



# Levelling up: The role of Albanian Municipalities in EU integration

*Giving a voice to  
the local government*

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*Giving a voice to the Local Governments*

## Bios Panelists

### Panel 1 - Basics of Local Governance – Importance of the Charter for Local Self-Government

**Monika Kurian,**  
Policy Analyst,  
SIGMA-OECD

Monika Kurian is a Senior Policy Adviser on Multi-Level Governance at the SIGMA Programme, where she leads analytical and advisory work on decentralisation, coordination, and local governance reforms in the Western Balkans and EU neighbourhood. She previously served as Director of Local State Administration and Self-Government at the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic and later as State Secretary at the Ministry of Education, overseeing reforms in the educational sector. Monika has over 12 years of experience in public administration, legislation, and governance reform, and has represented Slovakia in European and international bodies such as the OECD Public Governance Committee and the Council of Europe's CDDG, which she chaired in 2020. She is also the founder of the NGO "Good Civil Servant," promoting professionalism and integrity in the civil service. Her work focuses on multi-level governance, local government reform, and public sector modernization across Europe.



<p><b>Daniel Popescu,</b> Head of Promoting Local Democracy Department, Executive Secretary of the Chamber of Regions at the Congress, Council of Europe</p>	<p>In the Council of Europe, Daniel Popescu has been in charge of democracy and governance issues, notably but not exclusively at local and regional levels, for almost 39 years. He has worked both in the field of standard setting and in that of co-operation.</p> <p>He is currently Head of the Promoting Local Democracy Department of the Council of Europe's Congress and Executive Secretary of its Chamber of Regions. He also supervises the Centre of Expertise for Multilevel Governance, which provides assistance for local government reforms to member States.</p>
<p><b>Magnus Liljeström,</b> Senior Advisor, Swedish Association of Local Authorities &amp; Regions (SALAR)</p>	<p>Magnus Liljeström works as a senior advisor to the international projects of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (Salar). He has a background in journalism, working for national media in Sweden. Since 1990 his main field of work has been international development cooperation, working for NGOs, the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (Sida), as self-employed consultant and, since 2009, for Salar. There he combines his experience as a local politician and in development cooperation to support projects focusing on decentralisation reforms, EU accession, development of local government associations and local service provision. Magnus currently works with projects in Ukraine, Armenia, North Macedonia and Moldova. In parallel he holds positions in the municipal council, executive board and social welfare committee in his home municipality.</p>
<p><b>Panel 2 – Local Fiscal Relations – Strengthening the Autonomy of Local Governments</b></p>	
<p><b>Sabina Ymeri,</b> Public Finance and Decentralisation Expert</p>	<p>Sabina Ymeri is a public finance and governance specialist with extensive experience in Public Financial Management, fiscal decentralisation, and local government reform. She has led and contributed to numerous assessments and policy analyses, focusing on municipal finance, intergovernmental fiscal relations, and local revenue mobilisation.</p> <p>Her work has supported the design and implementation of key legislation and reforms in Albania, including those related to local government finance, municipal borrowing, and territorial and administrative reform. She has advised central and local authorities, as well as development partners on strengthening fiscal autonomy and alignment with EU principles of subsidiarity and good governance.</p>



<p><b>Fran Brahimi,</b> Head of Local Finance Department, Ministry of Finance</p>	<p>Fran Brahimi is the Director of Local Finance at Albania's Ministry of Finance, where he plays a pivotal role in shaping fiscal policy and strengthening local governance. With over 28 years of experience in Albania's public administration, Fran is widely recognized as a senior expert in decentralization and public finance. His career has been deeply rooted in advancing local government systems, improving intergovernmental fiscal relations, and promoting sustainable financial management practices. He holds the academic title of Associate Professor and serves as a lecturer in Public Finance at the University of Tirana and several private universities, where he mentors future public administration professionals and economists. His academic contributions are complemented by a rich portfolio of studies, articles, and strategic frameworks that have informed national policies on decentralization, local budgeting, and fiscal autonomy.</p> <p>Fran has also been actively involved in drafting regulations and legislative reforms that support transparent and efficient local financial systems. His expertise is frequently sought in national and international forums, and he has collaborated with various development partners and institutions to align Albania's local finance practices with European standards.</p>
<p><b>Margaux Vincent,</b> Policy Advisor, OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions &amp; Cities</p>	<p>Margaux Vincent is a Policy Analyst at the Decentralisation, Subnational Finance and Infrastructure Unit of the OECD's Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities. At the OECD, she works on multi-level governance, decentralisation, subnational public finance and property tax. She previously worked as a Senior Analyst at Fitch Ratings, a rating agency, on international public finance.</p> <p>Margaux has a Bachelor's degree in Applied economics and a Master's degree in International Economics from the University Paris-Dauphine, as well as Master's degrees in Political Economy of Europe from Sciences Po Paris and the London School of Economics, and in Behavioural Economics from Columbia University, New York.</p>

<p><b>Elton Stafa,</b> Director, NALAS Albania</p>	<p>Elton Stafa is a senior decentralisation, public policy and public finance expert at NALAS (the Network of Associations of Local Authorities in South-East Europe) focusing on informed policymaking, institutional capacity-building at national and regional level, supporting intergovernmental dialogue, and fostering regional learning and exchange.</p> <p>Elton has extensive experience in designing and implementing public finance and decentralization legislation, policies and reforms.</p> <p>Elton leads the NALAS Task Force on Fiscal Decentralisation, is the editor of the annual NALAS Fiscal Decentralisation Report for South-East Europe and coordinates the NALAS Regional Decentralization Observatory, a platform serving as knowledge and information hub for local government finance in South-East Europe.</p> <p>He recently managed the EU funded EU4Municipalities project for NALAS, and has previously worked at the Ministry of Finance and USAID Albania, as well as a regional fiscal decentralization expert for the EU, World Bank, ADA, GIZ etc.</p> <p>Elton holds MSc. in European Economy and Business Law from the University of Rome Tor Vergata. He has authored a number of studies on public finance and decentralisation.</p>
<p><b>Dr Mariel Frroku,</b> Lecturer, Faculty of Economics, University of Tirana</p>	<p>Dr. Mariel Frroku serves as a Lecturer and Researcher at the Department of Finance, Faculty of Economics, University of Tirana. His academic and professional engagement is focused on Public Financial Management (PFM) and Fiscal Decentralization at the local government level.</p> <p>He holds a Ph.D. from the Faculty of Economics, University of Tirana, with a dissertation concentrating on the impact of decentralization and public financial management on local governance. Dr. Frroku is the author and co-author of several scientific articles and international conference papers in these fields, some of which have been recognized for their substantial contribution to the study of public finance.</p> <p>Dr. Frroku's professional experience encompasses technical and managerial roles within central public administration institutions, including the Ministry of Finance. He has served as an expert in internationally funded development projects supported by the European Union, SECO, and other partners, providing technical assistance for public financial management reform initiatives.</p> <p>He has undertaken specialized professional training in his field at distinguished international institutions, including the International Monetary Fund, the Ministry of Finance of Austria (Vienna), and The Hague Academy for Local Governance (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands).</p>

### Panel 3 – Role of Local Governments in Territorial Development

**Valeria Valeri,**  
Expert EU Cohesion  
Funds (Chapter 22)

Valeria VALERI is a graduate economist from Bocconi University, Italy, who is currently working in Albania and Montenegro as Team Leader and Key Expert for EU technical assistance on Chapter 22 of accession negotiations in the area of Cohesion Policy funding. Her professional experience spans over 20 years in this field, serving as an advisor in Romania, Croatia, and the Western Balkans to support EU membership preparations for the management of EU Cohesion funds.

After her experience in Italy with the regional government of Lombardy as an EU financial instruments expert and project manager for regional investment projects, she was appointed EU Resident Twinning Advisor in two regions of Romania. Her mission focused on developing the capacity of county councils and municipalities of the two regions to prepare territorial development and urban regeneration strategies and interventions eligible for EU funding. In Croatia, she advised on the preparation and implementation of the Competitiveness and Cohesion Operational Programme, which, under a €6.9 billion EU Cohesion grant, includes support for integrated territorial investments in Croatian municipalities.

**Gilles Kittel,**  
Team Leader South-  
East Europe,  
DG REGIO

Gilles KITTEL has been working in the European Commission for more than 20 years (3 Directorates-General - REGIO, NEAR (ENEST now) and AGRI - and 7 units). Before that he worked 5 years in both an audit and consulting firm (Arthur Andersen; Brussels, Paris and Lyon) and an international group with operations in over 40 countries (Lagardère S.A.; Paris).

Through his different positions, Gilles has gained significant experience in EU enlargement process, external aid political process, cohesion and agricultural funds, economic support, audit, accountancy, internal control, consultancy and financial management. He is currently working within DG REGIO (Regional Policy and Urban Policy) as the team leader of the South-East Europe team within Unit D1.

**Pietro Celloti,**  
Partner & Policy  
Analyst,  
T33, Sound Policy

Pietro Celloti is a partner and senior expert in t33 Srl. With over 14 years of experience in evaluation services for both ETC and ERDF mainstream programmes (national and regional), he brings a solid background in project cycle management, developed through extensive work with EU sectoral programmes.

He has also wide experience in the design and delivery of comparative studies, having contributed to numerous research projects commissioned by the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the European Committee of the Regions (CoR). Currently, for DG REGIO, Pietro is coordinating the study to support candidate countries in implementing the partnership principle in EU cohesion policy. For the CoR, between 2015 and 2019, Pietro coordinated a framework contract under which numerous studies in the field of economic and social policy were carried out and published. His working languages are English, Italian (mother tongue), French. He is fluent in German.

**Timo Ligi,**  
Country Manager,  
SIGMA/OECD

Timo Ligi, senior policy adviser at OECD/SIGMA, also coordinating SIGMA's activities in Albania. Former civil servant from Estonia. Expert in public administration reform. Main areas of work include policy development, including application of better regulation tools, as well as the implementation of administrative procedures and functioning of administrative judiciaries.