

POLICYMAKING & ALBANIA'S EU ACCESSION NEGOTIATION PROGRESS

ONE INCREDIBLE JOURNEY

A PUBLICATION OF H.A.N.A YOUTH CENTER | LEZHË, ALBANIA

The third edition of our winter school program designed to engage Lezhë youth in public matters and policy-making
16 lectures; 3 field visits; 2 diplomatic visits; 6 podcasts; 3 EU cultural afternoons;

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IMPLEMENTED BY:

H.A.N.A.
HAND TO HAND AGAINST NATION APATHY

SEPTEMBER 2022- FEBRUARY 2023



The opinions represented in this document and throughout the implementation period from the implementing party, do not necessarily represent the official opinion of the supporter.

The third edition of the winter school was implemented during the timeline September '22 – February '23 and was titled “Policymaking and Albania’s EU Negotiation Process”. The program was financially supported from the Ministry which has ensured smooth operation of planned activities, among others, recruitment of some of the most notable and experienced voices in matters of public accountability, foreign diplomacy and relations, human rights and media. The program’s curricula was a fusion of seemingly unlinked topics, however, relevant to the notion European mindset and liberal democracy, as our grand aim has been to promote and advance values of EU citizenship in our youth.

Seven (7) lecturers, one American and six Albanian have contributed to this goal by holding around thirty five hours of interactive sessions covering from public speaking skills, to EU background history, Rule of Law, Europeanization journey, overview of the EU Negotiation chapters (the Acquis), domestic political context, need for young generations to be politically active, the Berlin Process, EU values, civic activism, relationship with the truth as a nation etc. 3 institutional visits to relevant structures for Albania’s journey towards accession (local government, ministry responsible for EU integration and the Berlin Process initiator, Germany’s diplomatic presence in the country), were also among the highlights of the program. An element that brought added value to the program were the podcasts, a platform of unformatted discourse and conversations regarding the topics explored during the lectures.

Part 1 | Lectures



2. UNDERSTANDING THE COUNTRY'S MEMBERSHIP IN THE EU AS A NATIONAL, COMMUNITY AND INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

BY ASS. DR. PROF. PËRPARIM KABO

1. PUBLIC SPEAKING AND PRESENTATION SKILLS

BY TIM THOMPSON

Youth participants who became part of this 3rd edition were introduced to the first lecturer, Tim Thompson, university professor for more than 15 years and founder of "Archer Consulting" with a focus on oral and written skills. Tim shared with the youth the successful traits of a good presentation from A to Z. The participants of our political education program will soon face high officials, diplomats and representatives of EU countries in Albania, and Tim helped them prepare for this purpose. From knowing the needs of the audience, content of the message, intonation, body language, adaptation, techniques of eliminating fears, appropriate jargon according to the occasion, managing emotions, networking with the audience, etc., the seminar from Tim was exhaustive and especially efficient having been delivered by a reputable professional.



This second lecture was actually the moment we made a breakthrough in our program of political education of our young participants. It is a pleasure, in addition to a privilege, to re-meet Professor Kabo, the teacher and mentor that we all would have loved to have as an influence in our lives.

A scintillating analysis of our Europeanist roots from the Pelasgian-Ilyirian times, or pre-Hellenic culture, antiquity that is, the Roman Empire, Byzantium, the Ottoman Conquest which changed important elements of our national identity by installing the theocratic state and the Asian model of society, relations with the state, land, administration, etc. Our zig zags from being the epicenter from the west, to the eastern direction which was Byzantium and then to the east with the invasion of Turkey. To continue then with the severe consequences of the isolation of the country by the Stalinist system that imprisoned people for a word of mouth.

We spent the important historical moments such as the 6 months of Prince Vid's stay, the Congress of Lushnja, the important role of Fan Noli in the League of Nations and other important figures with extraordinary contributions to the preservation of our European origin such as Monsignor Fishta, Monsignor Bumçi and Faik Konica.

If after 1990 we intended to go towards the West with the motto "We love Albania like all of Europe" we forgot to emphasize those who contributed in this direction, the figures above who made Albania European because without appreciating their contribution we have no awareness and pathos.

The country's membership in the EU is not just a technical matter, the task of the next government, but it is first of all the preservation of the European historical identity, which makes us proud alongside all the other countries of Europe.

Thus, with this synthesis of history in a few hours, we can say that thanks to Professor Kabo, the way has been paved to continue with the contemporary discourse of the EU membership perspective.



3. THE REFERENDUM LAW AS A PRECONDITION FOR EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

BY ADRIATIK LAPAJ

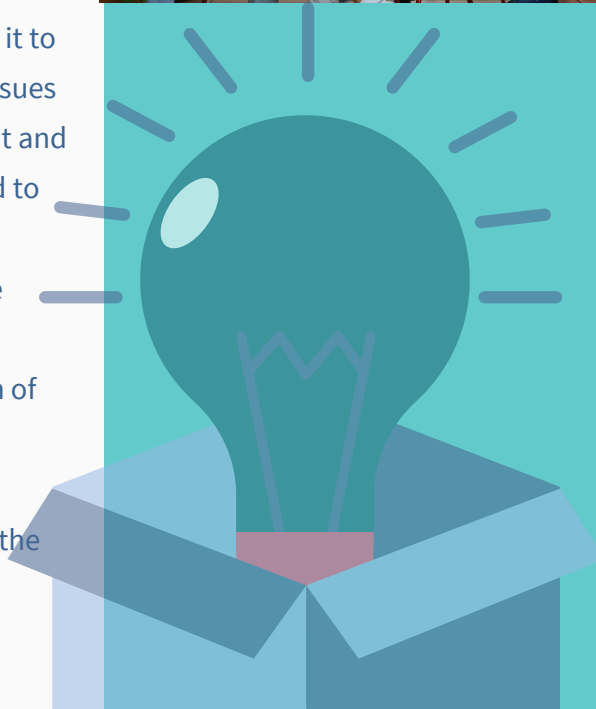
We are at the 3rd lecture out of 16 in total, this time we had as a guest mentor and lecturer on the topic, Mr. Adriatik Lapaj.

If out of 100 people, 51 give their vote of confidence while 49 do not, as a parallel with the parliamentary elections, what happens if the latter (49) are not heard?! How can we make sure that their right, which makes logical sense, is taken as a basis by a majority government, not waiting for one time in 4 years to punish, improve or change a bad policy?!

The participants were invited to reflect on the importance of the instrument that the referendum is, to exercise the right to vote not only once every 4 years, in order to intervene when anomalies manifest during this 4 year period. The helping hand that enters within the mandate of a government, not allowing it to become arrogant and decide at the expense of the minority. So, for major issues of public interest, the referendum gives citizens the opportunity to come out and express themselves again, without being forced to wait for the 4-year period to pass.

The referendum is a pure mechanism of direct democracy which freezes the mandate for a certain issue and reminds the government whose interests it should represent (the people) and when this happens, we have a unification of society leaving aside political divisions (party).

This lecture is of particular importance in the series of events of our youth political education program as it shapes the understanding of the power of the unified voice of society as a key tool for advancing the journey towards membership of the European Union.





4. EU, AN ORGANIZATION OF VALUES: A CRITICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH

BY ALBA BROJKA

How often do the values of the European Union come up in daily or even rarer discussions? We know that the answer is rarely or not at all, since the cold pragmatism does not allow for considerations beyond the reality of a better life in EU countries, without reflecting on the governing principles of the European mindset. Therefore, with Alba we focused on the fundamental values of which the union of 27 countries is identified, thus understanding that human dignity, freedom, democracy, human rights, equality and righteousness shape the European culture. We also learned how these values are preserved as inviolate by a solid institutional framework that the EU has consolidated through the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and governing structures, focusing in particular on the connection between the integration criteria of the candidate countries and embodying EU values from a membership perspective. Throughout the discussion, the Negotiation Chapters were also mentioned, however, not from the aspect of technical fulfillment of substantive conditions, but from the need to adopt the ethical standards of the Chapters as an adaptation of national and individual attitudes.



5. MEMBERSHIP IN THE EU & EUROPEANISATION AS AN INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITY.

BY ASS. DR. PROF. PËRPARIM KABO

In this lecture with Prof. Assoc. Dr. Përparim Kabo as part of our program "Policymaking and EU Membership Negotiation Process" we addressed the right spirit and mindset that should guide every Albanian nowadays, and the youth in particular, and that is the perspective of membership in the European Union.

Lecture reflections

Europeanism is an individual and community responsibility, but to reach this level of awareness we must think critically. A kind of factual analysis that is firstly related to synthesizing and correctly evaluating the past by recognizing the processes that deformed our anthropology. One of these that caused more damage was the totalitarian system in Albania. This system:

- stripped the Albanians of their property, bringing poverty among the people.
- eradicated political pluralism by creating a dogmatic system, prohibiting pluralistic thinking where man lost a natural right, that of freedom of thought.
- banned the right of religious belief
- isolated the nation internally and externally preserving a poor society

Thus, when the country came out of that system, the people had missing consciences such as; legal conscience the awareness of the trade initiative that led to the arming of the masses during the crisis of pyramid firms consciousness of free property awareness of human rights, religious belief, sense of initiative.

"Heroes of informal properties and martyrs of formal properties"

Thus, we discussed that the fall of Communism instead of bringing freedom, due to the misunderstandings with the law, we brought anarchy many times, such as the informality with the lands/properties that kneed the executive power and took away the right of ownership to the legitimate owners who still wander through courts and amid conflicts. This relationship violates the premise of a normal state that negotiates with the EU. Informality in the economy has seriously damaged the national wealth as the privatization of the public removes access to public property.

..."The administration of the state does not accept amateurism, does not accept division and hatred."



6. "RULE OF LAW"

BY ALBA BROJKA

In the first lecture with lecturer Alba Brojka, our youth from the program "Policymaking and the Process of Albania's EU Membership Negotiations" learned about the values of the union, since no country aiming for membership can achieve this goal without accepting and internalizing these values that constitute the "backbone" of this organization. In this next lecture, the focus was on the "Rule of Law" principle.

Alba is one of the most beloved lecturers of our winter school editions because, in addition to being professionally trained in the heart of the European Capital, Brussels – the seat of the EU, she knew how to speak the language of our youth from Lezhë, born and raised in certain challenging circumstances, limiting their potentials to take off, yet diligent and curious as only youth can be!

To define the "Rule of Law" in a coherent sense, we traveled back in time to the Middle Ages and reflected on the perceptions of the legislation of the time and how power was concentrated in one pair of hands, those of the Church, considered divine, and how the Church passed the power on to the Princes and Kings who reigned in luxury over impoverished and rightless people. Then, we moved on to the period of the Reformation where the Church and the Papacy were taken away the right to absolute power, indulgences and as supreme authority and then between the following historical periods when we understood that the people's intellectual, civil and political right to be governed with justice and equality was recognized.

3 important names in the transition and consolidation of the "Rule of Law" notion:

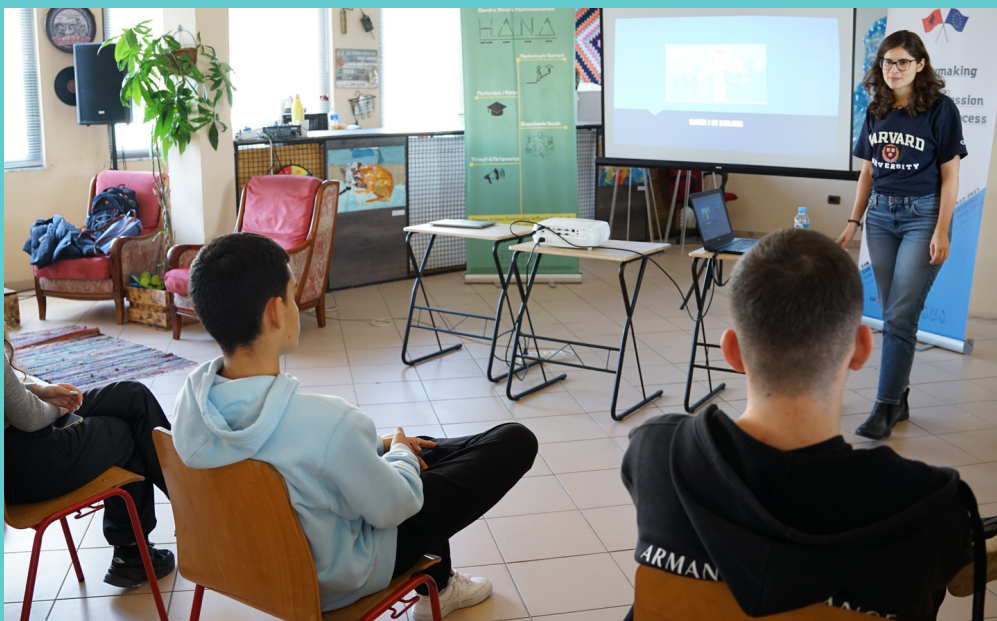
- Montesquieu (separation of powers theory)
- Locke (all persons are endowed with natural rights to life, liberty, and property, and that rulers who fail to protect those rights may be removed from the people, by force if necessary).
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau (preconception of the social contract as an agreement between the individual and the will of the group aimed at the common good and reflected in the laws of an ideal state).

To return to our times, we also analyzed 2 examples of how not only countries with fragile democracies and outside the EU can fail to build "Rule of Law" for their citizens, but also countries within the union; we then proceeded to mention the mechanisms of EU to hold member states accountable. These were the cases of Hungary and Poland with leaders who violated the elements and order of the Rule of Law.



Surely, we did illustrate abundantly and clearly, through very practical examples, how the willingness of a state to be fair and impartial in the treatment of its citizens is manifested in everyday life, starting from things like respecting the queue for waiting citizens to receive a service, spending public money with integrity in tenders, impartial and equal treatment of citizens despite connections at high levels of power, etc.

Finally, we focused on Chapters 23 and 24 of the Acquis of European Integration, the first chapters to open and the last to close; those related precisely to the Rule of Law, the non-negotiable terms of the European Union for Albania.





7. THE OPENING OF THE POLITICAL RACE AS A NEED FOR A NEW POLITICAL GENERATION AIMING AT EUROPEAN VALUES

BY ADRIATIK LAPAJ

Vital societies are those that seek change and do not remain prey to closed systems, they are those that drastically fluctuate the percentages of votes to X or Y party from one election to another, giving a strong message to the parties!

Our program of youth political education centered on the opening of EU membership negotiations of our country has exceeded the 7th lecture with lecturer Adriatik Lapaj. The main title of this session was "The opening of the political race as a need for a new political generation aiming at European values".

The participants were introduced to the peculiarities of the forms of state organizations, as a parenthesis of the lecture as well as to get to the heart of the discussion; configuration of the Parliamentary Republic. So, the Parliament, the Legislature or governance through the elected by the people! The discussion did not revolve around the question of whether this form is the most suitable for us, but how efficiently we apply it!

In principle, the form is appropriate because the citizens elect representatives who make up the parliament, and the latter is the controlling mechanism that does not allow the self (individual) to have power over it. MPs and ministers are merely executive officers and delegated to represent the will of the people by drafting laws for them.

A very efficient and simplified process of building the government, in Albania we see that it is deformed at the beginning when the parties or coalitions of parties that receive the vote of the citizens in the election and that come out automatically with a list of elected officials do not follow the principles defined in Constitution (backbone of the state) for the establishment of the government. Instead of the elected people electing the prime minister and mandating him and the government, it is actually the party leader, the prime minister, who mandates the deputies by distorting the system.

This distortion begins when the lists of candidates for MPs are drawn up by the party chairman, "assigning" their fate according and making the future MPs obey the chairman and not the electorate, since it is he (the chairman/prime minister) who can also remove them by not adding them to the list next time. This is how the system is taken and held hostage to the function of the leader, completely contrary to the principles of the "Parliamentary Republic" organization, and the voters become merely statistics and not the real power to bring about changes, making it difficult to distinguish the good from the abusive. .

On these foundations of discussion, the arguments to improve this situation revolved around the principle of opening the political race which would first allow to "heal the wound" created by the burnt votes because the division of the country into regions means that you do not get a mandate even if you are voted in mass; mandates which could give voice to the many problems of the people in the Parliament. Secondly, competition imposes an increase in quality, and if there is no competition at the first level, that of decision-making for the election of representatives in the Parliament, there will be no competition at other levels either (general director, regional director, clerk, etc.), this is how nepotism, corruption, and conflict of interests arise.

Competition in the electoral system makes it possible for people not to be tied to a party irrevocably, but to an offer, as well as not having problems to face the prime minister if the policy that the latter will adopt is contrary to the opinion of the citizens.

Vital societies are those that seek change and do not remain prey to closed systems, those that drastically fluctuate the percentages of votes towards X or Y party from one election to another, giving a strong message to the parties. And also, if there was an open race where the people choose their favorite and not that of the leader, this deputy would have power from the electorate and, consequently, responsibility.

The regionalization of votes for the effect of the mandate that is applied in Albania does not take into account the fact that the deputy elected from X region will not vote in the Parliament on laws and policies only for that region but for the whole nation, so he/she must be voted in the entire nation through open competition. This would be the real and final democracy guaranteed by significantly reducing the crime from politics as a criminal group that has influence in a region, the power of influence and intimidation will fall if the vote extends to the whole of Albania.

As long as the party works for the leader and not for the ideal, the law and the candidate, the democratic and representative system is flawed.

Thus, Albania will become part of the EU when it implements the principles of the Union, although as an individual you can manage to integrate even by fleeing in a raft, but this does not bring value to the nation which is well positioned in the middle of the Mediterranean, in the middle of mismanaged goods!

8. EUROPEAN UNION; FROM 6 TO 27. A STORY OF SUCCESS AND PEACE

BY ÇELIK RRUPLLI

In this session, our youth were introduced to a somewhat more exhaustive information than what they receive at school, about the origins of the EU, as a by-product of World War II and the urgent need for peace and prosperity in Europe. Jean Monnet's seminal role as a pioneer who inspired the unification of France and Germany under one logo for national Coal and Steel production and Schuman, another key figure in the birth of the EU, promoted the mindset of overcoming Franco-German divisions as there could be no peace in Europe if the focus was only on narrow national interests. Thus, the first agreement was born, the Treaty of Paris (1951) for the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community by 6 countries:

- France
- West Germany
- Italy
- Benelux (Belgium, Netherlands or Holland and Luxembourg)

This community was defined as an Authority that would also have a Court for settling disputes, drafting laws and making decisions. First for minerals, then for nuclear energy. A milestone for the shaping of today's union was the European Economic Treaty that defined a common market for these countries and the way of making decisions by a qualified majority of votes (2/3).

Great Britain, Denmark and Ireland were the first 3 to join the community, increasing it to 9 members and expanding the range of common interest of the new community. Thus, joint attention began on issues such as agriculture, subsidies and taxes, the common market, and then the first discussions about the European Parliament, the European Council, the principles of political integration of the European community, free movement, the fall of the Berlin Wall that highlighted the development disparity of Eastern Europe compared to the Western one and recently the quasi final shaping of the EU through the Maastricht Treaty.

And in addition to the linear history, we also took our time at some special moments in terms of the internal debate in the face of difficulties that called for further reform, such as the pause of several years of the union, the dilemmas of the sovereignty of the states, the Treaty of Lisbon, the arrival of Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy, the exit of Great Britain from the union, among +others.

Although the above is only the first minutes of the entire session, 2 hours is still too little to deal with a topic so rich in history and presentation of facts. We tried with our lecturer to make the time spent together as valuable as possible in a necessary and essential discussion for our youth political education program with a focus on the process of our country's membership in the EU.



9. BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS WITH A FOCUS ON GENDER EQUALITY.

BY DENI SANXHAKU

"Girls should play with dolls and boys should play with balls or toy guns. Boys should be oriented towards the color blue; girls towards pink", the vast majority of our society does not see anything wrong with these lines, while we see only the tip of the iceberg of gender stereotypes that feed a cancel culture whenever this reality is discussed, because what the majority "decides" is the norm and talking about issues like feminism, gender justice, femicide, misogyny, marital rape, early marriages, modern slavery, makes you a follower of the sinister "Sorosian" agenda, anti-family and anti-religious. Indoctrination is present at incredible levels among almost every category of society, and again, somehow, we find ourselves calling in a chorus for "membership in the EU for Albania".

"Based on the Treaty (of Lisbon) on the European Union, the promotion of gender equality is one of the Union's duties (Article 3).

Deni, one of the most beloved lecturers in our political education program, took on the not-so-easy task of addressing our youth about the symptoms of gender role imbalance.

She presented a history of the reasons why days like November 25 have been set by the UN to commemorate violence against girls and women; as 1 in 3 women worldwide experience some form of abuse and every 5 hours 1 girl/woman is killed worldwide.

Albania has ratified international conventions in order to provide mechanisms for the protection and prevention of gender-based violence. Investing in public structures to implement them by first transforming mindsets of the masses is another matter.

"Gender-based violence is any act resulting from physical, sexual or psychological harassment or harm. This includes actions, arbitrary acts that take away the right to freedom or cause oppression, discrimination or prejudice in public in the personal space of girls and women."

Deni spoke to the participants about the Istanbul Convention or the Council of Europe Convention on Violence against Women, among others, as the first binding document for the signatory countries, including in its content the addressing of economic violence (women who are not allowed to have access to income, in the labor market, cash).

The irony with the Albanian legislation (National Strategy for Gender Equality) lies in the correct presentation in paper that speaks of a utopian society where no one is left behind and everyone, regardless of differences, is given equal opportunities to develop their potentials, compared to practice, the mindset of the actions carried out contrary to the written laws. The question arises, is it possible to join the EU with such inconsistencies, or only by waving laws up in the air?!

A special moment was the one where the strong moral system within the family that frames and models behavior was highlighted, violating free expression, psychologically binding and preventing us from being in touch with our feelings. This equation produces gender stereotypes.

"Raising a girl is more difficult than raising a boy. The girl must be educated, restrained, trained, guarded; pressured to perform well, to sacrifice, to compromise. Boys cannot control themselves, they cannot be educated, because boys are not prejudiced, girls are!"

Thoughts, strong opinions, but also facts and statistics, collided in this special section of the day session that enabled the opportunity to see the prejudiced and the arbitrators among the new generations. For this, we must work better, more wisely and more dedicated to the cause of gender justice/equity among the actors of society, public and non-public!

It would not serve our cause to limit the political act of feminism to the name "gender equality", since it is much more than that, it is the movement that aims to correct the historical faults that have produced and produce violence, sexism, exploitation and oppression, so we must speak louder and clearer! And the culture that produces these anti-values is the same one that extends the tentacles of the language of hatred and lack of tolerance towards categories such as people of color, the LGBT community, children, etc. Double oppression, through social exclusion and exclusion from receiving exhaustive and efficient legal, political and administrative services! Oppression by government power and oppression by the popular masses.

We see massively how the cancel culture finds shelter in the phrase "feminists hate men"!



"FEMINISM HATES NOONE, FEMINISM IS A VALUE THAT IS BUILT ON LOVE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE. FEMINISM IS NOT ONLY FOR WOMEN BUT ALSO FOR MEN; IT JOINTLY BUILDS POLICIES AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS BECAUSE ESSENTIALLY, IT IS A SOCIETY WITHOUT PRIVILEGES AND WITHOUT OPPRESSIVE STRUCTURES." DENI SANXHAKU



10. EUROPE A COMMUNITY OF VALUES

BY ASS. DR. PROF. PËRPARIM KABO

With Professor Përparim Kabo, we restarted the discussion about the EU as a community of values, focusing in particular on the freedom that allows man to express his capacities and contributions to society.

In essence, we said that freedom is a matter of culture and knowledge, and the more culturally deficient and the less a person knows, the less freedom he has. We talked about the relationship between moral virtue and professional virtue in the sense mentioned from Aristotle and then Immanuel Kant, and how our justice system, former one which we had and are trying to build, has not properly established the relationship between the two. A quick visual presentation of the main theories of some philosophers (Schopenhauer, Fromm, Spinoza, Sartre, etc.) to internalize the nuances of the term freedom, which was talked about a lot in Albania but invested little (remember the connection with knowledge). Thus, misunderstandings about freedom in our country led to anarchic actions. With a deficient culture of freedom, we cannot start the discussion about human rights, unfortunately, and the citizen ends up a beggar at the doors of the state and government. Freedom in relation to truth (which comes from reason), and fear (free from fear means free from authorities that trample on human dignity). Freedom brings a community's agreement with the truth that increases social cohesion and its absence at best produces a demotivated, apathetic society and at worst, a conflicted society. We moved the conversation to the need to combine the Moral Code with the Judicial Code for a functional society based on values. We talked about how in the last 30 years we did not focus the justice system on the moral code and agreement with the truth but on the market code which is neither moral nor immoral but amoral (interests, utility, profit etc.) and where the market 'game' begins human solidarity ends. The market is capitalism (focuses on profit) while the values are democracy (focuses on public interest) and the principles that guide both of these systems are different, not 2 parallel tracks where social development goes. If capitalism creates deep economic differences in the people, then the Rule of Law is endangered because it is not realized in poverty but in a developed economy and the Chapters on justice system are among the most difficult in the Negotiation process. Corruption (public money that does not go to the state budget and consequently leads us to fewer public services), the malfunctioning of democracy are a major concern for the EU. It is senseless for governments to boast when they buy modernity but do not invest in normality with public money. Example: A yacht harbor with luxury buildings and restaurants can resemble Barcelona in our imagination, but the most important thing is to reflect on whether children in nurseries and kindergartens receive the necessary nutrients or even the right spiritual and cultural "food" or the awareness that the annual budget predicts that the Ministry of Education spends only 1 euro per day for a young person (what are the chances of Europeanization with EU values for this young person?!). So, in this lecture, as in this entire program, we wanted young people to become aware of opposing market policies at the expense of the public interest. So public servants, not market servants and our youth shall understand which are the wrong policies at the expense of public interest. Private-public partnership, 'Albania 1 Euro' are not social policies, but gross distortions that pave the way for corruption. Homeland land at auction! And if they quote you that they are applying the model of X country of the EU, they (young people) should tell them "stop, let us explain to you the model applied by X country and the extreme differences with your policy".

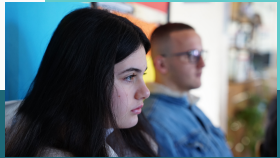




11. "THE TRUTH IN THE FACE OF PROPAGANDA, DISINFORMATION" **BY LUTFI DERVISHI**

With the journalist Lutfi Dervishi, we carried out a detailed analysis of the relationship between truth and lies, trying to understand why nowadays we reach different conclusions about the same event; so, how the fake is now disguised under the "cloaks" of the truth through the massive spread of the use of social networks where the lie finds global ground.

Just as there are mechanisms for a journalist to research, identify and attack untruths, each of us has the means to defend ourselves because the information we share in sessions like this is enough to apply and replicate. When we read as much information as possible from reliable sources, we contribute in the lowering of possibility to fall prey to conspiracy theorists who find ground in the uncertain, unverified and provide simple explanation to complex events.



12. "THE BERLIN PROCESS AND THE WESTERN BALKANS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES... UP TO THE TIRANA SUMMIT" **BY ÇELIK RRUPLLI**

In this session, the focus was on the Berlin Process and the history of the journey in the EU, until today, or more precisely, until December 6, 2022, the day of the Berlin Summit, held in Tirana. Thus, with our expert Çelik Rruplli, we discussed in about 2 hours how Germany originated the Berlin Process, a complementary instrument on behalf of the prospect of EU membership to solve essential structural problems of the region. All countries of Western Balkans participate in this regional initiative, as well as key EU countries and the maximum political support makes it different from any other initiative, including the one called the Open Balkans. Among other things, the participants were introduced to a history of the summits of this process over the years.

13. THE EU AND ALBANIA IN IT - THE IMPLICATIONS AND BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP **BY LUTFI DERVISHI**

Another talk about the EU, so as we make sure not to leave a single trail uncovered in the information pack for our participants of the 3rd edition of the winter school in political studies and the EU. This time with Lutfi Dervish and an exhaustive analysis of the main features of the political organization in question as well as the significance of its membership for our country. A lecture which left room for conversation with the participants as well as a comparative approach with the post-membership period for our country. So, what are the main changes that await us, the added value in the EU of Albania's presence and the implications of the Union's monetary policies, among others.





14. "ALBANIA WON'T BE GOING TO THE EU, BUT THE EU WILL BE BUILT HERE" BY LUTFI DERVISHI

With the journalist Lutfi Dervishi, our young people were involved in a reflection on the meaning of belonging to the European community called the EU, whose superpower is the effort to bring education, integration of economies, social transformation as well as peace, among other things, to its own communities. Integration in it should not be seen as a mechanical displacement nor a "romantic" narrative, but a union with values, progressive culture and standards cultivated with effort. Geographically, Albania is the 'front yard' of the EU, but politically a country that first needed to be stabilized and then to belong (Stabilization-Association Agreement, 2006"). And so, the participants understood what are the efforts of the EU to help Albania in overcoming the barriers of membership, but also the reality of the necessity of assistance as an inevitable way to maintain the existing balances in the countries of the Union (example; a crisis of people leaving in Albania directly affects European destinations with an increased flow of emigration). We talked about the Negotiation Chapters and the colored indicators according to the progress in the "screening" process and how the country has to "cross" a rainbow to reach the green color for all the chapters and that in reality "Negotiation" does not mean compromise with EU standards. In addition, the center team would be happy to make the extended version of the lecture available to you.



15. "DISINFORMATION - THE TOOLS THE EU USES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST DISINFORMATION." BY ÇELIK RRULLI

With the media analyst in issues related to Albania's accession journey in the EU, Çelik Rruplli, we discussed the phenomenon of disinformation as a very important aspect of building European consciousness. We illustrated it with some examples of the misinformation and propaganda machinery in action and at the service of corrupt, authoritarian and non-democratic governments. Thus, it was important to talk about how this awareness was attempted to be weakened in the events of the COVID-19 pandemic with the many conspiracy theories, the Russian invasion of Ukraine according to the false Russian narrative towards Ukraine as a country with a Nazi approach or even domestic models as the case of the government's justification for the unreasonable increase in the price of energy as a comparative approach with Italy, whose citizens pay monthly bills of an average of 500 Euros, hiding the fact that within this value a multitude of services are billed under the electricity bill. The verification of news sources is essential to develop sound judgment and critical and productive thinking in society, so there is no important event from H.A.N.A that will not be crosscut by the topic of media information and gender equity.

In the sixteenth and last lecture, we talked about civic engagement and social movement as one of the forms to exert pressure on an authoritarian government or on unjust decisions. The lecturer spoke to the attendees about the ways in which collectivity is built to influence different causes, to protect human rights when they are violated, to protect natural resources when they are threatened by harmful projects and to protect communities from certain threats. We judged it valuable that our young people in the program learn some of the forms of civic engagement, including those types of interventions that can be described as non-conformist. We defined the principle of civil engagement as a set of educational actions and mobilization of individuals or different social groups to influence a type of behavior, a type of policy or a long-awaited type of cultural change. Individuals and groups committed to social change share certain values and are focused on improving the quality of life for a community. It is important for our youth to understand the benefits of civic engagement as, in addition to increasing the quality of life for the beneficiaries of our cause, the members of the civic engagement group grow through the experience of engagement, on a personal and professional level, they are empowered and learn along the way. These groups are actively increasing their influence and involving citizens in their causes, thus increasing the impact and the likelihood of success of the cause. Increasing citizen involvement and engagement in causes is important since, as we said at the beginning, the goal in general is to try to defend against threats and autocratic forms of rulers, and state structures when they join forces with various corporations become very powerful to counteract.

Of course, we did not leave without mentioning the important mechanisms of the exercise of civic duty such as voting and involvement in electoral processes, as foundations of sound democracies, advocacy, voluntary commitment, activism and each of these acts provides that the subjects involved are well informed before acting. Information can be legal, administrative, lobbying, etc. In cases where the government prohibits or hinders in an active and damaging way the right to organize and protest peacefully, then activists turn to more radical ways of organizing such as civil disobedience, always said this in clear contexts of decisions that damage the premises for the wellbeing of a certain group or community category. To make it as clear as possible and to avoid misunderstandings in our message, we referred to history and how certain rights that were denied to certain categories (people of color, women, people of a certain sexual/gender orientation, etc.) have been gained through social, cultural and political revolutions.



Part 2 | Field Visits

1. STUDY VISIT AT THE MUNICIPALITY OF LEZHË

The 3rd edition of #hanacentre’s youth political education program made the first stop of the series of study visits to the Municipality of Lezha, the Directorate of Strategic Projects, Europe, Migration, Diaspora, Communication and Transparency.

We chose this directorate as it is the structure responsible for breaking down at the local level the country’s progress chapters for EU accession negotiations. Elson Frroku, head of the visited structure, discussed with the young people, answering their curiosities and questions.

Among the interactions of the municipality with the EU countries, it was mentioned that there are recommendations for student scholarships given within the framework of ERASMUS, the contracting of companies from EU countries to carry out work in infrastructure and services in Lezha, mobility projects to build capacities of the municipality’s personnel, special funds for the local units of the countries of the Western Balkans, etc. In the last 20 months, Mr. Frroku shared with the youth that the municipality has received 11 projects worth 1.1 million Euros from these funds, mainly in the form of infrastructure.

Lueda, one of the most active participants of our program, asked in particular about local policies for managing and curbing the phenomenon of the immigration of young people from our country to developed countries, and they learned that the unsolved challenge in this regard remains first the construction of a database with statistics for immigrants and diaspora. While efforts have been made to re-integrate the returnees through the provision of services for them in the multifunctional center of the municipality managed by the organization Terre des Hommes.

While it was clarified for the youth that the EU Corner near the Lezhë City Hall is a concept rather than a physical space, Mr. Frroku led them on a tour of the premises dedicated to this department in the municipality. Mr. Frroku mentioned that a special section was dedicated to the EU Corner on the official website of the municipality as a cascade column with 3 sub-topics (Projects; Strategic Documents; Ideas and Projects).

Mr. Frroku made a direct request to the youngsters to address their needs and ideas for youth projects to the municipality so that the latter can assist in implementation, also as a form of the municipality’s commitment to their needs.



2. STUDY VISIT AT THE GERMAN EMBASSY IN TIRANA

H.A.N.A, together with some of the participants of our "Policymaking & Process of EU Accession Negotiation Process" program, visited the German Embassy last week. This meeting, part of one of the 5 components of our program (Study Visits), allowed the youth and our colleagues to talk with the diplomatic representatives of one of the countries with a special contribution to the advancement of Albania throughout the stages of the accession.

We were welcomed from Mr. Martin Zinckendraht, First Secretary, Spokesman and Head of the Culture and Press Section at the German Embassy in Albania. Since Tirana hosted the Western Balkans Summit a few days ago, the youth learned more about this important event and how the Berlin Process, originated by Germany, is showing the EU's willingness to support the perspective of Albania and other countries of the region, to join the union.

Mr. Zickendraht shared a history of 30 years of German support to Albania through GIZ and KFW, a valuable panorama to understand the magnitude of the extraordinary contribution given to our country to reflect the necessary changes in the aspiration for accession, not only advancing our role in the foreign politics but especially the domestic one. Thus, the youth learned that for the German presence in Albania, the Rule of Law, the fight against corruption and nepotism as well as the Reform of Justice are very important objectives with which our country must progress.

The participants used this opportunity to ask some questions to Mr. Zinckendraht, regarding the mass emigration of Albanians, which, according to Lueda, "is turning Albania into a Ghost Country"; investments for Albania to increase the yield of exports (question from Victoria); perspectives and considerations on the "Open Balkan" process versus the "Berlin Process" (question from Joni) as well as an analogy mentioned by Matilda about the EU as a big gate with 2 keys, where the EU itself has one and Albania itself has one.

Mr. Zinckendraht was very willing to talk about the issues above, giving the meeting and the young people, due appreciation and importance, although young in age and commitment. Having said that, H.A.N.A is extremely grateful to the German Embassy in Albania for its cooperation and unsparing availability to implement this networking event with us and our young people.



3. STUDY VISIT AT THE ALBANIAN EUROPEAN AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS MINISTRY

Our youth political education program with a special focus on Albania's EU membership enabled participants to visit the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania.

The group of H.A.N.A met with Mrs. Admira Jorgji, Director of the Directorate of the European Union at the Ministry and Mrs. Inid Milo, Director at the Directorate of Public Diplomacy and Diaspora.

As the holder of the Integration Portfolio, our young people were thus introduced to the important role of this institution in the drafting of diplomatic policies as well as the progress of relations with the European Union since 1991 and the 2 starting points in this direction were a) the Agreement on Trade and Cooperation as well as b) 1996 – Initiation of the process for the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA).

Obviously, the discussion about the Negotiation of the 33 Chapters of the Acquis had particular focus in the meeting, although the SAA (the main principles that Albania has agreed with the Union community to implement) remains just as much as a priority.

An interesting fact was the sharing that about 70% of the need to fulfill the Chapters is in the "hands" of the Local Government.

To Kejvin's question if there is an EU country to which we refer for comparison in terms of a journey similar to Albania, Mrs. Jorgji answered that this country is Croatia, which we consult about the Negotiations Process.

Meanwhile, our young people physically present, as well as the ones online, used the opportunity to direct many of their questions or points of view which were related to the inhibition of large companies to invest in Albania, the role of Open Balkan, greatest challenges or progress in the advancement with the Chapters, the situation with the standards for the export of local products, mass emigration, slow rates of progress, etc.

We are proud of the critical thinking and ability of our young people to address complex issues completely freely with diplomats and senior officials. Our tradition of the winter school in political studies and about Albania's EU membership for the 3rd year in a row has influenced the young participants to strengthen their voice and knowledge in the issues addressed.



Part 2.1 | Special Visits

HIS EXCELLENCY, THE LUXEMBOURG AMBASSADOR TO ALBANIA, MR. PHILIPPE DONCKEL

VISIT #1

We welcomed at our center His Excellency, the Luxembourg Ambassador to Albania, Mr. Philippe Donckel, in a fruitful day of sharing amongst institutional partners and the youth participating in our program supported by the Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs.

It is especially encouraging and motivating for our work to be shown such solidarity and support in our daily efforts to leave a mark in our society and we are beyond words grateful for the trust!

The day's itinerary included a cordial meeting in Lezhë Municipality with the Mayor, Mr. Pjerin Ndreu and deputy mayor Mrs. Eueda Molla, continued with a chaperoned tour to historically significant sites across Lezhë as a way to guide our guest of honor towards a better understanding of Lezhë's cultural heritage.

Finally, we concluded the day with a meeting with our youth members of the "Policymaking and EU Accession Negotiation Process" program. An earnest discussion driven by the curiosity to learn from the long experience of a diplomat commissioned by an important EU state (Luxembourg) to promote dialogue and constructive thinking about the issue of Albania's membership in the European Union family.



VISIT #2

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg signed the new cooperation agreement with H.A.N.A during the visit of Ambassador Donckel, renewing the bilateral commitment for the political education of young people with a focus on the country's integration in the EU.

During his visit, the Ambassador of Luxembourg to Albania Philippe Donckel met with the team of the center, joined the young people of the program in a workshop session, visited the premises of the AZ Group Company that operates according to the model of renewable energy and circular economy as well as became familiar with an important segment of the "Kune-Vain" Lagoon protected area.

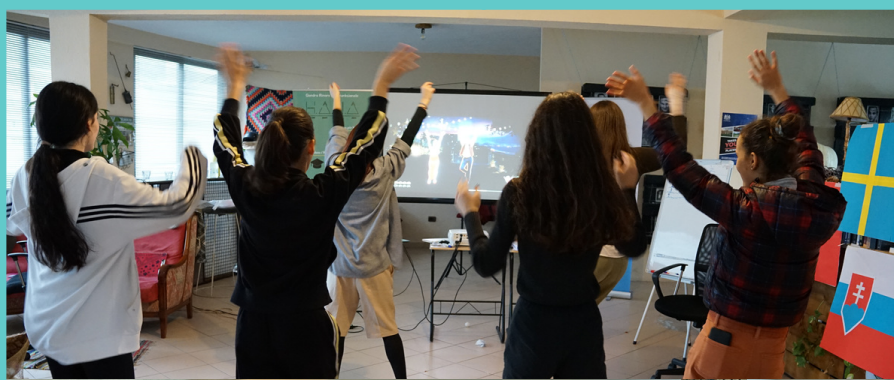
A special and productive day that for H.A.N.A served as an incentive at the beginning of the year to "roll up our sleeves" and work on our advantage as a service unit for young people, to improve and diversify our offer for them.



Part 3 | EU Corner, Cultural Afternoons

1. EU CORNER | FIRST CULTURAL AFTERNOON

A fun afternoon learning about 9 of the member countries of the union. How many stars are there in the European Union Flag? What is the motto of the EU? We got the answer about these and much more on the first cultural afternoon of this edition.

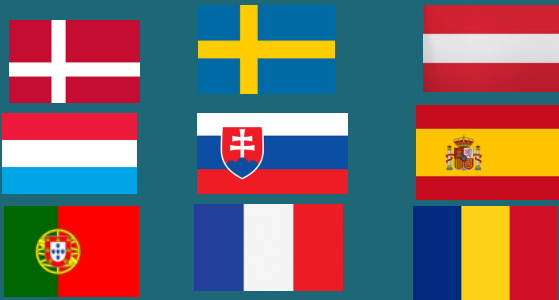


2. EU CORNER | SECOND CULTURAL AFTERNOON

A festive afternoon to recognize and celebrate the cultural and social values of 9 EU countries, bringing to 18 the number of member states for which we held events with our young people in H.A.N.A.'s EU corner.

This is our original way of instilling in the youth the understanding that the European community of the EU is a multicultural community of nations that strongly preserve their identity as their most valuable contribution to the larger EU community.

Thus, we accompanied the celebrations with traditional foods, songs and music of the respective countries, curiosities and games as well as dancing.

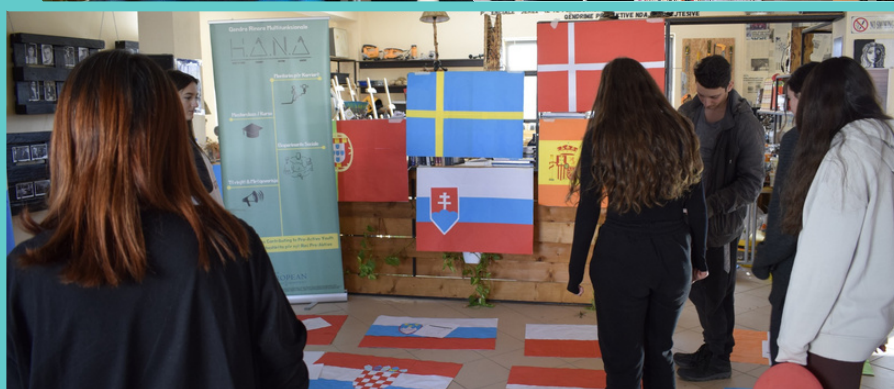


3. EU CORNER | THIRD CULTURAL AFTERNOON

We held the last cultural afternoon meet up part of the program "Policymaking and the EU Accession Negotiation Program" for this 3rd edition.

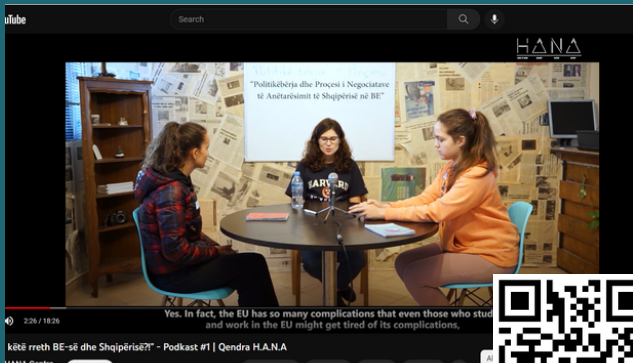
As is the tradition of our meetings, this time the 9 countries we learned about were: The Netherlands; Germany; Slovenia; Croatia; Malta; Cyprus; Ireland; Latvia and Poland.

We learned with the quizzes, we tried traditional dances and foods (mostly sweets) of these countries, and in between we played a few other fun games.



Part 4 | Podcasts & Recaps

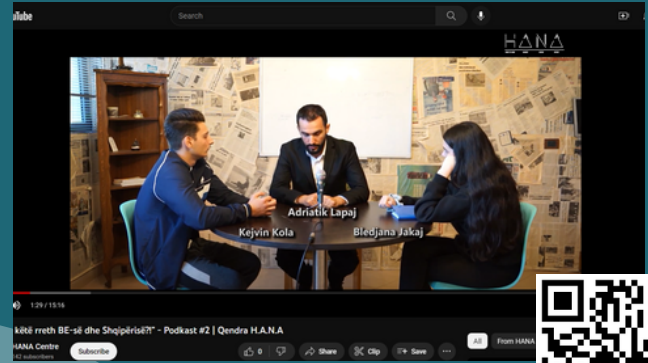
PODCAST #1 | "THE STATE OF VALUES - FAST TRACK TO THE EU"



SCAN ME



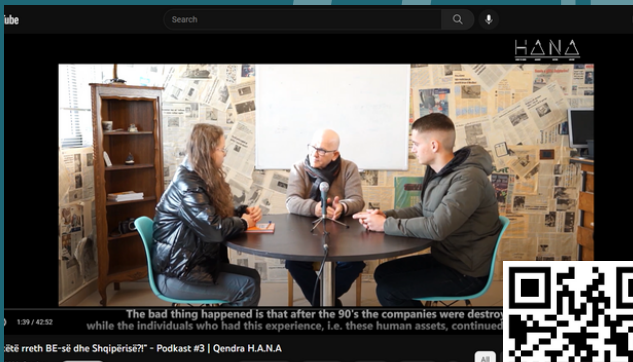
PODCAST #2 | "CIVIC AWARENESS AS A COUNTER MEASURE AGAINST REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRATIC ABNORMALITIES."



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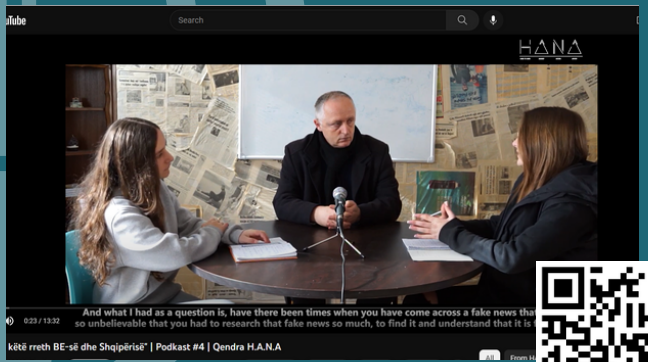
PODCAST #3 | "A CHANGING COUNTRY - THE CONNECTION TO THE ROOTS"



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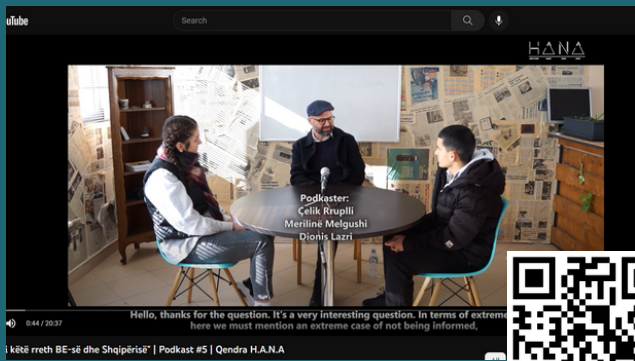
PODCAST #4 | "ALBANIA A WORTHY MEMBER OF THE EU?"



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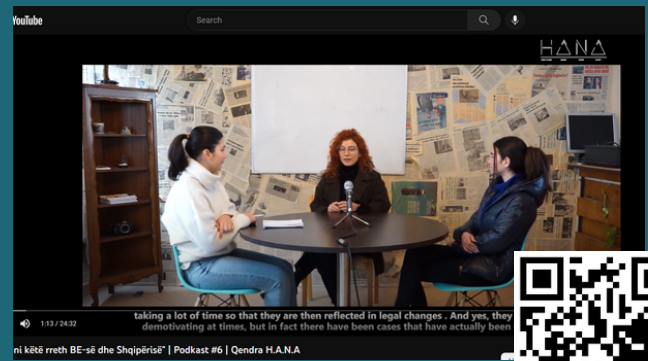
PODCAST #5 | "FAKE NEWS ERA AND THE VOIDING OF THE NATION."



SCAN ME



PODCAST #6 | "THE RESISTANCE IDEAL INCARNATED THROUGH CIVIC ACTIVISM"



SCAN ME



A novelty for this edition was the added element of the podcast. At the end of the cycle of lectures, with each lecturer, two young participants sit down to discuss the topics that have been touched upon during the continuation of the program. They touch on the topics of fake news disinformation, the rule of law and civil movements and community awareness in the service of having direct democracy ect. These podcasts, in addition to technical notes, also had an emotional tone, as the conversations were often accompanied by personal experiences. Scan the QR code to follow these conversations in full.

Part 4 | Podcasts & Recaps



SCAN ME



Recaps from our lectures and more can be found in our Youtube page. Scan the QR Code to have a look.

ENDING REMARKS



Albania's democracy implementation context is challenging and we operate amidst barriers such as; high numbers of youth migration/immigration, capital (Tirana) centralized service/opportunities offerings, nepotism and party partisanship that manifests in less opportunities for the non-affiliated youth, the unfavorable conditions created from the Ukraine War (increased living costs but not income), the uncooperative stance of the public education structures towards NGO's such as ours that tackle policymaking and institutional accountability. However, we could implement our program with youth that saw a value in H.A.N.A's call to recruit and share a journey of 6 months to discuss about Albania's path to EU accession.

Our center is particularly interested in fostering civic activism in youth so as the country can benefit from pro-active young generations that show interest in investing their lives in Albania, as opposed to immigrating to developed countries through legal and, most of the time, illegal ways. This result cannot materialize if the youth fail to engage meaningfully in the country's political life and perspective of it joining the community of the EU, since it is the member countries of the Union that mostly appeal to our youth. Having said that, one of H.A.N.A's most prized interventions is the winter school yearly editions, financially supported and fostered by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Luxembourg.

H.A.N.A has incredibly matured from and with this experience, therefore we can attest that sustainability of interventions (in this case, the winter school) brings success and trustworthiness in the communities. In turn, this fosters positive outcomes which we reinforced through the reputable academics and experts that joined our third edition as well.

We are humbled from the philosophy of partnership that we encounter from Luxembourg's representation. The ease of communication and interaction and also the responsive and highly professional approach has provided us with a role model to follow with our youth and other stakeholders in the program.