**Parliament-to-Citizen Forum:
Strengthening Participatory Democracy
and Parliamentary Responsiveness**

26 MARCH 2025, TIRANA

# **Bios of Speakers and Moderators**

**Elisa Spiropali** was elected Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Albania during the 10th Legislature, beginning on July 30, 2024. She has had a distinguished political, parliamentary, and governmental career. From January 2019 to July 2024, she served as the Minister of State for Relations with Parliament and was reappointed to this role in the Socialist Party’s third governing mandate in September 2021.

She is currently serving her second term as a Member of Parliament. In the 2017 parliamentary elections, she was elected as an MP for the Korça district, while in the 2021 elections, she was elected as an MP for Tirana. Before her appointment as Minister of State for Relations with Parliament, Spiropali was the Deputy Chair of the Socialist Parliamentary Group and the Deputy Chair of the Committee on Labour, Social Affairs, and Health from 2017 to 2019.

Spiropali has been an active member of the Socialist Party since 2009, serving in leadership roles. She has a strong academic background. She completed her first two years of high school at “Qemal Stafa” Gymnasium in Tirana and continued at “Lester B. Pearson College,” United World College (UWC) of the Pacific in Canada, after receiving a scholarship as one of the top five high school students in Albania.

In 2001, she won a scholarship to Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts, USA, where she graduated in 2005 with honors in Economics and Politics. She also studied for a semester in Buenos Aires through a Mount Holyoke College scholarship program, focusing on the Argentine economic crisis. In 2007, she won the "Chevening/OSI" scholarship for postgraduate studies in Contemporary European Politics at the University of Sussex in the UK.

**Nicholas Abbott** joined the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in 1985. Before his appointment as Her Majesty’s Ambassador to the Republic of Kosovo, he was the Head of the Strategy Department in the Middle East and North Africa Directorate at the FCO in London. He has worked on a wide range of issues throughout his career, with a recent focus on post-conflict countries and the strategic use of program funds.

Abbott has held multiple diplomatic postings in the Middle East and North Africa, including Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Egypt. He served as Political Counsellor at the British Embassy in Iraq from 2010 to 2012 and as Deputy Head of Mission in Algiers from 2014 to 2015.

In London, he held key positions such as Head of the Afghan Team (2009-10) and the Syria Team (2013-14) in the UK Government’s interdepartmental Stabilisation Unit. He also served as Deputy Head of the EU Directorate Mediterranean Department (EUD-Med) at the FCO from 2012 to 2013 and as Deputy Head of the Conflict Department at the FCO in 2014.

**Stephanie Draper** is the Director of Innovation and Practice at Involve UK. She oversees and leads a cross section of projects that practically deliver public deliberation and engagement on key decisions. Her work includes leading citizen assemblies, juries and other public participation processes and ensuring that these processes deliver impact, innovation, and great outcomes. Recent projects include Hackney Citizen Jury, Waltham Forest Citizen Assembly and Thriving Places.

**Sotiraq Hroni** is a former Albanian diplomat, an adviser to the Albanian Prime Minister (1997), and an adviser to the President of Albania until the end of 1999. He is the founder and Executive Director of the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM), a non-governmental organization based in Tirana, Albania.

His responsibilities include the overall management and development of IDM, which operates in five key areas: governance and public integrity, security sector reform, the EU accession process, local governance, and civic space. He has led IDM’s efforts in fostering cooperation with public and private institutions, networking, and fundraising, ensuring IDM’s strategic alignment with Albania’s development priorities.

**Ermonela Felaj** is a Member of Parliament and has served as a Deputy Speaker of Parliament since 2021. She is also a member of the "Committee on Legal Affairs, Public Administration, and Human Rights" and has been involved in various parliamentary commissions.

Felaj completed her undergraduate studies at the Faculty of Law, University of Tirana, and later graduated from the High School of Magistrates as a “Magistrate Prosecutor” in 2002.

From 2009, she worked as a prosecutor in the District Prosecution Offices of Fier and Berat. She has served three terms as an MP for Berat (2009, 2013, 2017) and was re-elected in 2021 for Tirana.

Throughout her parliamentary career, she has been actively involved in legislative and oversight activities. She previously served as Minister of State for Relations with Parliament, chaired the National Security Committee, and was President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Francophonie.

**Ilda Dhori** was elected as a Member of Parliament in 2021. She graduated in Medicine from the University of Tirana and specialized in Rheumatology at the University Hospital Centre of Tirana.

She has worked as a lecturer at the Faculty of Nursing at “Aleksandër Xhuvani” University and as a rheumatologist at “Ihsan Çabej” Hospital in Lushnje. She has actively participated in numerous national and international medical conferences and training programs.

**Julia Done has held the position of General Director at the Information and Documentation Service since 2020. She graduated from the Faculty of Law at the University of Tirana in 2009, as well as from the Faculty of Economics at “Eqerem Çabej” University in Gjirokastër, specializing in Finance and Accounting. She has participated in several meetings and conferences both domestically and internationally. She has held various leadership roles in different institutions and has extensive teaching experience as a Lecturer.**

**Lefterije Luzi has held the position of Director of the Committees Service since 2017. She graduated from the Faculty of Law at the University of Tirana in 1992 and completed postgraduate studies in "Advanced Marketing" at the Faculty of Economics, University of Tirana. She has also completed doctoral studies and earned the title of "Doctor of Sciences." She has held various leadership roles, including serving as Chair of the Central Election Commission from 2012 to 2016. She has received several recognition certificates and international awards.**

**Laura Black is a highly experienced Participation Specialist with over 15 years of expertise in community and public engagement. Currently leading innovative participatory methods at the Scottish Parliament, she plays a key role in ensuring seldom-heard voices contribute to parliamentary scrutiny. Her work focuses on developing impact frameworks, evaluating engagement initiatives, and strengthening deliberative participation methods.**

**Previously, Laura managed the £1.2M Scotland 365 project at National Museums Scotland, pioneering youth engagement strategies and training peer evaluators. As Programme Manager for CashBack for Creativity at Creative Scotland, she oversaw a multimillion-pound arts funding programme supporting young people in deprived communities. Her career also includes spearheading community-led media projects and heritage initiatives, emphasizing inclusive and dynamic approaches.**

**With an MSc in Ethnicity and Multiculturalism from the University of Bristol and an MA from the University of Edinburgh, Laura combines academic insight with hands-on leadership. A graduate of the Common Purpose Senior Leadership Programme, she also serves as a trustee for SURF Scotland’s Regeneration Network. Passionate about participatory democracy and social change, Laura is dedicated to embedding impactful engagement practices across sectors.**

**Elona Dhëmbo** is a lecturer at the Department of Labor and Social Policy, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tirana. She holds postgraduate studies in Comparative Social Policy from the University of Oxford and a PhD from the University of Tirana, focusing on family policies and work-life balance. She has also conducted postdoctoral research at the Central European University (CEU, Hungary) on migration and social protection.

With over 15 years of expertise in teaching, research, and policy analysis, her work covers social policy, gender issues, and migration. She has authored university textbooks and published extensively in leading social work and social science journals. Beyond academia, she has contributed to applied research and consultancy for civil society and government, addressing gender, human rights, and social inclusion.

**Elsa Toska** served as a judge at the Constitutional Court of Albania (2019-2024) and was previously a senior law clerk with over a decade of experience. Toska has worked with the People's Advocate Institution, the law firm "Boga & Associates & KPMG," and as a lecturer in various institutions, including the School of Magistrates and the Albanian School of Public Administration.

She is an international trainer for the HELP program of the Council of Europe and has contributed to multiple scientific publications on constitutional justice and human rights.

She graduated from the Faculty of Public Law at the University of Tirana in 2000 with distinctions. She completed postgraduate studies in European Studies (2003-2005) and earned a Doctorate in Law in 2012.

**Enkeleda Olldashi** is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Law, University of Tirana, where she has taught full-time since 2002.

She holds a Master’s degree in European Studies and a PhD in Law. She has been a lecturer in multiple subjects, including Roman Law, Parliamentary Law, and Transitional Justice.

Beyond academia, she has extensive legal experience, having served as the Head of the Legal Office at the University of Tirana and as a legal expert for organizations such as the World Bank, GIZ Albania, and OXFAM, focusing on gender equality and property rights.

**Lorin Kadiu** has led Citizens.al since 2018, overseeing its editorial direction and strategic development.He holds a Master’s degree in Journalism and Public Relations from the University of Tirana and has undergone training in innovative journalism and media management across Europe and the US.

With over 10 years of experience as a journalist, editor-in-chief, and podcast/documentary producer, he has also worked as a consultant and trainer in innovative journalism methods for organizations such as the Thomson Foundation, IREX, OSCE, and EULEX.

**Gjergji Vurmo** is IDM’s Senior Advisor. His work focuses on governance, state capture, money laundering, civic space and EU enlargement. He is the author of several studies and reports related to civil society development, governance, EU accession and related processes in Albania and WB countries. Mr. Vurmo works as a consultant and advisor for numerous international organizations supporting reforming processes in Albania and the broader WB region. He has served as a Steering Board member of networks of research institutes in the SEE region and is a contributor to the WB region for different EU think tanks. Before working with IDM Albania, Mr. Vurmo has been affiliated with various think tanks in the WB region for more than seven years. Gjergji studied law at Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje and obtained his MA degree in European studies at the University of Bologna, Italy.

He has monitored and reported on Albania for well-known global reports such as the Open Government partnership (2013-2018), USAID CSO’s Sustainability Index (2010-2013), Open Parliaments 2012 report, and Freedom House’s Nations in Transit global report. Before working with IDM, Mr. Vurmo has been affiliated with various think tanks in the WB region for more than seven years. Gjergji studied law at Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje and obtained his MA degree in European studies at the University of Bologna, Italy.