

# KOSOVO AMERICAN EDUCATION FUND

*Quarterly Newsletter, March 2024*



Hana Bektashi (first from the left) George Washington University '24

# REFLECTIONS ON 20 YEARS OF KAEF

**January 31st, 2024** - As 2024 marks the 20th anniversary of the Kosovo American Education Fund, the KAEF Alumni Association proudly launched the celebration with an engaging breakfast event. KAEF founder, **Mr. Dale Pfeiffer**, shared a compelling narrative of his beginnings in Kosovo, and the inception of KAEF - a cornerstone program in fostering Kosova's economic development through education.

Surrounded by alumni and guests, Mr. Pfeiffer led a dynamic discussion about the evolution of Kosova's educational system, the achievements and challenges of the last two decades, and the aspirations for the future. The conversation was a profound exchange of experiences and a collective envisioning of continued progress in education.



# FORMER PRESIDENT ATIFETE JAHJAGA VISITS AMERICAN COUNCILS

**March 4th, 2024** - Ms. Atifete Jahjaga, former President of Kosova and Honorary KAEF Committee Member, visited the American Councils for International Education headquarters in Washington, DC to meet with Ms. Lisa Choate, President and CEO of American Councils.

During her visit, President Jahjaga and Ms. Choate delved into the transformative work of the Jahjaga Foundation, a remarkable NGO dedicated to propelling democratic development in Kosova and the wider Balkan region. Ms. Choate shared with President Jahjaga updates on the latest American Councils' educational initiatives in Kosova which include critical Department of State programs. The discussion also included a focus on the profound impact that the Kosovo American Education Fund has had in shaping the educational landscape and empowering the next generation of Kosovars.

This collaborative meeting underscored a shared commitment to education, strengthening Kosova's economy, and the importance of the bilateral relationship between the U.S. and Kosova. At American Councils, we are deeply grateful for President Jahjaga's unwavering support and look forward to continuing our partnership with her and the foundation.



# WESTERN BALKANS WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS OF THE YEAR AWARD

**March 13th, 2024 - Liridona Osmanaj (Duke University '20)**, has been recognized as one of the **Western Balkans Women Entrepreneurs of the Year** for her impact with **Hajde Folim** social enterprise. This initiative aims to spotlight the remarkable achievements of women who have fearlessly launched and nurtured their businesses, paving the way for new and sustainable opportunities for women and men alike across our region. Out of an impressive 250 nominations spanning across the Western Balkans, only 12 women were honored, including Liridona, who is also one of the two women from Kosovo to be recognized.

Liridona received a Special Jury recognition for promoting mental health & wellbeing. Her recognition for promoting mental health & wellbeing of communities is a testament to her visionary leadership and impact.

Hajde Folim stands as the foremost Albanian-speaking platform dedicated to mental health and self-care. It's aim has been to educate, destigmatize mental health, and equip the audience with self-guided tools and resources for their journey towards improved well-being. 16,000 people and growing follow and trust Hajde Folim for mental health education and guidance to self-care, improved wellbeing and more authentic relationships.

Hajde Folim's vision is to build a world of greater human connection and mental well being, with the mission to empower people to self-reflect, nourish spiritual growth and become the truest, most fulfilled version of themselves in order to live a more meaningful life.



# WESTERN BALKANS WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS OF THE YEAR AWARD



Liridona shared with us the significance that this award has for her: “This recognition serves as a beacon of hope and validation, not only for me personally, but for the resilient spirit of women and young entrepreneurs from Kosovo. It highlights the impact we're making with Hajde Folim despite the formidable challenges of launching a startup in our region, particularly one with a crucial social mission.

Starting a business in Kosova is tough in itself, especially as a young person and a woman. Entrepreneurship is an uphill climb in any setting, but carving a path for social change in a community where models such as a social enterprise are still finding their footing adds layers of difficulty.

*16,000 people and growing follow and trust Hajde Folim for mental health education and guidance to self-care, improved wellbeing and more authentic relationships.*

Additionally, tackling the stigma surrounding mental health, a topic often shrouded in silence and misunderstanding, only amplifies the obstacles we face. However, in the realm of business, there's this philosophy of "finding solutions for the hardest problems to solve, an approach that underscores the importance of innovation and problem-solving prowess. It encourages teams to think creatively, explore unconventional solutions, and push the boundaries of what's possible.

The recognition Hajde Folim has received for promoting mental health and well-being validates our vision and impact. As the sole entity recognized in the theme of mental health, it underscores the innovative potential of our approach and the capacity to make a meaningful impact beyond borders. This proves that our work is not only pioneering in Kosovo but also on a regional level, as evidenced by the traction we receive from people in Albania, Macedonia, and beyond. It indicates the scalability of this model and the potential to change lives in our region.

At Hajde Folim, our mission is clear: to break down barriers, destigmatize mental health, and empower individuals on their journey to well-being. We're not just building a business; we're building bridges to a world of greater human connection and fulfillment. It's worth noting that Hajde Folim is not only a woman-led startup but also has 80% young women on the team.

This award isn't just a pat on the back; it's a call to action. It's a reminder that our work matters, and that every step we take is a step toward a brighter, more compassionate future. I'm humbled by this recognition, and more determined than ever to keep pushing forward, spreading hope, and changing lives.”

# PHILANTHROPY/ KAEF ALUMNUS GIVES BACK



**Dastid Pallaska (Yale Law School '08)** Managing Partner of **Pallaska&Associates**, recently made a generous financial contribution to the Kosovo American Education Fund (KAEF). This donation signifies a deep commitment to fostering educational opportunities for Kosova's brightest minds. As the head of Kosovo's leading legal consulting firm, Pallaska&Associates, Dastid has cultivated an impressive career in law, with a focus on banking, finance, and corporate mergers.

Pallaska&Associates has emerged as Kosovo's premier legal consulting firm, boasting unparalleled expertise in various practice areas such as energy, mining, telecommunications, and real estate, among others. The firm is renowned for its dedication to a select clientele comprising foreign and multinational companies, as well as top-tier law firms representing interests within Kosovo and the region. The firm is also recognized for its expertise across several key sectors, also stands out for its pro bono work aimed at strengthening Kosova's legal framework.

Reflecting on the impact of KAEF on his career, Pallaska said, "**KAEF had a tremendous impact on my professional career. It not only awarded me a full scholarship for my LLM studies in the United States but, more importantly, enabled me to attend the LLM program of my choice at Yale Law School. Just as KAEF believed in me back in 2007, today I am confident that KAEF continues to be uniquely positioned to support Kosova's best and brightest achieve their full intellectual capacity by pursuing their post-graduate studies at the most premier universities in the United States. This is why I am a KAEF supporter.**"

Dastid's contribution to KAEF is a testament to his belief in giving back and investing in the future of Kosova's talent. His support highlights the importance of educational advancement for the nation's youth, ensuring they have the means to pursue their dreams at top-tier institutions in the United States, much like he did.

Through his generosity, Pallaska not only acknowledges the pivotal role that KAEF played in his own success but also inspires a new generation to reach for their highest aspirations, embodying the spirit of perseverance and philanthropy.

# REFLECTIONS FROM KAEF ALUMNAE

*In celebration of Women's History Month and KAEF's 20th anniversary, we invited three Fjollas of KAEF to share how the program has shaped their lives and careers, and its impact on empowering women in Kosovar society. Here are their stories:*



**Fjolla Raifi (Syracuse University '15)**

Reflecting on the profound impact of KAEF, both personally and professionally, is truly humbling. This esteemed program has not only provided invaluable opportunities for my professional growth and development; but has also served as a beacon of empowerment for many women in Kosovo. Personally, it has equipped me with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to navigate the professional world with determination and resilience. Professionally, KAEF has opened doors to a myriad of possibilities, fostering connections and shaping career trajectories.

Beyond individual success stories, the broader impact of KAEF on women in Kosovo through education and leadership development, is fostering further positive change, innovation, and a culture of inclusivity and equality.

As we celebrate the achievements of the KAEF program and many Kosovar women, I extend my heartfelt wishes to the program and its participants. May we continue to empower, inspire, and uplift each other as well as new generations of Kosovar women towards shaping a brighter, more equitable future for all.



**Fjolla Kondiroli (Cornell University '17)**

KAEF's influence on my life has been nothing short of transformative. Through their generous support, I was able to pursue a Master's degree from Cornell University – a dream that would have been unattainable otherwise. This experience not only propelled me towards my goal of achieving a PhD in Economics but also ignited within me a deep desire to give back to my community. KAEF's commitment to empowering women is essential for Kosovo's future. By providing access to world-class education, KAEF cultivates a generation of female leaders ready to reshape economic policies, drive innovation, and create a more equitable society for all. I am deeply grateful for KAEF and wish them continued success in their mission to build a stronger, brighter Kosovo.

# REFLECTIONS FROM KAEF ALUMNAE



**Fjolla Azemi (Bentley University '23)**

The Kosovo American Education Fund (KAEF) scholarship has profoundly influenced my personal and professional journey. My scholarship enabled me to develop my global perspective and self-discovery in an innovative and diverse environment. Professionally, KAEF has been instrumental in expanding my career horizons. The exposure to advanced analytics and global best practices has equipped me with the tools to contribute to Kosovo's digital transformation and economic development, preparing me to bring valuable insights back.

KAEF doesn't just support women's empowerment; it leads by example, setting a powerful precedent for gender equality in Kosovo. As part of the organization's commitment to empowering women, we have not only been able to promote our aspirations but also been able to foster a path where more women can realize and pursue their dreams.

I am immensely grateful to the KAEF program for this life-changing opportunity. It has shaped me into a more competent and compassionate individual, eager to contribute to Kosovo's future.

I send my warmest regards to KAEF and its future scholars. Let's continue to work towards a future filled with opportunities for everyone, driven by the spirit of innovation, equality, and shared success.



# INTRODUCING KAEF'S 2024-2025 FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENTS

*We are very happy to introduce KAEF's 2024-2025 fellowship recipients: Arlinda Salihi (LLM, '25) and Agon Sokoli (LLM, '25). Read what Arlinda and Agon had to say about their expectations from this transformative journey, and join us in congratulating them! Welcome to the KAEF community, Arlinda and Agon.*



**Arlinda Salihi** (LLM, 2025)

This fellowship represents a key moment in my journey, one that will unquestionably hasten my personal and professional growth. It is a testament to the KAEF community's commitment to supporting and inspiring young generations to pursue their dreams; me being one of them. I'm incredibly excited about this upcoming adventure because I strongly believe that pursuing an LLM in the United States will not only enhance my legal skills and allow me to delve into intricate legal matters with thorough analysis, it will also enable me to immerse myself in my new community and share my energy, enthusiasm and commitment with my peers and professors, so that when I come back home I will leverage my knowledge and skills to impact Kosovo's legal landscape positively.



**Agon Sokoli** (LLM, 2025)

I am honored to have been chosen as a KAEF Fellow and I intend to use this opportunity by immersing myself in an environment that fosters growth and meaningful connections.

During my time as an LLM student my goal is to specialize further into the intricacies of Commercial Law and gain the necessary insights that my current environment cannot offer. I am excited about the prospect of collaborating with fellow scholars and mentors which will equip me with the skills, perspectives, and networks necessary to further my career as a commercial lawyer with an international perspective.

The KAEF fellowship has provided me with the opportunity to broaden my horizons and also empower me to contribute meaningfully in the advancement of my profession. I look forward to exciting new challenges which will help me make a positive impact on Kosovo upon my return.

# REFLECTIONS FROM KAEF FELLOWS

*We invited our fellows to share their insights on the influence of KAEF on their personal and professional development, as well as its wider impact on Kosovar society. This is what they shared:*



**Bardh Rushiti (Rochester Institute of Technology '23) -** “My journey with the Kosovo-American Education Fund (KAEF) has been a path of continuous learning and discovery. Starting as an eager student fascinated by the potentials of artificial intelligence (AI), KAEF gave me the chance to dive deep into this field far from home, in the United States. I landed a role at Calvary Robotics in Rochester, NY, which has pushed me into new challenges every day. Here, I work with machine learning and the exciting mix of physics, robotics, and computer vision. This job is a direct result of the doors this program has opened for me, showing me how much one can grow with the right opportunities and support. KAEF's influence on my life has been more than just professional growth. It's about bridging the gap between Kosovo and the wider world of tech and innovation.

The program has not only expanded my skill set but also taught me the value of bringing back what I learn to my home country. Inspired by the opportunities and growth KAEF offered me, I took a significant step by co-founding AI Kosovo. This venture is my way of giving back—aiming to nurture education in artificial intelligence (AI) and leverage AI for social good, both within Kosovo and beyond its borders.

Reflecting on my own experiences, from my graduate studies, to my first internship in AI to my current position, I see a clear line of growth that KAEF has helped me navigate. It's a journey that underscores the importance of reaching out, learning, and then giving back. This cycle of growth and contribution is what KAEF promotes, aiming to uplift not just individuals but our society as a whole. The founding of AI Kosovo is just one of the many steps I plan to take in this ongoing journey, driven by the lessons learned and the inspirations drawn from my time. This story is not just about the growth of an individual but about how that individual can contribute to the growth of a community and beyond, embodying the true spirit of KAEF's mission.”

**Rina Bulliqi (MBA, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, '24) -** “KAEF is an incredible opportunity that I am so grateful to be a part of. It has impacted me immensely, both personally and professionally. Experiencing a completely different culture is shocking at first but it is a proven growth mechanism in terms of skills, networking and a deeper appreciation of your own culture. If I could recommend one thing, is to apply in the program and immerse yourself in it.

As I am nearing the end of MBA, I am excited to become part of the KAEF alumni community and follow into their goals in advancing Kosovo professionally and economically.”



# REFLECTIONS FROM KAEF FELLOWS

**Hana Bekteshi (George Washington University '24) -**

”Studying in the United States for my LLM degree through the KAEF program has been a highly transformative experience. Aside from providing unparalleled opportunities for personal and academic growth, immersing me in a vibrant academic environment with access to world-class resources and intellectual discourses, this experience has facilitated invaluable networking opportunities, allowing me to forge connections with legal professionals and academics globally. Additionally, the exposure to diverse cultures and viewpoints in DC has broadened my horizons, while creating life-long connections with my



peers certain that KAEF has played a pivotal role in the instrumental shaping of Kosovar society through its contribution to the development of a skilled workforce, driving economic growth, fostering innovation and positive change in Kosovo. Owing it to KAEF, individuals like myself and other KAEF alumni ultimately empower Kosovar youth to contribute meaningfully to our society's development and build a brighter future.”

**Debora Peci (Syracuse University '24) -** “The impact of the KAEF fellowship on my life has been absolutely transformative. It's not just about the incredible education I've received, but also about the connections I've made with fellow scholars from all corners of the world. Being part of this network feels like being part of a big, supportive family, where we all share similar passions and goals. These connections have already opened up so many doors for me, making me feel like my contribution to Kosovo can be even more significant. Knowing that there are other KAEF alumni out there who've walked a similar path and are still making waves in their fields fills me with gratitude and motivation to do my part.

Beyond just my own experience, I can see how KAEF is making a real difference in Kosovo. By nurturing a community of talented individuals with diverse perspectives, the program is helping to shape a brighter future for our country. The ideas and skills we bring back home are invaluable assets in tackling the challenges we face. So here's to KAEF – may it keep on empowering Kosovars for generations to come, and may our collective efforts continue to make our society stronger and more vibrant.”





# Kosovo American Education Fund

Learn more: [kaef-online.org](http://kaef-online.org)

To support our program, please visit:  
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