

## WFP Albania Young Women Speech Contest: Save The Environment, Save The Future

Katarzyna Minollari  
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In September, Women's Federation for World Peace Albania organized a Young Women Speech Contest. The idea itself takes origins in the activities of WFP UK and is a great way to reach out and encourage the younger generation. This was the second time that we organized this type of event.

On the morning of September 18, the participants began to gather in the concert hall of the Musical High School for a quick rehearsal before the competition. All of them had participated in a public speaking training a week earlier, led by Ms. Edlira Çepani, a well-known civil society activist, and a frequent guest of various TV talks. During the training, the young ladies learned how to use their voice, control body language and interact with the audience. Of among 18 of them, 12 were selected for the final competition.

The theme this year was "Save the Environment, Save the Future," a topic that is very important for Albania. The country is blessed with a rich natural environment, which is actually facing a lot of risks, due to a lack of comprehensive strategies of protection, awareness and education. Albania still does very little in terms of recycling, poor waste management often leads to problems and our Adriatic Sea has a high level of plastic pollution. For these reasons, WFP decided to choose a theme centered on the environment for this year's competition.



The first call for applicants was in early April, using mainly social media and personal contacts. As a result, WFP received nearly 50 applications. Another benefit of advertising on social media was the fact that it caught the interest of journalists. Our representatives, including Project Coordinator, Irida Shkoza, and the finalists from the previous competition, spoke on five various TV channels, including state-owned TVSH station and A2 CNN Albania.

Over the summer, all applications were read and evaluated, leading to a selection of participants for a zoom interview. Next, 21 potential participants were selected. The best applications were those that dealt clearly with specific problems. For example, one participant spoke about an NGO, whose work prevents further irresponsible industrial stone excavation in the area of Berat.

Putting the event together was a cause of some anxiety for us, as COVID-19 numbers grew over the summer and might prevent us from holding a face-to-face event. Luckily enough, the contest was able to be held in person and safety measures were kept.

The participants did not disappoint the audience. It was touching to see so much youthful enthusiasm, confidence and skill. The atmosphere of support and care was also palpable. This was created by investment into personal relationships with the participants from the side of WFWP staff and graceful moderation of the program by Ms. Senarda Demaj. The video presenting WFWP activities in the world and the words of introduction from Mrs. Katarzyna Minollari, WFWP Albania president, helped the audience get a grasp of WFWP's vision and goals. It was heartwarming as well to receive messages of gratitude from participants after the program (including those who were not among the winners).



Evaluating participants was a challenge for the jury, as many speakers were clearly very well prepared and made excellent speeches. The chair of the jury was Mrs. Çepani; Ms. Rovena Vata, a university professor and a writer; Ms. Manjola Vasmatias, Family Federation for World Peace National President; Mrs. Suzana Rexhepi, WFWP board member and a public school director; and Mrs. Katarzyna Minollari.

Besides planned prizes for 1st, 2nd and 3rd place winners, an additional 3rd prize and a prize of appreciation were added. The winner, Ms. Marjana Koceku, spoke with great ease and conviction about the necessity to segregate waste, reduce consumption and recycle. She made the audience both reflect and laugh, when she shared about her experience of living abroad and having to pay a fine for not segregating garbage. The runner-up, Ms. Borana Fuqi, recalled her mountain escapades and nature cleaning initiatives undertaken with a group of friends. One of the third prize winners, Ms. Endora Celohoxha, spoke with passion about the overuse of plastic and its catastrophic impact on marine life in the Adriatic Sea.

