



Sasha Pajevic, who directs NDI's programs in Albania, was featured in *Panorama*, a daily national newspaper in Albania. Ms. Pajevic spoke about the *Developing New Political Leaders* program and the future of women in Albanian politics.

**Panorama:** You have been promoting the inclusion of women in decision making in Albania for three years. Are you satisfied with the achievements?

**Sasha Pajevic:** I am very happy that we will see more women in this parliament and also ultimately more women involved in decision making. Also, I hope that the coalition government that forms after the upcoming June election will appoint more women in key places in the administration. Over the last 18 years, Albanian women have worked hard to gain their share of political empowerment. Women have gathered together to lobby for their rights and, as a result, the gender equality law for government institutions was adopted and amendments to the electoral law were passed. They need to continue with these efforts to keep the issue of women's role in society on the front pages.

We are very happy with the progress to date, although we are disappointed with the positions of women on party candidate lists in the upcoming elections. Given the stated commitments of the parties in the last several years, we had expected the parties to put more effort into placing women in winnable positions on candidate lists. In local elections last year and in the election this year, women have worked really hard for their parties, campaigning every day from dusk until dawn to secure more votes for their parties. They have demonstrated that they are willing to work full-time for the success of their respective parties and equal work should be rewarded with equal positions.

**Panorama:** NDI trained women activists of different political parties and from different cities. Many of these women now stand as candidates. Do you believe the NDI training played a role in this?

**SP:** We are convinced that our training did have positive influence, but at the end of the day it is the commitment that the women have showed to the program that made the difference and gotten them noticed by their parties' leadership. We are proud to say that NDI worked over a period of 18 months with over 80 women from 13 different cities across Albania and now, 20 of those women are on the parties' candidate lists.

I am sure that our trainings had a huge impact on the women, motivating them, giving them the necessary experience and knowledge to contribute positively to the work of their parties, and ultimately making the leadership of the party aware of the potential and abilities of their women members. The women were trained for nine months and after each training session the women practiced the subjects they learned – conducting questionnaires to find out the issues of their citizens, arranging press conferences, organizing advocacy campaigns, etc. After the first group's graduation from the NDI program, our participants decided to organize and register a women's network under the

name Equality in Decision Making. The participants of the second group have since joined Equality in Decision Making and now the network is expanding. NDI constantly stays in touch with the members of the network and provides them with any advice they may need. Also, we are constantly in touch with the party leadership to make them aware of the network participants' skills, knowledge and initiatives.

**Panorama:** From your experience, what is your opinion about Albanian women? Do they have the distinct abilities necessary to be leaders?

**SP:** Albanian women are intelligent, educated, and talented. They fulfil a huge role in society and in the family and they would like to contribute further to the faster integration of their country into the rest of the developed world. Albanian women have accomplished much, but there is much more to do for them to realize their ambitions and become equal partners in decision making. I am sure that, with more women in the next parliament, a new model of successful women politicians will start emerging.

**Panorama:** NDI has been a promoter and supporter the women's network Equality in Decision Making. How do you see the network now; do you think it is gaining power?

**SP:** The network has started to spread and get recognition. It is already implementing two projects, one funded by the United States Embassy and another one in partnership with a local NGO in Kukes, supported by UNIFEM. The name of the network has become known, and members are known in their communities for their activities. Also, now at the national level, there is more recognition of our women candidates. The women's network was recently featured on televised news where four network members, and among them two candidates, spoke about the role of women in society and decision making.

**Panorama:** What programs is NDI planning to undertake after the elections? Is NDI going to continue to support women?

**SP:** We are doing our strategic planning for the activities in the post-election period. NDI's future activities would concentrate on involving more people in the political and legislative process on various issues, to better connect institutions like parliament with constituents. NDI will undoubtedly continue working with Equality in Decision Making in the next period, focusing more on capacity building for the network itself. Also, we will work on expanding the network further and, through the network, reaching out to communities and finding ways to solve citizens' problems and make democracy fulfil the promise of a better life for all.

*Update: The June 28<sup>th</sup> parliamentary elections resulted in the election of 21 women members of parliament. Women now comprise 15% percent of the Parliament, a notable increase from 7% in the previous Parliament. Although these numbers are below the target outlined in the gender quota of the electoral law of 30% representation for women, party leaders generally continue to express support for women candidates. NDI also continues to advise and support Equality in Decision Making as they implement their projects to support the elected women.*