

Reflective corner

33 years in a quest for democracy: Sustaining Integrity and Engagement in Civic Spaces

Library "Moikom Zeqo", Avni Rustemi Square, Tirana

13th December, 16:30-18:00

Context

Thirty-three years ago, on a cold December day, Albanian students gathered to the centre of Tirana armed with hopes and ropes to take down the statue of the deceased dictator adorning the square.

"We want Albania to be like the whole of Europe" - their chants, audible, although weakly, even today, sought a European future for the country, based on democratic values, respect of human rights, and rule of law.

33 years later, as the country is facing narrowing civic space, a fragile democracy, plagued by a growing number of young professionals leaving, the needs remain the same, although holding those chants seems difficult.

This reflective corner is designed to delve into the hurdles faced by Albanian civil society, academia, media, and the youth in their determined quest for change. It will explore the motivations behind their civic engagement, the principal challenges they confront, and the prospective opportunities that lie ahead. Additionally, the session will investigate how personal and professional integrity can be maintained in a demanding environment where compromise often appears to be the simplest solution.

The Center Science and Innovation for Development (SCiDEV) warmly invites you to participate in this event and engage in a meaningful conversation with representatives from civil society, the media, and academia. This gathering, forming part of the Week of Integrity, also commemorates the 8th of December as National Youth Day in Albania. This initiative aligns with SCiDEV's ongoing commitment to bolstering democratic resilience in Albania and the broader region and to fostering collaboration within the Quadruple Helix framework.

DRAFT AGENDA

Moderator: *Orkidea Xhaferaj, Digital and Innovation Policy Expert, SCiDEV*

16:15-16:30	<i>Arrival and registration</i>
16:30-16:40	<p>Setting the Stage: Introduction, Contextual Overview, and Dialogue Format</p> <p>Blerjana Bino, Executive Director, SCiDEV</p>
16:40-17:40	<p>Challenges and opportunities of preserving integrity in civic engagement in Albania. Discussion and reflection around three key questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Addressing Current Challenges: "What critical challenges do civil society, academia, media, and youth in Albania face amid shrinking civic spaces and fragile democracy? How are these impacting the pursuit of democratic goals?"</i> 2. <i>Exploring the Role of Integrity: "In today's challenging context, how can integrity be upheld in Albania? What strategies can counteract compromises against democracy and ethical standards?"</i> 3. <i>Looking Towards the Future: "What future opportunities can Albania leverage, especially for its young professionals, to reinforce democracy and civic engagement? How can these drive renewed participation in the democratic process?"</i> <p>Key Insight Contributors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kristina Voko, Executive Director, BIRN • Megi Reçi, Civic Space Programme Manager, IDM • Ermal Hasimja, Scholar • Ilir Brasha, Data Analyst • Arilda Lleshi, Activist • Osman Stafa, Journalist & Activist • Klesiana Omeri, Journalist, Lajmëtarja
17:40-17:50	<p>A perspective from outside: The importance of integrity in protecting civic space for further EU integration advancements and democratic development</p> <p>Karl Bergner, Ambassador, German Embassy in Albania (tbc)</p>
17:50-18:00	<p>Concluding Remarks</p> <p>Dan Bolger, Senior Media Officer, OSCE Presence in Albania</p>
18:00	<i>Family Photo and Reception for Informal Networking</i>