

# KOSOVO AMERICAN EDUCATION FUND

*Quarterly Newsletter, December 2023*



Festa Stavileci, Duke Law '23

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## DR. DAVID PATTON ON 20 YEARS OF KAEF

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As KAEF approaches its 20th anniversary, we have invited American Councils' President and CEO, **Dr. David Patton**, to reflect on the impactful journey of KAEF over the last two decades.



*The Kosovo-American Education Fund (KAEF) is, without doubt, one of the most effective and influential programs that American Councils for International Education has had the privilege to administer. From the design that ultimately gave the program its shape, to its formal launch in 2004, through remarkable efforts to support long term sustainability, to the current celebration of 20 years of unparalleled success, I have taken great personal and professional pride in realizing virtually all facets of the KAEF Program.*

*To cite all the accomplishments of KAEF would be an arduous task. The lives of the 115 fellows who have successfully completed the program have been greatly enriched and indelibly marked by the program. The successfully completed the program have been greatly enriched and indelibly marked by the program. The positive impact the fellows have made on the U.S. institutions and host communities they were and are part of is another significant accomplishment of the program. Most importantly, the impact the KAEF alumni have had on the economic development and socio-economic well-being of Kosovo is the ultimate measure of success of the program.*

*There are, however, two facets of the program that I would like to briefly highlight. These are the effectiveness and efficiency of KAEF; two features that truly separate it from other graduate fellowship programs. Over its 50-year history, American Councils has had the good fortune to administer thousands of fellowships. While I am pleased to say that all have enjoyed a remarkable degree of success, KAEF stands out as a model in a number of ways.*

*Unlike grant programs with similar goals funded by the U.S. government, KAEF has been supported by an ongoing fundraising effort and an aggressive effort to secure cost-share from American Councils' network of prestigious university partners that has totaled \$6.5 million over the course of the program. Thus, the initial U.S. government investment of \$7.8 million has been significantly augmented in ways that are not common to similar programs.*

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*Finally, I believe KAEF is truly unique for the extent of the impact the program has had on Kosovo. Given the relatively small population of the young country, the effort was bound to have an outsized effect. In this case, a relatively small investment, managed correctly, could potentially have an impact that would not be as significant in a larger country. Moreover, given the fact that the program was launched shortly after Kosovo won independence, the program was in an unusually advantageous position to have a significant impact on a generation of aspiring young leaders. The nature of the program's transparent and merit-based recruitment and selection process ensured that the best and brightest applicants who demonstrated a strong commitment to the development of Kosovo would rise to the top.*

*Ultimately, the success of KAEF will be determined by its long-term impact on Kosovo. First generation fellows have assumed leading roles in government, the private sector, and the non-governmental sphere. Their accomplishments thus far have been notable. However, younger generations of KAEF fellows are still on the rise and all indications are that the ultimate impact of the program will be truly remarkable."*



*First cohort of KAEF fellows facing the Washington Monument, 2005*

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## FELLOW SPOTLIGHT: THE KAEF IMPACT

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On program fellows, **Bardh Rushiti** (Rochester Institute of Technology, '23) and **Debora Peci** (Syracuse, '24) delve into their transformative journeys with KAEF, sharing the personal and professional growth they've experienced. Their narratives capture the essence of the fellowship's impact on their lives and careers.



*During my 30 months in the U.S. with KAEF, one of the important lessons I've learned is: You don't have to solve all your problems... by yourself. I faced many challenges, like finding suitable housing, finishing assignments and projects, breaking into the AI industry, and finishing tasks under tight deadlines. This lesson kept coming back to me: trying to do everything alone is hard and sometimes impossible.*

*What really helped me was making friends, finding partners, and building relationships along the way. Sharing my troubles with them and getting their help made a big difference. It's*

*not just about getting help with tasks; it's also about the support and different ideas they bring. This experience has taught me a lot, not just in my career but also in my personal life.*

*I'm forever grateful to KAEF for this opportunity. It's not just this lesson, but many others that have shaped my journey here. KAEF has not only provided me with education and professional opportunities, but it has also opened doors to personal growth and understanding the value of community. It's this holistic growth, both professional skills and personal insights, that I value immensely, and for that, I am deeply thankful.*

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*My journey at the Maxwell School this semester has been a compelling blend of challenges and rewarding experiences. The academic demands stretched me beyond my comfort zone, requiring resilience and adaptability. Despite the hurdles, this period stands out as the most fulfilling chapter of my life. The essence goes beyond academic pursuits, finding its roots in the invaluable connections established with a diverse group of people. KAEF has played a pivotal role in this, affording me the privilege of meeting exceptional people and cultivating networks that extend well beyond the confines of the classroom.*



*A particularly noteworthy highlight has been my engagement with the city of Syracuse through my program. Here, I had the opportunity to apply lessons learned from Kosovo, proposing ways in which cities can leverage open data to enhance transparency and communication with their constituents. This experience affirmed the value of my presence in the program and underscored the notion that each of us can contribute meaningfully to the programs we are enrolled in.*

# KAEF SUPPORT FROM THE GOVERNMENT AND THE ASSEMBLY OF KOSOVO

As 2023 draws to a close, the Kosovo American Education Fund (KAEF) takes a moment to celebrate a year of significant milestones, marked by the unwavering support from both the Government and the Assembly of Kosovo.

The year began with an impactful decision by the Government of Kosovo. On January 11th, in its' 118th meeting, the Government of Kosovo approved a proposal-decision to allocate 100K EUR to the Kosovo American Education Fund (KAEF). This act of support was not merely a financial endorsement but a recognition of KAEF's 19-year history facilitating educational opportunities for over 110 Kosovar students in top U.S. universities.

Further momentum was gained on May 3rd when the Assembly of Kosovo, unanimously passed a declaration supporting KAEF, led by KAEF alumni, Member of Parliament **Yllza Hoti** and Member of Parliament **Besian Mustafa**. This endorsement, backed by MPs across five parliamentary groups, recognized KAEF's vital role in enhancing Kosovo's economy and democracy and its part in strengthening the bilateral relations between Kosovo and the United States, underscoring the value of academic exchange programs in fostering national and international growth

**David Patton**, President and CEO of American Councils for International Education, along with **Michael Curtis**, Senior Vice President for Strategic Development also visited Kosovo this year where they engaged in significant discussions with President **Vjosa Osmani**, Prime Minister **Albin Kurti**, and Speaker of the Assembly **Glauk Konjufca**. The government's strong endorsement in these dialogues showcased a united vision for advancing education and expanding opportunities for young Kosovans, goals that aligns seamlessly with the objectives of American Councils and KAEF.

The combined support from the Government and the Assembly has been instrumental in bolstering KAEF's efforts to provide exceptional educational opportunities and support the ongoing mission of nurturing the next generation of Kosovar leaders.



# KAEF BUSINESS BREAKFAST SERIES

In 2023, KAEF has enhanced its engagement with the private sector through a series of impactful Business Breakfast events. These gatherings, each featuring a distinguished industry leader, provided a platform for sharing insights and fostering connections between our alumni and the broader business community. Each session offered unique perspectives on the challenges and opportunities within Kosovo's evolving economic landscape.

The year began with an insightful session led by **Mërgim Cahani**, Founder and CEO of Gjirafa. His journey from the U.S. to Kosovo, coupled with his experiences in the ICT sector, set a precedent for the year, emphasizing innovation and adaptability in the face of challenges.

As the series progressed, we welcomed **Zana Tabaku**, Co-founder and CEO of Appdec, in April. Her discussion on the vital role of women in technology not only shed light on gender diversity in the ICT sector but also inspired our community with her dedication to empowering female professionals in the field.

May's event featured **Agon Gashi**, CEO of Meridian Express and SPAR Kosova. His insights into the retail industry's complexities, from market education to community engagement, provided a broader perspective on the dynamics of consumer markets and the significance of strategic thinking in retail.

The series culminated in September with insights from **Elvin Guri**, a notable entrepreneur, investor, and philanthropist. Mr. Guri's experiences in navigating the investment landscape offered a masterclass in resilience, highlighting the importance of adaptability and innovative strategies in today's business world.



# MARKING A YEAR OF PARTNERSHIPS

While the Business Breakfasts series stands as a prominent example of KAEF's engagement with the private sector, the Kosovo American Education Fund has also been privileged to cultivate a variety of other dynamic partnerships. These collaborations, each unique and impactful in their own way, have significantly contributed to advancing our mission of empowering the youth of Kosovo through education.

A significant highlight was the signing of two Memorandums of Understanding, with Meridian Express & SPAR Kosova and Dukagjini. These agreements, symbolizing a joint commitment to Kosovo's development through education, have laid the groundwork for long-term partnerships. The financial support pledged by these esteemed companies emphasizes the role of collaborative efforts in driving societal progress and underscores the private sector's recognition of the value of investing in education.

KAEF's mission this year was further bolstered by the generous financial support from FINCA Kosovo, Limak Kosovo International Airport (LKIA) and Pivommo. Their contributions have been vital in supporting our educational programs and initiatives, demonstrating a shared belief in the transformative power of education.

An important aspect of our international outreach was the visit of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo's Board of Governors to the American Councils for International Education's office in Washington D.C. This meeting facilitated a meaningful exchange of ideas about Kosovo's business environment and the potential for educational organizations like American Councils to support the private sector.

Reflecting on these fruitful collaborations, KAEF stands as a testament to the commitment and support exhibited by the private sector in 2023. These partnerships have been instrumental in enhancing the capacity to provide quality education and are perfectly aligned with the vision of nurturing future leaders poised to contribute significantly to Kosovo's economic and democratic growth.



# KAEF RECEIVES GRANT FROM ROCKEFELLER BROTHERS FUND

Kosovo American Education Fund (KAEF) is grateful to announce the receipt of a grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund (RBF) as a commitment to advancing the development of Kosovo through quality higher education.

Founded in 1940, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, a private family foundation rooted in the Rockefeller tradition of philanthropy, works to build lasting solutions to challenges facing today's increasingly interdependent world through grantmaking, convening, and mission-aligned investing. RBF has been engaged in grantmaking in the Western Balkans since 2001, supporting efforts of civil society groups, governmental institutions, and other partners to work toward strengthening democratic practices and sustainable development in the region.

Through its contribution, RBF will support KAEF's mission to stimulate economic and democratic growth in Kosovo by investing in the higher education of motivated, talented Kosovars with leadership potential. The support from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund signifies an essential step towards sustaining KAEF for the future, demonstrating the importance of collaborative efforts between the private sector and educational programs in driving positive societal change and development.



**Rockefeller  
Brothers Fund**  
Philanthropy for an Interdependent World



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# AMERICAN COUNCILS LEADERSHIP TRANSITION: WELCOMING LISA CHOATE AS THE NEXT PRESIDENT AND CEO

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As American Councils for International Education approaches a pivotal transition, we celebrate the distinguished service of Dr. David Patton and warmly welcome Ms. **Lisa Choate** as the new President and CEO, effective January 31, 2024.



After over 30 years with American Councils, including four as President and CEO, Dr. Patton has announced his retirement in 2023. Under his leadership, the organization has flourished, becoming more resilient and agile, and impacting tens of thousands in the global education community. The Board of Trustees commends Dr. Patton for his visionary guidance and profound dedication, which have significantly shaped American Councils' legacy.

Succeeding Dr. Patton is Ms. Lisa Choate, a visionary leader with extensive experience in international education. Selected after a comprehensive search involving diverse stakeholders, Ms. Choate's appointment marks a historic moment as she becomes the first female President and CEO of American Councils. Her unique skills and global perspective are celebrated by Dr. Patton, who is confident in her ability to drive organizational growth and expand its impact.

This leadership change signals an exciting era for American Councils. With Ms. Choate at the helm, the organization is poised to continue its mission of enriching lives and fostering understanding through education and cultural exchange. As we embrace this new chapter, we remain dedicated to strengthening our transformative programs and deepening our global partnerships.

We extend our deepest gratitude to Dr. Patton for his remarkable contributions and look forward to Ms. Choate's leadership in continuing to advance the mission of American Councils, and the commitment of building a more interconnected and understanding world.



# Kosovo American Education Fund

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

To support our program, please visit:  
[KAEF Donation Link](#)

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