



Linda Rama has the power to persuade

By Mário de Castro

special envoy to Tirana (Albania)

She has this essential capacity of passing thoughts from one brain to another.

Passionate and well-researched, Linda Rama is permanently motivated by the sensibility towards the most vulnerable groups: women, children, the most fragile social categories, people with disabilities, minorities...

Linda's words are fresh and unique and when she addresses you it's like an invitation to come and discover Albania.

Who is Linda Rama, wife of Albanian Prime Minister, Edi Rama?

Linda is an economist, graduated in 1987 at the University of Tirana, Master Degree of Arts in Economics awarded from the University of New York and Central European University (1993), Doctor of Economic Sciences (1996). She has been Lecturer of International Finance and Public Finance in the University of Tirana and Lecturer of Public Policies and Public Risk Management in the European University of Tirana.

From 1993 to 1999, Linda was the Head of the Privatization of Large and Strategic Companies and General Director of the National Agency for Privatization with distinguished contribution in tailoring the mass privatization reform, privatization techniques for large and strategic companies including their financial restructuring and risk management, the establishment of the Share Registry and the Tirana Stock Exchange.

Linda is the co-founder of one of the first think-tanks in Albania: “The Human Development Promotion Centre” (HDPC) and has been a long-time contributor for their activities. She author, co-author and expert in many studies, research and policy papers in the area of Governance, Human Development, Labor Market, Education, Social Welfare, Private Sector Development in Albania and the surrounding region.

Linda Rama is also one of the co-founders of the Albanian Children Alliance and Advocate of the “Sky Say Yes For Children” and has a long involvement in activism for human rights issues and civil society particularly those focused on children and women rights.

LINDA RAMA, how can you explain this wave of sympathy and interest for Albania that is actually increasing not only in Europe but worldwide? Do Albanians and solidarity walk together hand in hand?

In these 35 years of transition, we Albanians have been able to face two historical challenges, to open the world’s doors for us and bring the world to our door.

The first stage began in July 1990 with thousands of Albanians filling the embassies’ yards in Tirana and boarding the ships in Durrës to escape communist isolation and poverty. Then and for many years, tens of thousands of other Albanians every year took to the mountains, the sea and the air with impatience to live the European or American dream. Between countless efforts, they succeeded in gaining their right of citizenship in the countries they chose to live by overcoming mountains and seas of prejudice.

Theoretically, in 1990, together with the fall of communist isolation, Albania also opened its own door to the world. The first to come where the foreign international institutions and also few foreigners coming for work. Furthermore, for more than a quarter of a century, the only tourists in Albania were Albanians in emigration when they visited their families or Albanians in the region. I remember a conversation between colleagues around 2008. Worried that the world almost didn’t know us or even when we were mentioned in the international media it was because of some wrongdoings here and there across the border, we were trying to find out how to change this image. We talked and talked until one of my colleagues said: “Don’t try to find a solution, the image of Albania will change when Albania changes”.

Albania has changed.

Today, Albania is visitable, advertisable, livable. The increased wave of sympathy and interest for Albania in Europe and the world is because Albania today offers nature, history, culture, services, sports, entertainment, comfort, adventure, infrastructure, architecture, work and security. In Albania you are safe everywhere and you have no reason to feel unsafe. To bring the world to Albania's door and to make the little Albania known in the world, I believe, has been the most unimaginable and the most difficult and painful journey of transition, which has marked also the end of extreme communist isolation. Until a decade ago we continued to be at best a potential, today we are a tourist reality with still many other untapped potentials. What has happened in the last decade is a tangible product of the development vision of the political leadership and the extraordinary work of Albanians in Albania and Albanians everywhere they live and work in these three post-communist decades.

As a woman born and bred in Albania you've made a successful post-communist transition. What is your vision for the future of women in Albania?

I grew up with a grandmother who worked full-time in the home, who invested all her talent, intelligence and authority in the family without ever having a chance to prove herself beyond those walls. My mother is the typical woman of socialist realism. She worked at work and at home, without ever quitting her attention and care for our well-being, encouraging us to get an education and instilling in us a sense of work and responsibility. Life for women in communism was difficult and arduous to the point that every woman in those decades deserved to be called a hero. My mother did only one job all her life, the job chosen for her by the state. As I see today in her over eighties how she manages

to take all the advantages that technology creates for information, communication and solutions, I regret that she didn't have the opportunity to discover herself and use all her potential. However, my mother was lucky enough to see her daughters more educated than herself, who did the work they chose to do and not what state or ideology would have chosen for them, and who managed to face an extremely difficult transition in every sense. Whereas, for my daughter and two nieces, the spectrum of rights is unmatched and equally unmatched is that of opportunities where they can navigate and live their dreams and passions. What I described very briefly above has developed in very complex and difficult contexts with gigantic efforts to reach the civilized world while battling daily with the complicated Ottoman-communist past.

Today there are still girls and women writhing in the clutches of this past, just as there is a huge army of girls and women engaged in education, health, social services, justice, art and culture and up to the highest levels of public administration, governance and policy making. Such a clear progress and such a great power of this army makes me believe that all girls and women of the future will have crossed the threshold of submission and will be capable to live the life they chose and not the one chosen for them. Meanwhile, no vision of the future for women can be separated from the vision of the future for boys. The time has come to talk equally for both, the future of girls and boys.