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

26 MARCH 2025, TIRANA (ANTIGONEA 1 HOTEL ROGNER TIRANA)

# **BACKGORUND**

# Over the past two years, the "Increase Parliament’s Responsiveness to Citizens’ Concerns" project, implemented by IDM, AIS, and Citizens Channel with British Government support, has strengthened the relationship between the Albanian Parliament and its citizens. Through innovative participatory tools and capacity-building initiatives, the project has addressed key gaps in parliamentary responsiveness, fostering inclusive and meaningful engagement.

The Parliament-to-Citizen Forum serves as a platform to reflect on these achievements, consolidate lessons learned, and explore ways to institutionalize participatory practices in Albania’s parliamentary system. The Forum will bring together MPs, parliamentary staff, international experts, civil society, journalists, academia, experts, and citizens to discuss how these initiatives can shape a more transparent and responsive Parliament.

Despite its central role in a democratic system, Parliament often struggles to engage meaningfully with citizens, affecting public trust in institutions. This project has tackled this challenge by:

* Introducing deliberative democracy tools such as Citizens’ Panels, enabling citizens to contribute directly to parliamentary decision-making.
* Strengthening the petition process, providing recommendations to improve parliamentary procedures and developing a standardized petition form for citizens.
* Enhancing parliamentary oversight, equipping MPs, parliamentary staff, CSOs, and journalists with tools to engage effectively in legislative monitoring, public hearings, and budget oversight.
* Facilitating parliamentary engagement through public hearings, particularly on citizen concerns from underrepresented regions in Albania.
* Promoting citizen journalism as a bridge between Parliament & the public.

The Forum will consolidate these gains and ensure that participatory governance becomes an enduring feature of the Albanian parliamentary system.

The Forum will showcase project milestones, assess their impact on parliamentary responsiveness, and explore how participatory mechanisms can be institutionalized. This is the second annual Forum, reinforcing the need for Parliament to formally integrate such discussions into its institutional calendar. The Forum not only reflects on key achievements but also serves as a call to action to ensure the sustainability of these reforms.

#### **PROGRAM**

#### **9:00 – 9:30**

**Registration & Welcome Coffee**

#### **9:30 – 10:00**

#### **OPENING REMARKS**

* Forum objectives & project milestones – Mr. Sotiraq Hroni, Executive Director, IDM

#### **KEYNOTE ADDRESSES:**

* **H.E. Elisa Spiropali, *Speaker of the Albanian Parliament***
	+ Parliament’s Commitment to strengthening public participation mechanisms in legislative processes.
	+ Institutional Reforms for Participatory Democracy: Concrete actions Parliament is taking to sustain participatory mechanisms beyond the project’s duration.
* **H.E. Nicholas Abbott, *British Ambassador to Albania***
	+ Democracy & Parliamentary Openness: Why fostering transparency and responsiveness strengthens democratic institutions in Albania.
	+ Lessons from the UK: How the UK has integrated citizen engagement tools into governance.
* **Ms. Stephanie Draper, *Director of Innovation and Practice,* *Involve UK***
	+ Innovative Participatory Tools for Parliamentary Engagement: A deep dive into methods such as Citizens' Panels and deliberative democracy processes.
	+ Ensuring Public Voices Shape Decision-Making: Examples of successful participatory democracy practices and their impact.

#### **(Max. 5-7 minutes each speaker)**

**10:00 – 11:00**

#### **FIRESIDE TALK PANEL: INSTITUTIONALIZING PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY IN THE ALBANIAN PARLIAMENT**

* **Public Participation Mechanisms in Lawmaking & Oversight in the Albanian Parliament, Ms. Julia Done,** *General Director at the Information and Documentation Service and* **Ms.****Lefterije Luzi,** *Director of the Committees Service, Albanian Parliament*

**Key Questions:**

* + **What concrete steps has the Albanian Parliament taken to integrate deliberative democracy tools and other participatory mechanisms into legislative processes?**
	+ **How can parliamentary committees effectively use citizen-generated recommendations, including petitions, in decision-making?**
	+ **What legal, procedural, or digital advancements are needed to institutionalize participatory democracy and enhance parliamentary responsiveness?**
* **Insights from the Scottish Parliament’s engagement model, Ms. Laura Black**, *Public Participation Specialist, Participation and Communities Team, The Scottish Parliament*

**Key Questions:**

* + How has Scotland made public engagement a core part of parliamentary procedures?
	+ What mechanisms does the Scottish Parliament use to ensure citizen recommendations are acted upon?
	+ What best practices could Albania adopt?
* **MPs perspective on parliamentary openness & engagement**, **Ms. Ermonela Felaj** & **Ms. Ilda Dhori**

**Key Questions:**

* + Can you share an instance where citizen input influenced your parliamentary work?
	+ What are the biggest challenges in making participatory democracy a sustainable practice in Parliament?

**Moderator:** ***Ms.*** ***Elona Dhembo***, *Lecturer, University of Tirana*

***(Max. 10-15 min each speaker)***

*Q&A from the audience (\*via Slido during the Panel: 4199283* [*https://app.sli.do/event/73bPXm9zsxdQqG8216fn7C*](https://app.sli.do/event/73bPXm9zsxdQqG8216fn7C) *)* 

**11:00 – 12:30**

#### **Panel II: Strengthening Civil Society & Public Engagement in Parliamentary Oversight**

* **Embedding Citizens Petitions: Key analysis & recommendations** – **Ms. Elsa Toska & Ms. Enkeleda Olldashi,** *IDM experts*

**Key Questions:**

* + What are the main procedural gaps in the citizen petition process in Albania?
	+ What improvements have been proposed, and how do they align with best practices from other countries?
* **MPs & parliamentary staff guide on deliberative mechanisms** – **Ms. Elona Dhembo,** *IDM expert*
	+ How can MPs and parliamentary staff effectively use deliberative tools to improve decision-making?
	+ What lessons have been learned from Albania’s pilot Citizens’ Panels?
* **Improving the Understanding of Budgeting Process and Transparency for stakeholders** – **Ms. Loida Hasa.** *Data Analyst, AIS*

**Key Questions:**

* + How can civil society and journalists strengthen budget transparency and hold institutions accountable for public spending?
	+ What are the main challenges in budget oversight, and how can collaboration with Parliament help address them?
* **Citizen journalism as a bridge between Parliament & the public** – **Mr. Lorin Kadiu,** *Executive Director, Citizens Channel*

**Key Questions:**

* + How can citizen journalism effectively amplify public concerns and enhance accountability in Parliament?
	+ What successful examples show citizen journalism influencing parliamentary debates and decision-making?

**Moderator:** *Gjergji Vurmo, IDM*

#### **(Max. 15 min each speaker)**

*Q&A from the audience (\*via Slido during the Panel: 4199283* [*https://app.sli.do/event/73bPXm9zsxdQqG8216fn7C*](https://app.sli.do/event/73bPXm9zsxdQqG8216fn7C)*): What is the biggest barrier to citizen engagement in oversight, and what is are the solutions to overcome it?*

*(20 min Q&A)*

#### **12:30 – 12:45**

**Closing Remarks**

**12:45**

**Lunch buffet**