized the importance of widespread participation and ease of communication in such endeavors to ensure meaningful engagement and responsiveness to citizens' concerns.

Ms. Zhupa also shared her disappointment regarding the handling of petitions within the Parliament, noting instances where petitioners were not actively involved in discussions about their concerns. She stressed the need for active participation from petitioners to facilitate effective communication and responsiveness to citizens' demands, underscoring the vital role of inclusive dialogue in parliamentary processes.

Addressing challenges within the Secretariat, Ms. Zhupa discussed difficulties in achieving consensus, particularly on issues that directly impacted government decision-making or majority interests. She emphasized the necessity of addressing such challenges to ensure that Parliament not only appeared transparent but also actively engaged citizens in decision-making processes, fostering a culture of accountability and responsiveness.

In conclusion, Ms. Zhupa reiterated her commitment to addressing citizens' demands, pledging to continue submitting legal initiatives on their behalf. She emphasized her dedication to ensuring that citizens' voices were not only heard but also translated into tangible parliamentary actions aimed at improving societal well-being.

**Mrs. Klodiana Spahiu**  
Member of Parliament

Mrs. Klodiana Spahiu, a Member of Parliament, discussed the Assembly's efforts to promote transparency and public participation in parliamentary proceedings. She highlighted initiatives such as the online broadcast of plenary sessions and committee meetings, enabling the general public to access parliamentary activities in real-time. Spahiu emphasized the importance of leveraging technology to facilitate communication with the public, citing the Assembly's new audio-video system and official social media channels as examples.

Spahiu underscored the Assembly's commitment to openness by implementing measures such as the online platform for public consultation of legal acts and the publication of a Transparency Program. She emphasized the importance of proactive transparency in providing complete and accessible information to citizens, noting the Assembly's dedication to updating and reviewing its transparency practices regularly.

Furthermore, Spahiu highlighted the Assembly's collaboration with civil society organizations, media, and other stakeholders in the co-drafting of standards to achieve transparency goals. She expressed confidence that through continued cooperation and dedication, the Assembly would evolve into a model institution that is open, accountable, and responsive to the needs of citizens.

**Mrs. Aida Malaj**  
Media Sector the Albanian Parliament

Mrs. Aida Malaj, representing the staff of the Albanian Parliament, outlined the institution's commitment to openness and transparency in its operations. She emphasized that transparency is not just a fundamental principle but also a necessity for enabling citizens to be informed and engaged in the decision-making process. Malaj highlighted several initiatives undertaken by the Assembly to enhance transparency, including public participation in the law-making process, broadcasting plenary sessions and committee meetings online, and providing access to parliamentary documentation through various channels.

During the pandemic period, the Assembly swiftly adapted to new working conditions by broadcasting all open meetings online, allowing the public to follow parliamentary activities in real-time. This proactive approach was recognized in the OSCE-ODHIR 2020 report, positioning the Assembly as one of the fastest-adapting parliaments to the challenges posed by COVID-19. Additionally, the Assembly made significant investments in technology to improve transparency, including the installation of a new audio-video system and the development of online platforms for public consultation.

Despite these advancements, Malaj acknowledged the ongoing challenge of meeting transparency standards and the need for closer interaction with the public, especially young people. She stressed the importance of simplifying access to information and fostering inclusive communication channels to improve public perception of the Assembly. Malaj also highlighted the drafting of a communication strategy and the Assembly's commitment to joining the Open Parliament initiative as further steps toward enhancing transparency and citizen engagement.

**Mr. Klaudio Hyseni**

*Durresi Aktiv*

Klaudio Hyseni, the Director of Durres Active Center, shed light on the work undertaken in Durres concerning participatory democracy and dialogue between citizens, local government institutions, and the Assembly. The forum aimed to address the challenges encountered by citizens and organizations in democratic decision-making processes.

Hyseni highlighted the daily struggles faced by civil society, including the limited presence of deputies in communities, informational challenges, and the need for more direct consultation processes. To address these concerns, measures have been taken to engage citizens in the Assembly through initiatives like Citizen Forums and public hearings focused on issues impacting citizens' lives.

He underscored the myriad and complex challenges civil society organizations face in participating in parliamentary decision-making, particularly for smaller organizations located outside the capital. These challenges include insufficient financial and human resources, limited access to information, and low accessibility within public institutions. Institutions must implement measures to increase citizens' participation in decision-making, such as creating transparent mechanisms for information dissemination and facilitating direct involvement in decision-making processes. Additionally, providing training and technical support to civil society organizations is essential for building their capacities and enhancing their engagement in decision-making processes.

Hyseni emphasized the crucial role of civil society organizations, informal groups, and vulnerable communities in parliamentary processes, as they bring grassroots experience and represent the needs of marginalized communities. Their involvement promotes transparency, accountability, and broader participation in advocacy processes.

Drawing from the work of Durres Active Center, Hyseni highlighted cases that have led to significant changes in policies and decision-making practices, while acknowledging that institutional responses have sometimes been limited. To maximize impact, organizations need clear advocacy plans and ongoing engagement with decision-making representatives.

The forum provided a platform for participants to exchange approaches and experiences in advocacy processes, facilitating collaborative efforts to address challenges in democratic decision-making.

## Closing Remarks

**Mr. Gjergji Vurmo**

*Senior Advisor at IDM*

Mr. Gjergji Vurmo, reflected on insights of the two-panels at the Forum. He described the forum's format, highlighting the significance of each panel's contributions to the overarching theme of citizen engagement and public consultation in parliamentary processes.

During his remarks, Vurmo underscored the importance of strategic priorities, suggesting a shift away from exhaustive lists toward more focused action items. He emphasized the need for concrete steps to address challenges and drive meaningful change in parliamentary engagement with citizens and civil society.

Drawing from IDM's experience as an implementer, Vurmo highlighted key activities undertaken in collaboration with project partners as well as IDM's previous experience with the Parliament.

In conclusion, Vurmo expressed optimism about the progress made in promoting transparency and citizen engagement in Albania's parliamentary system. He stressed the importance of continued collaboration and communication among stakeholders to sustain these efforts and drive further improvements.

## Conslusions and the way forward

In the aftermath of a comprehensive Forum addressing citizen engagement and public consultation within the Albanian Parliament, several key conclusions were drawn, along with a roadmap for future action. The discussions reflected a collective recognition of the imperative to bridge the gap between parliamentary proceedings and the broader public, particularly focusing on the involvement of young people and various interest groups across the country.

One resounding conclusion underscored the necessity of enhancing civic education, especially among the youth. Delegates emphasized the importance of integrating parliamentary awareness into school curricula, advocating for a curriculum overhaul to incorporate a deeper understanding of governmental institutions. Additionally, the utilization of existing structures like the National Youth Council and Local Youth Councils emerged as pivotal in mobilizing and educating young people about parliamentary processes.

Moreover, it was widely acknowledged that traditional and digital communication channels must be diversified to effectively disseminate information about parliamentary agendas and activities. Participants stressed the significance of leveraging social media platforms and organizing open days at the Assembly to engage citizens, especially the younger demographic, in constructive dialogue and participation.

In terms of practical steps forward, the forum highlighted the urgent need for increased public hearings conducted by parliamentarians in their respective constituencies. This necessitates a proactive role from the Assembly itself, potentially allocating resources to facilitate such engagements. Moreover, establishing accessible systems for citizens to voice their concerns, coupled with mechanisms for follow-up communication from the Assembly, was deemed essential to foster accountability and trust in the parliamentary process.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) were also encouraged to play a more proactive role in informing MPs about pertinent issues and advocating for the allocation of resources to engage specialists. The importance of networking among CSOs to amplify their impact on parliamentary decision-making was emphasized, along with the need for media coverage that prioritizes issues relevant to citizens rather than partisan politics.

Looking ahead, there was consensus on the necessity of developing localized public consultations and hearings, particularly concerning strategic investments in various regions. Such initiatives would ensure community involvement in decision-making processes and potentially pave the way for local referendums on pertinent issues.

In essence, the forum served as a springboard for collaborative efforts aimed at fostering greater transparency, inclusivity, and citizen engagement within the Albanian Parliament. By implementing the proposed strategies and initiatives, stakeholders are poised to bridge the divide between parliamentary proceedings and the aspirations of the Albanian populace, thereby strengthening democratic governance and accountability.





