



## SUCCESS STORY

### Scholar Connects Kosovo to its Diaspora

Leadership studies aid activist to engage Kosovars living abroad



Liza Gashi, left, with friends, builds communication between Kosovars living abroad and their home country.

November 2016—When Liza Gashi was accepted into a leadership program in the United States, her work in co-founding a local Kosovo NGO and its diaspora program were important factors in the award of her scholarship. Having graduated from Arizona State University with a Master’s in public administration, Gashi is now back in Kosovo, leading the diaspora effort and helping young Kosovars to apply for international baccalaureate programs around the world.

“I’m back in Kosovo because this is my place and these are my people,” she effuses. “My ultimate call in life is education. And I want every young person in Kosovo to know that, if there is a will, there is a way, and things can be changed for the better.”

Her scholarship was part of USAID’s Transformational Leadership Program—Scholarships and Partnerships, which is co-funded by the Government of Kosovo. The five-year project, launched in 2014, aims to develop a cadre of leaders and equip the abilities of other Kosovars to drive change in priority economic, political, and social areas in Kosovo. Despite having lived and studied in Argentina, Costa Rica and the United States, Gashi has kept her focus on her native Kosovo, constantly finding innovative ways to solve local problems. She dedicates the majority of her time to two initiatives—Kosovo Diaspora and the Structured Dialogue for Diaspora Rights—which operate under the auspices of NGO Germin, which she founded along with colleagues Behar Xharra and Martin Waehlich. The growing organization works to leverage diaspora skills, knowledge and networks to help advance the development and diplomacy of Western Balkan countries.

“Our primary goal is to strengthen the relationship between Kosovo’s diaspora and the government here. And we want people to stay involved,” says Gashi, explaining the variety of ways that the organization encourages citizen involvement. Kosovars in the diaspora can teach a workshop, provide training for nascent organizations, or engage in diplomacy on behalf of Kosovo, communities or organizations. With more than 800,000 Kosovars living and working abroad,

they are an important resource for representation, networking and knowledge across multiple disciplines.

Currently, the Kosovo Diaspora initiative has 33 contributors from 14 countries around the world. Supporters are Kosovars and non-Kosovars who study abroad and feel connected to Kosovo in some way.

In addition to her work with diaspora, Gashi, a United World College (UWC) alumni, chairs the UWC committee in Kosovo that raises funds to send young Kosovars to UWCs around the globe to earn an international baccalaureate diploma.

She credits her experience studying at Arizona State University and living in Phoenix for her improved management and organizational skills. “Arizona State shaped my view of innovation and what successful management really is,” she says. “My college was full of seasoned professionals, people who worked for NGOs and in various state government organizations. I learned a lot from them that I’ve brought back to Kosovo.”

For the past two years, Kosovo Diaspora has highlighted over 600 success stories of individuals, groups and organizations while nurturing existing links between Kosovo and its diaspora community. To keep nurturing this connection, the program just embarked on the Structured Dialogue for Diaspora Rights initiative to advocate for greater social and political rights of diaspora through a structured dialogue with Kosovo institutions.

“We hope this initiative will serve as a starting point for mutual engagement between our diaspora and their home country,” says Gashi.

Germin recently launched their interactive platform for diaspora, continuing their quest to advocate for greater social and political rights for Kosovo’s diaspora.