

#weekofintegrityAL

Vlore December 6, 2021 11:00

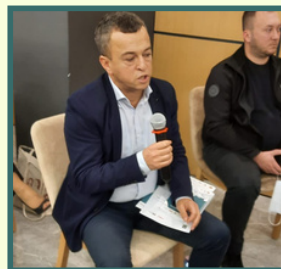
# NATIONAL CONFERENCE Fostering Integrity at Local Level in Albania Week of Integrity



On 6.12.2021 **Gender Alliance for Development Center** in partnership with the members of the Juxtaposing Political Offers Network (Përballja e Ofertave Politike - POP) and with the support of the Embassy of Sweden in Tirana and the Olof Palme International Center organized the National Conference **"Fostering Integrity in Local Level at Albania"**.

This activity took place in Vlora along with the participation of 120 people online from 12 municipalities in the country. This meeting was attended by representatives from important institutions of the country, regional councils and representatives from 12 municipalities where the POP network conducts its activities under the Social Contract: Tiranë, Durrës, Pukë, Kukës, Vlorë, Fier, Pogradec, Kamëz, Shkodër, Elbasan, Vau i Dejës and Korçë.

The purpose of this conference was to discuss with representatives of local government, civil society, and the media the importance of integrity in leadership to increase public trust. During the conference, the participants and the public shared good experiences of cooperation and methodology of the POP network with representatives of the local government.



## Fostering Integrity at Local Level in Albania

Mrs. Mirela Arqimandriti - Executive Director of the Gender Alliance for Development Center: *"Juxtaposing Political Offers, or the well-known POP Network (Përballja e Ofertave Politike) is today in Vlora for the National Conference within the Integrity Week. The POP Network is a network operating in 12 municipalities, led by the Gender Alliance for Development Center, which is also a member of POP and responsible for organizing activities and monitoring the social contract in the Municipality of Tirana. The POP network aims to strengthen Albanian democracy, promoting transparency and accountability, both of which are very important components in terms of integrity.*



*For almost 4 years, the Juxtaposing Political Offers network has become a sustainable initiative and a strong voice of the civil society and citizens, in local election campaigns and during the exercise of office by local elected officials, aiming for an organization at a respective municipality to serve as a bridge between citizens and those who are elected, always keeping in mind important elements such as integrity, transparency, non-discrimination, anti-corruption and accountability "*



The host of this conference was the mayor of Vlora, Mr. Dritan Leli, who due to the civil emergency from the aggravated weather in Vlora, stressed through a live connection the fact that the Social Contract is a very important instrument for meeting political offers and access to the community. Thanking participants present in the hall and online Mr. Leli said: *"Local autonomy is one of the issues that require improvement and attention, and definitely a lot of work from everyone."*

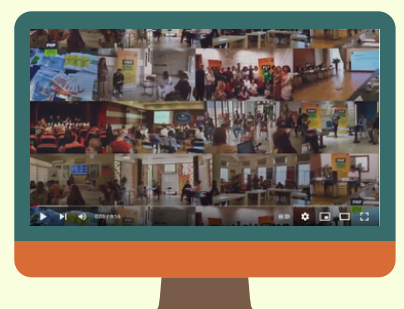
The conference was greeted by the Ambassador of Sweden in Albania, Mrs. Elsa Hastad which among other things said: *"The Social contract is the fundament that builds the bridge between the public, people who pay taxes and the institutions who actually have to deliver services. It's extremely important to keep the social contract alive because that contract is the contract of trust between us."* Speaking about the high level of trust that Sweden and the Nordic countries have, Mrs. Hastad stressed the fact of the importance of freedom of the press, adding: *"The principle of freedom of the press having the right to get information and public access information is a very good way to hold public institutions accountable on all levels.*



*I think this is good because it reduces the risk of power being abused and this creates a high trust in the public institutions. So, we need the media, the outlets, the social platforms, the civil society, the change actors, to have a very powerful tool through the right of freedom of expression and most importantly, access to information.'*



Click on the image to watch the video prepared by the POP Network for Social Contract within the Week of Integrity





## Fostering Integrity at Local Level in Albania

From the local government, Mrs. Anisa Ruseti, Deputy Mayor of Tirana, shared with the participants the most effective mechanisms that the Municipality of Tirana has used to increase public integrity. *"For the Municipality of Tirana, institutional integrity is of paramount importance, because it is directly related to the trust of citizens. The Social Contract is a document that best coordinates the strategies and medium-term municipal plans, highlighting the priorities that the communities of the Municipality of Tirana have shown and that each structure of our administration is maximally committed to enabling their realization, fulfilling 80 % of the Social Contract in the first year of monitoring."*



On the same topic, Mrs. Voltana Ademi - Mayor of Shkodra in online communication, shared with the participants the experiences and mechanisms that the municipality of Shkodra follows in regards to its commitment and integrity towards the public: *"I am proud that in the Municipality of Shkodra we have perfected and made the methodology of our daily work the most effective mechanisms for increasing the integrity of the public. From decision-making consulted with citizens to cooperation agreements and contracts for consultation, services, and monitoring with Civil society organizations. There is still a lot to do! We evaluate that local democracy is one of the important factors that determine development."*

Mrs. Alma Mele, from the Directorate of Local Affairs and Delegated Functions at the Ministry of Interior, stressed during her speech the importance of such activities, adding that: *"At the central level, integrity plans are one of the elements and joint efforts to combat inequality and lack of trust in public institutions perceived by citizens, regarding the public services we provide at the local or central level. The need to establish effective systems of integrity is very important, in the context of public institutions throughout the territory of Albania, at a moral and professional level, in order to have an ethical public administration, with integrity, and determined on how it provides and accomplishes services which have a legal and moral basis."*



*You have included all of the above in your personal social contracts with the citizens to whom you have to provide services. And these services must certainly be provided without discrimination."*



The Deputy Mayor of Elbasan, Mr. Ervin Muço, emphasized the fact of the importance of local government in the development of democracy based on three main pillars: the partnership between local actors; inclusion and exchange of information. *"The Municipality of Elbasan has had a very strong partnership with civil society for years and has drafted its integrity plan which is very important on how we approach citizens, but also an instrument to prevent certain forms of undeserved favoritism, which are almost always present and pose a threat for every institution. The heart of success in some aspects in the Municipality of Elbasan, is precisely the long-standing cooperation with civil society organizations."*

## Fostering Integrity at Local Level in Albania

Chairman Mr. Ervis Moçka from the Vlora Region was also present in this activity and emphasized that the topic of this conference was interesting but also a topic that should be debated not only during the week of integrity but constantly during the provision of services by institutions. *"The fact that this topic has been brought to the local level is quite significant and we are listening to the measures taken at the central level to fight corruption, but these measures are insufficient if they will not go down to the local level because the largest service delivery units are in the level of local government. The greater the level of transparency, the greater the access to information, the greater the civic awareness and the greater is the opportunity for the citizen and civil society to participate in decision-making."*



Mrs. Esmeralda Hoxha - POP network coordinator from Gender Alliance for Development Center was focused on the impact of the POP network on promoting integrity in decision-making through citizen involvement, as well as civic engagement in increasing transparency and co-government at the local level. *"Integrity is a tool through which involvement and cooperation enable the achievement of efficient and effective public governance, accountability and above all transparent policy-making, where the voice of citizens is heard and taken into account. The role of integrity in areas such as the communication between local government and citizens, if properly implemented can significantly limit unnecessary influences and create measures to protect the public interest. This is exactly the mission of POP."*

Mr. Gjergji Erebara, a journalist from BIRN Albania, presented the media's perspective on local government. Among other things he stated: *"The biggest concern for the local government that I have specifically, is the lack of contact with the media and citizens. It is a fact that with the new territorial reform, Albania is divided into two parts, 40% live in rural areas and 60% in urban areas. In rural areas, all costs which provide public services are higher and the weight they have to influence the policy-making of municipalities is very small, eg. removing garbage from a rural area costs more than removing it in an urban area, but they must be removed throughout the country. The downside, in this case, is the degradation of the ability of Albanian citizens to hold politicians accountable as well as the empowerment of politicians through the impunity of corruption."*



Mr. Lavdrim Shehu - Center for Youth Progress, Kukës *"The territorial reform created a gap between leaders and citizens, as stated by the leaders themselves. There are a number of reasons why we are facing this situation currently, and what happened in 2019 caught us unprepared, especially considering we would've preferred to have another situation in the municipalities. Currently, municipalities have unified how they show transparency by combining elements such as broadcasting municipal council meetings, so that people who want to get information and have an interest in, can see what is happening in addition to using traditional media and social media, but have left out to issue regarding product focus which overshadows the most important part, namely how to get the product, what's its value, how effective it is, and how much it contributes to the integrity of local government."*

