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## PINK Embassy introduces 30 people of 2014 Individuals who have publicly supported the LGBT cause

For the year 2014 PINK / LGBT Pro in consultation with the LGBTI community and people who work for this cause in our country have agreed to present a list of public personalities and others who through their work, activism and engagement have given a real support to raise and strengthen awareness on the LGBT cause.

This list is not exhaustive and we are aware that many people, whether known to the public or not, have given and will continue to give support for more equality, respect and integration of LGBTI people in Albanian society. We are also aware that the biggest support, for each and every LGBT person comes from loved ones like parents, brothers, sisters, friends and teachers.

Also, the term support is quite relative. If for some people like the publicist Mustafa Nano or MP Vasilika Hysi this support entails a serious engagement in media or politics, for someone else the support can be through talking with friends and other people in positive ways for LGBT people, opposing homopho-

bia and reacting properly to offensive remarks.

Another issue noticed widely with allies and friends of the cause is the criticism that they get from other people. This shows that support does not require simply well-wishing but also courage and strength to get out of ones' comfort zone and speak up for human rights.

Some of the supporters put in this list are not individuals but institutions and groups which have given support to the LGBTI cause.

Being aware that support for the LGBT cause comes from different directions and in different form we apologise to the individuals who do not find themselves in this list. If you know people who have given support to the LGBTI cause please write to us at [pinkembassy@crca.al](mailto:pinkembassy@crca.al).



### **Vjollca Meçaj – Albanian Helsinki Committee**

Mrs. Meçaj has supported the LGBT cause for years, especially in relation to legal protection, the implementation of the law for protection from discrimination and the social acceptance of LGBTI people. She has spoken up publicly during IDAHOT at the Diversity Fair in Tirana. At a working meeting with Albanian and European parliamentarians she said that Albanian society needs to understand that sexual orientation and gender identity is just one more characteristic of a person and as such it should not serve as a motive to discriminate or exclude them.



### **Vasilika Hysi – Member of Albanian Parliament**

Mrs. Hysi is one of those politicians, that has worked for vulnerable groups and human rights including LGBTI. While many politicians have decided to work for causes which are more popular in society, Mrs. Hysi like few of her colleagues in Parliament has contributed to the protection of LGBTI rights. In our understanding she has not done this just because of politics. In her comment regarding the so-called petition of 57 intellectuals following Tirana Pride she wrote: “It has been a long time since “intellectuals” have said anything for many problems which worry people in this country. They do not speak of children in hiding due to blood feuds, for street children, victims of trafficking suffering for years in Europe, for lack of justice, for victims of sexual violence in Kosovo etc. They do not speak for the reforms in education, art, social services and many other reforms needed for this country. The “problem” chosen to be made public is wrong. Homophobia is not a democratic value and it is punished by law.”



### **Igli Totozani – People’s Advocate**

Mr. Totozani is one of those public personalities who has enriched his institutional duty with an engagement similar only to people in countries with long-lasting democracies. He is also one of the few allies and supporters of the LGBTI cause in our country that just because of doing his institutional duty has publicly and privately faced strong political and media opposition. At a working table on this issue he has accepted the fact that the road to achieving full acceptance of LGBTI people in society will be long mainly because there are not many people who accept to speak openly of this issue.



### **Alexander Arvizu – Ambassador of the United States of America to Albania**

While preparing this list we had doubts whether we should put foreign citizens or not. The first thought was that people would think it is “too easy” for foreigners to promote the LGBT cause. However, not putting these people in this list would seem simply xenophobic and a type of complex we have towards foreigners. After a conversation with the group it was clear that each person, despite of their position and origin represent firstly themselves. Also in Albania there are many foreigners, who not necessarily have supported this cause publicly, even though their work might demand them to do so. The PINK Embassy team wants to thank Mr. Arvizu and his team at the US Embassy in Tirana for the extraordinary work they have done for LGBT people, for raising awareness on the cause and for the attention they pay to the security of the activists operating in Albania.



**Niko Peleshi – Deputy Prime Minister of Albania**

In his speech at a regional EU conference on fundamental Rights, taking place in Tirana, last November, Mr. Peleshi said: “Albanians have certain advantages in respecting minorities and religious harmony, which positively affects respect for human rights. In this area there are many challenges to face. One of the successes of protecting human rights is the creation of a coordination system between the government and organizations for common actions for the community. Media debates, improving legislation and public awareness are some of the steps that have no comparison even to a few years ago.”

## **Ema Ndreja - Actress**

While in many parts of the world artists are often at the forefront of social issues and are known as activists of many causes, Albanian artists, for reasons that cannot be analysed here, keep a certain distance from social issues. This however cannot be said for the popular actress Ema Ndreja. She is one of those people who is known for her honesty, response to injustice and for exposing the many difficulties that Albanian artists face in their work. For LGBT people she has said: “I have been at your side in a natural way, but not everybody sees things like me”. Further she has accepted that because of the support she gives to the LGBTI community she has received negative responses: “At that moment I started to reflect more about your activities and I understood that you are like a locomotive which needs to keep on its shoulders the entire society for it to move forward. In that sense we are very much alike”.





### **Gëzim Tushi – Sociologist**

Through his prolific work as a sociologist Mr. Tushi has been one of the few Albanian intellectuals who has spoken for the LGBT cause with an admirable rationality. Being aware of Albanian society and culture he has made not just positive analyses for LGBT people but through his daily work has advanced the human rights culture in Albania as a social value. Mr. Tushi is currently working on a book about LGBT issues.





### **Kujtim Çashku – Director & Producer**

Mr. Cashku is one of those Albanian artists who has supported human rights not just through words but daily actions and work. Through him and the team he works with at the Film and Multimedia Academy “Marubi” in Tirana, a space is available for art, movies, culture and debates which serve as a promoter of critical thinking and reflection. Mr. Cashku speaks to all generations. In his own words the doors of the Academy are open to all citizens. Each year the Academy welcomes an International Human Rights Festival where the LGBTI topic is included with highly rated international movies and productions. LGBT groups have organized at the Academy movie screenings, debates and other events.

## **Gilman Bakalli – Sociologist**

Even though Mr. Bakalli cannot be called a “supporter” of the LGBT cause in the classical sense, his response following IDAHOT 2014 made great impression on us. In his comment, he sees “the force of habit” as a major obstacle towards the respect of LGBTI people and has put into questions the truthfulness and value of social prejudices. In his article, among other things he says: “For centuries, marriage is a heterosexual privilege. Because, nobody can let go of their privileges easily, this emotional response to gay marriage is somehow understandable. But the fact that even I cannot escape the trap of tradition, does not prohibit me to say that there is no rational argument that can exclude homosexual people from the right to marriage. The main argument that many people share is that these couples cannot have babies. Whoever, turns the ability of having babies into a condition for marriage, then needs to take it to the end and accept that with this logic, everybody who is going to get married, should at first get a fertility test. Luckily this idea which violates human dignity has not been in anybody’s mind. With this I do not mean to say that children do not enrich the life of a married couple.



However I cannot understand why this value, for some people, needs to be conditioned by the sexual disposition. Even the right of same-sex couples adopting children causes negative reactions for the same reason. The force of tradition puts same sex couples into a strange optic as they try to raise children. But, the fact that we have been used for year with the image of a mother and a father holding a baby does not make a legitimate argument for prohibiting same-sex couples to do the same. Of course, children raised by same sex parents can be bullied at school. However, children of mixed ethnic backgrounds, of different religions get bullied in schools. For me, the main reason (not widely expressed in society) which causes many Albanians to oppose same sex marriage is the idea that gays and lesbians are perverted people, who should be kept away from children. Also there is the fear that homosexual parents will raise homosexual children. As if, it was not heterosexual parents who raised homosexual children! I say that a little more reason and fewer emotions would not hurt the debate. Especially when the debate is being taken into the hands of professors, whom society expects to use their intellect.”

**Gilman Bakalli**



### **Bardhylka Kospiri – Deputy Minister of Social Welfare and Youth**

Mrs. Kospiri has been a supporter of LGBTI rights as an activist and now as a Deputy Minister of Social Welfare and Youth. She has been present in several activities organized by LGBTI organizations and has offered her support in the efforts for protection of LGBTI people.



### **Mustafa Nano – Writer**

Mr. Nano is a multi-dimensional person whose publications touch upon many issues. As for LGBTI rights he is one of the few who has spoken with a strong voice. In his own words: “My position is an attack. It is an attack against those who do not understand one of the most basic things of today’s civilisation. Nobody should be mocked, put down, discriminated or persecuted just because they have been born or chosen to be different from us in relation to their gender, race, ethnicity, religion, politics, sexual orientation etc. and nobody should give themselves the right to persecute, mock or discriminate people who are different from them”.



### **Fatos Lubonja – Publicist**

Mr. Lubonja, like many people from this list is very respected by the LGBT community in Albania. Thanks to his articles, just like Mr. Nano he has influenced public opinion in a positive way. Very few people do not know of his article with the famous title “I am homosexual”. At an award ceremony where he was thanked for supporting LGBTI people, Mr. Lubonja said: “There are two types of awards, one given by the majority which you need to refuse because for sure you have done something wrong and another which you receive from the minority. The latter is an honour which not only I cannot refuse but I need to ask myself what I did to deserve it”.



### **Delina Fico – Activist**

Delina Fico, as an activist and supporter of human rights has supported the LGBTI community not only with media statements and TV debates but has been close to the community by offering advice, ideas and support. Even though the LGBTI cause has many allies among women, Mrs. Fico has been quite outspoken and also because she has advocated for gender equality as much as equality for LGBTI people.



### **Rudina Magjistari – Journalist & TV host**

Ms. Magjistari has done something that many LGBTI people would not expect from the Albanian showbiz. She has introduced the LGBT topic for what it is: a social issue that needs to be addressed calmly and rationally. In her studio, LGBTI activists and their allies have found a space where they were not doing show, but managed to adequately inform people about the issues, needs and problems of LGBTI people.





**Nora Malaj – Deputy Minister of Education and Sports**

Mrs. Malaj has supported LGBT people; especially younger generations through her job as a teacher and head of school and now as a politician and Deputy Minister of Education. She is one of those politicians who know the challenges towards full acceptance of LGBTI people and the work that institutions need to do for this cause. She has shared a few positive ideas in relation to education especially in relation to adequate preparation of future and current teachers and to fight homophobia and discrimination in schools and universities.



## **Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth**

The Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth has supported for years the work and efforts of LGBTI people to raise public awareness and improve policies and services towards LGBT people. Thanks to an improvement in legislation and political willingness of the governments in the past 6 years, this ministry and its administrations have given an important contribution for legal improvements, awareness campaigns and many projects implemented in collaboration with this institution. Presently the Ministry is preparing a new strategy of social inclusion and a Plan of Measures for LGBTI people.



### **Elga Mitre – Political Advisor, Embassy of the Netherlands in Albania**

Mrs. Mitre is a well-known person for the LGBTI community for her efforts in protecting their rights and assisting the organizations. Through her work she has offered often solutions and ideas for many problems and has initiated several working tables and exchanges between LGBT organizations and international partners.



### **Irma Baraku – Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination**

Commissioner Baraku is well-known for the LGBTI community. Her role and position and the law for protection from discrimination, whose implementation she oversees have put her in direct contact with the community for the past 4 years. During this period Mrs. Baraku has worked for the law to be recognized and implemented by public and private institutions, to raise public awareness with all vulnerable groups and communities. The support has consisted in signing cooperation agreements with LGBT organizations, reporting directly cases of discrimination and helping in filing them, organizing and holding awareness activities, trainings and seminar and in co-implementing different projects and initiatives. Lately the office of the Commissioner has published a special report on the LGBT issue with facts, analysis, comments and suggestions for legal improvements, policy change etc.

### **Belioza Çoku – Activist**

Belioza Coku has supported for years the LGBT cause and is one of the first people from civil society who has participated in TV debates, at a period when the LGBT cause started to get wide recognition but also heavy opposition. Meanwhile she has been one of the people who has supported directly the community. For many years she held a social event “Coffee at PINK” which was a safe space for many young LGBT people to speak about their problems and difficulties with family, school or work.





### **Amarda Çoku – Legal Expert, Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination**

Ms. Coku is contact person for the LGBT community at the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination. During these years she has participated in many activities of the LGBT community and has given a positive contribution in debates and many activities. She has met and consulted with many LGBTI people who have sent their complaints to the CPD and has prepared two special reports on the LGBT community.



**Michael Kane – Embassy of the United Kingdom**

Mr. Kane is one of the people from the international community in Tirana who has made great contribution for the LGBT community. Only in the last year he has assisted in organizing training for managing an emergency LGBT centre and helping on the screening of a British documentary during Diversity Week 2014.

**Eltin Qirazi – Professor**

Mr. Qerazi is one of those people from the academic and business environment who has tried to help in raising awareness for LGBT rights. Every year PINK Embassy has had the possibility to hold open classes by the Faculty of Social Sciences.







**Enila Cenko – Psychologist & Lecturer**

Ms. Cenko has also helped in holding open classes on the LGBT topic at the University of New York, Tirana.

## **Luis Vivaldi - Peace Corps Volunteer**

As a Peace Corps volunteer, Luis has given a great contribution for the LBGT cause in Albania getting engaged in many activities. With hard work and in cooperation with all LGBT groups in the country he implemented a small project through which 15 lectures were held on the LGBT topic at high schools all across Albania.





### **Bekim Asani – LGBT activist**

Bekim is one of the most inspiring Albanian activists. He is actively involved with the LGBT cause in his hometown of Tetovo in Macedonia, yet he has been able to contribute to the cause also in Albania. For the Tirana Pride 2014, he managed to come to Tirana with a group of activists giving even more energy to the event.

## **Ermira Shkurti – UNDP**

Through her work at UNDP Mrs. Shkurti has given great contribution to the issues of gender equality and human rights. Taking inspiration from the support that the UN has been giving recently to the LGBT cause she and a big team of UNDP have helped with several activities, by participating proactively and making a positive contribution to the discussions and debates.



**Mr. Vangjush Dako, Mayor of Durrës, Mrs. Nevila Xhindi, Deputy Mayor of Tirana, Mr. Sotiraq Filo, Mayor of Korce, Mrs. Benila Tërrova, Deputy Mayor of Korce, Mr. Shpëtim Gjika, Mayor of Vlorë, Mr. Qazim Sejдини, Mayor of Elbasan, Mr. Lorenc Luka, Mayor of Shkoder.**

The mayors of these cities have all expressed their willingness to work on the LGBT topic by getting to assess current perceptions of municipality's perceptions, holding trainings and workshops and holding awareness raising activities for the public in the respective cities.



[www.respublica.al](http://www.respublica.al)

**Respublica – Online Portal**

Is one of the most serious online mediums in Albania and often publishes articles which have a critical content especially on legal matters and issues of hate speech and discrimination.



### **Merita Poni – Professor and Human Rights Activist**

Mrs. Poni is quite well known in academia, civil society and media. She is one of those people who embodies academic knowledge with grass root activism and a fight for more equality for women, people with disabilities, LGBT etc. She has spoken openly and with competence for issues of sexual orientation and gender identity and for the work that needs to be done for this issue. At a round table regarding the LGBTI topic she has said: “For as long as this fear from the different [homosexuality] will not be challenged, then homophobia and what causes it will leave homosexuals in the darkness of second hand citizens, without fundamental rights like those of family, education, employment, assembly or even life, even though anti-discrimination laws have been formally passed. Gay people are not asking for special civil rights, but for the same civil rights like any other citizens and they will not enjoy them for as long as their orientation or behaviour will be seen as unworthy under the light of undisputed prejudices and negative social myths. Homophobia has terrible consequences in the lives of LGBT people and their loved ones. Homophobia separates relatives, friends, and neighbours and creates even more divisions in our society which for generations has suffered from judgmental separations. We do not need new boundaries. For as long as homophobia will be legitimised by society, religion and politics it will continue to grow in violent forms and it will be the last prejudice to be accepted widely.

### **Hueyda El Saied- PINK Ambassador**

Hueyda has supported for years the LGBT cause and for the last two years has been a PINK Embassy Ambassador. Even though she is not living in Albania, she has met with the community several times and has given her support in many events held by LGBT groups.

