

# KOSOVO AMERICAN EDUCATION FUND

*Quarterly Newsletter, June 2023*



Dren Krasniqi, Brandeis University '23

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# INTRODUCING THE 2023-24 KAEF COHORT

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The Kosovo American Education Fund (KAEF) is thrilled to introduce its 19th cohort of KAEF fellows, set to commence their academic adventures in Fall 2023. For these talented individuals, the year ahead marks the beginning of an inspiring and transformative journey. Below are some of their thoughts on their aspirations and anticipations:

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## Debora Peci

### Policy Analysis, Syracuse University



The KAEF fellowship presents an incredible opportunity for my personal and professional growth, and I have high hopes for what I can gain from this experience. The fellowship will provide me with access to renowned educational institutions and scholars, enabling me to delve deeper into my field of interest and acquire specialized knowledge. Additionally, the fellowship's emphasis on fostering leadership skills will empower me to become a more effective advocate for positive change in my community and beyond. Overall, I aim to enhance my intellectual capacity, expand my network, and develop a more nuanced understanding of global issues, all of which will be invaluable assets as I embark on my future endeavors.

This fellowship will serve as a catalyst for my personal and professional growth, empowering me to become a catalyst for positive change within my community and inspiring others to pursue their own dreams. With the support of the KAEF fellowship, I am confident that my future career will be characterized by impact, innovation, and a steadfast commitment to making a difference.

## Hana Bekteshi

### IT Law, George Washington University

Beyond excited about this new journey ahead, as I consider it to be the ideal opportunity for immersing myself in an environment of intellectual stimulation and personal enrichment. Thanks to KAEF, I am confident that an LLM in the United States will enrich my legal skills, while enabling the exploration of complex legal issues and rigorous analyses. In addition, by engaging in an international community, I also expect to be exposed to a vibrant and dynamic environment, while fostering valuable global networks. I firmly believe that this experience will equip me with the knowledge and skills to navigate cross-border legal challenges and contribute to Kosovo's legal community.



# KAEF BUSINESS BREAKFAST SERIES

April 5th, 2023 - The KAEF Business Breakfast series hosted Ms. Zana Tabaku, Co-founder and CEO of Appdec, for an engaging conversation with our distinguished guests, including KAEF founder and Committee member Mr. Dale Pfeiffer, KAEF Committee Co-chair Mr. Michael Hora, and KAEF alumni. As a trailblazer in Kosovo's ICT sector, Ms. Tabaku shared her remarkable journey and her ongoing dedication to encouraging and empowering more women to enter and thrive in the field. The conversation that followed was rich with insightful observations and ideas aimed at bolstering Kosovo's ICT landscape.

The KAEF Business Breakfast is a series of monthly events that bring together members of the business community to engage in high-level discussions on economic and other significant issues facing Kosovo today.



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# KAEF ALUMNI REPRESENT KOSOVO AT THE PRESTIGIOUS PARLIAMENTARY GLOBAL FORUM

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April, 2023 - KAEF alumni, Besian Mustafa (MBA, City University of New York, Baruch College '12) and Yllza Hoti (Online MBA, University of Minnesota' 22), represented the Parliament of the Republic of Kosovo at the highly esteemed Parliamentary Global Forum. This annual event, co-organized by the World Bank Group, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank and IMF (PN), holds a prominent position on the international stage by bringing together thought leaders, policy-makers, and key stakeholders from around the globe.

This year's forum was themed "Tough Challenges, Tougher Choices," reflecting the critical and pressing challenges facing humanity today. Among the issues discussed were climate change, security, governance, accountability, economic growth, debt management, gender issues, and the global economic outlook.

While in Washington D.C., Besian and Yllza also seized the opportunity to visit the American Councils' offices. During discussions with representatives from American Councils, they shared insights into the profound impact that KAEF has had on their lives and careers.

As individuals who have risen to influential positions and are actively contributing to shaping Kosovo's future, Besian and Yllza's stories stand as living testaments to the transformative power of education. Their participation in the Parliamentary Global Forum not only reflects their individual accomplishments but also showcases the far-reaching impact that KAEF graduates have in the global arena.



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# AMERICAN COUNCILS' BOARD MEMBER VISITS KAEF ALUMNUS-LED BUSINESSES IN KOSOVO

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April 20th, 2023 - Michael Hora, member of the American Councils' Board of Trustees and Co-Chair of the KAEF committee, visited Kosovo. A highlight of his visit was a tour of the thriving businesses led by KAEF alumnus, Robert Ejupi (MBA, UNC '21).

As the Operations and Marketing Director at Sport-In, Kosovo's premier sportswear retailer, Robert has been instrumental in the company's recent landmark achievement: the inauguration of five flagship stores - Intersport, Nike, Buzz, Sizeer, and Lacoste - all under one roof at the newly opened Prishtina Mall. Covering over 3,700 square meters of this state-of-the-art retail space, these projects took an impressive 18 months of meticulous planning, designing, budgeting, and execution. This development not only elevated the shopping experience for sportswear enthusiasts in Kosovo but also made a substantial impact on the local economy through the creation of over 90 new jobs.

During his visit, Michael Hora expressed admiration for the accomplishments of Robert and the positive ripple effect they have had on the community. Robert, crediting his KAEF education as a cornerstone of his success, serves as a shining example of how KAEF alumni are utilizing their skills and education to make substantial contributions to Kosovo's growth and development.



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# ASSEMBLY OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO SUPPORTS THE KOSOVO AMERICAN EDUCATION FUND

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May 3rd, 2023 - The Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo passed a declaration in support of the Kosovo American Education Fund (KAEF).

KAEF alumna and Member of Parliament, Yllza Hoti, presented the motion prepared with the support of MPs across five parliamentary groups of the Assembly. The motion emphasized the program's instrumental role in bolstering Kosovo's economy, strengthening its democracy, and fostering its enduring friendship with the USA since KAEF's establishment in 2004.

Ms. Hoti stated, "Such academic exchange programs are an excellent opportunity for the young people of Kosovo to be educated in world-renowned institutions, but at the same time to expand their professional network beyond the borders of our country."

The declaration formally recognizes KAEF's contribution to the nation's economic and democratic progress and encourages the Government to actively support academic exchange programs. These programs not only empower young Kosovars but also foster long-term growth.

This endorsement by the Assembly marks a significant milestone for KAEF, highlighting the recognition and support from the government for the role KAEF plays in the development of Kosovo.



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# KAEF BUSINESS BREAKFAST SERIES

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May 31st, 2023 - the KAEF Business Breakfast series had the pleasure of hosting Mr. Agon Gashi, CEO of Meridian Express and SPAR Kosova, for a captivating discussion with program alumni and guests. As a renowned leader in the retail sector, Mr. Gashi shared his insights on the complexities of the retail landscape, addressing diverse topics ranging from the challenges of market education to the significance of community engagement. Drawing from his extensive knowledge and experience, Mr. Gashi sparked a lively discussion that highlighted the importance of embracing challenges and seeking innovative solutions within the retail industry.



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# KAEF RECEIVES SUPPORT FROM MERIDIAN EXPRESS

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June 14th, 2023 - In a sign of a joint commitment to advancing the development of Kosovo through education, Meridian Express and the Kosovo American Education Fund (KAEF) have solidified their partnership by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The agreement pledges financial support of EUR 25,000 to KAEF over the next five years.

Mr. Agon Gashi, CEO of Meridian Express and SPAR Kosova, and Mr. Gjeni Shporta, American Councils for International Education Kosovo Country Director, were the signatories of this MoU, in a ceremony held at the Meridian Express Offices.

“By investing in education, we are investing in a brighter future where our society is driven by innovation and sustainable development,” Mr. Gashi said. “Education is not only the foundation of personal growth and development but also the catalyst for economic and professional development.”

Meridian Express, established in October 2012, operates a network of neighborhood stores across eight major cities in Kosovo. While the company's vision emphasizes customer service, and a professional yet welcoming environment, it also strongly values social responsibility. This commitment is an integral part of Meridian Express' heritage and reflects the core values of the founding family, renowned for its solidarity and communal support.

Through its contribution, Meridian Express will be supporting KAEF in its mission to stimulate economic and democratic growth in Kosovo by investing in the education of its people. Meridian Express' pledge underscores the importance of collaborative efforts between the private sector and educational programs in driving positive change and development in the society.

American Councils for International Education and the Kosovo American Education Fund express their profound gratitude to Meridian Express for its unwavering commitment to building economic prosperity and democracy in Kosovo through education.





# CELEBRATING CLASS OF 2023

The Kosovo American Education Fund extends its warmest congratulations to the Graduating Class of 2023! This cohort, comprised of talented individuals, has demonstrated unwavering dedication and relentless hard work in successfully navigating their graduate programs. As they take confident strides into the professional world, KAEF is eager to witness the positive contributions they are poised to make in Kosovo.



**BARDH RUSHITI**

Computer Science, Machine Learning AI  
Rochester Institute of Technology



**DREN KRASNIQI**

MBA, Entrepreneurship  
Brandis University



**FESTA STAVILECI**

Law, Corporate Law  
Duke University



**RRON ISMAJLI**

MBA, Finance and Banking  
University of North Carolina

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## SPOTLIGHT ON KAEF ALUMNI: BARDH RUSHITI DIVES INTO A CUTTING-EDGE CAREER IN AI AND ROBOTICS

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After getting his Master's degree in Computer Science, with a focus on Artificial Intelligence from the well-known Rochester Institute of Technology, Bardh Rushiti has recently joined Calvary Robotics in Rochester, NY, as a Computer Vision and Artificial Intelligence Engineer.

In this capacity, Bardh is going to have the opportunity of delving into intriguing challenges related to computer vision, 3D reconstruction, and the exciting intersection of physics, robotics, and machine learning.

As he navigates the frontiers of these technologies, Bardh is also becoming a part of a global community of professionals pushing the envelope in artificial intelligence and robotics. This not only gives him the platform to develop professionally but also to build networks and partnerships that can contribute to a larger cause.

KAEF is immensely proud to see its alumni leveraging their education to forge ahead in such innovative fields. Bardh's career trajectory exemplifies the potential and opportunities that KAEF fellows have in contributing to cutting-edge industries.



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

To support our program and latest initiative, please visit:  
<https://www.mygiving.net/donate/KAEF>

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