



# SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

## Parliamentary Conference on Ensuring equality for rainbow families in Europe

12 September 2025

### OPENING

#### **Hon. David Agius, Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, Malta**

David Agius is the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives of Malta, Spokesperson for European Funds and Sports within the Nationalist Party, and Vice President of the EUCDW in the European People's Party.

He was first elected to the Maltese Parliament in 2003 and has since been returned in every subsequent general election (2003, 2008, 2013, 2017, 2022). Between 2017 and 2022, he served as Deputy Leader of the Nationalist Party. In earlier legislatures (2008–2013 and 2013–2017), he held the positions of Parliamentary Whip and Secretary of the Parliamentary Group. Mr Agius has contributed extensively to parliamentary work, serving on a number of standing and select committees, including the House Business Committee, the Social and Economic Affairs Committee, and the Public Accounts Committee (PAC).

His political engagement began at a young age through active involvement in the structures of the Nationalist Party. He served as President of SDM, held various roles within the PN Youth Movement and Workers' Solidarity, and was later appointed Director of Information of the Nationalist Party. He has been a long-standing member of the Party's Executive Council and its Administrative Committee. Prior to his election to Parliament, he was elected to the Ħ'Attard Local Council in 2001.

Born in 1968, Mr Agius is married to Deborah (née Spiteri). They have two daughters, Davinia and Desirée, and reside in Ħ'Attard.

#### **Hon. Rebecca Buttigieg, Parliamentary Secretary for Reforms and Equality, Maltese Government**

Hon. Ms Rebecca Buttigieg currently serves as Parliamentary Secretary for Equality and Reforms within the Office of the Prime Minister. She holds a B.A. in International Relations from the University of Malta and continued to further her studies at the University of Edinburgh having graduated in 2015 with an MSc in Global Crime, Justice and Security. Hon. Buttigieg started her career working at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean where she later gained experience abroad working as a Policy Officer at the Permanent Representation of Malta to the European Union during the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union. In 2017 she started working as a Spokesperson for the Ministry for Economy and most recently for the Ministry for Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement.

Parliamentary secretary Rebecca Buttigieg has been included on this year's list of 40 European Young Leaders (EYL40) by the Brussels-based think-tank Friends of Europe. She contested the general election for the first time in 2022 and was subsequently elected to Parliament. Ms Buttigieg is married to Andrea, and they have a daughter, Valentina.



## **Hon. Naomi Cachia, Head of the Maltese delegation to PACE**

Naomi Cachia is a member of the Maltese House of Representatives since 2022 and is the Government Whip. She serves as the Head of the Maltese Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and was recently appointed as a Youth Rapporteur in the Monitoring Committee. Naomi Cachia's political journey started in the youth wing of Partit Laburista (Malta) when she joined in 2013 and continued to climb the ranks from member to serving as President of the Forum between 2017-2020. Over the last decade, she has been representing the Labour Party's progressive agenda both locally and internationally, championing gender equality in Parliament, Vote16 and youth participation in politics.

## **Ms Béatrice Fresko-Rolfo, PACE General Rapporteur on the rights of LGBTI persons**

Béatrice Fresko-Rolfo has been a member of the National Council of Monaco since 2013. She became the first woman in Monaco to run in a national election as head of a party list and was re-elected in 2018 and 2023. She became a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in 2013 and is currently Head of the Delegation of Monaco to PACE. She is Vice-Chairperson of the ALDE political group. She was appointed General Rapporteur on the rights of LGBTI persons in March 2024 and coordinates the Parliamentary Platform for the rights of LGBTI persons in Europe.

She has been rapporteur on Preventing and combating violence and discrimination against LBQ women (Resolution 2576 (2024)), Preventing and combating violence against women with disabilities (Resolution 2514 (2023)) and Strengthening the fight against so-called 'honour' crimes (Resolution 2395 (2021)).

## **SESSION 1: THE LEGAL LANDSCAPE FOR RAINBOW FAMILIES IN EUROPE**

*Moderator: Hon. Naomi Cachia, Head of the Maltese delegation to PACE*

### **Dr Roberta Muscat, Lawyer, European Court of Human Rights (TBC)**

Roberta Muscat has a doctor of laws from the University of Malta and a Master's degree in human rights. She has worked as a lawyer at the Registry of the European Court of Human Rights as of 2005 with areas of expertise including rights of LGBTI persons and currently leading the Maltese and San Marino units.

### **Ms Evgenia Giakoumopoulou, Head of the SOGIESC Unit, Council of Europe**

Evgenia Giakoumopoulou is the Head of the Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) Unit of the Council of Europe (CoE). She has been working with European Institutions and INGOs for over 10 years, focusing on SOGIESC, as well as on anti-trafficking, migration and asylum, and torture prevention. Convinced of the need to bridge the gap between grassroots movements and international organisations, Evgenia has been actively engaged with the LGBTIQ+ and feminist movements in France, Greece and at the pan-European level.

### **Dr Alina Tryfonidou, Assistant Professor in EU law and family law, University of Cyprus**

Dr Alina Tryfonidou is Assistant Professor of Law at the University of Cyprus and Visiting Professor at the University of Reading. She has previously held academic posts at the Universities of Leicester (Lecturer), Reading (Lecturer, Association Professor, and Full Professor), and Neapolis University Pafos (Full Professor). A graduate of King's College London (LLB, LLM, AKC, PhD), she specialises in EU free movement law, family law, and LGBTIQ+ rights. She has co-authored landmark studies for the European Parliament on rainbow families and parenthood recognition and was a member of the European Commission's Expert Group on the Recognition of Parenthood. Dr Tryfonidou frequently speaks at international academic and policy events and has advised the European Parliament, OSCE-ODIHR, and the Council of Europe's ECRI. She is joint coordinator of the BCCE LGBTIQ Working Group and member of the academic team preparing Cyprus' first National LGBTIQ+ Strategy. Her work has been cited by several Advocates General before the Court of Justice of the EU.





### **Mr Alexander Schuster, Lawyer, Italy**

Alexander Schuster (he/him) holds a dual doctorate from Trento and from Strasbourg University (mention très bien avec félicitations) and a diploma from the European Public Law Organisation. He coordinated the EU co-funded project Identities on the move – Documents cross borders (DxB) and was previously lead researcher of the Rights on the move – Rainbow families in Europe and of the project EQUAL-JUS. He acts as board member of the Center for Gender Studies at the University of Trento and of the Euro-Regional Association for Comparative Public Law and European Union Law.

As an Italian attorney based in Trento, he focuses on family law and assisted reproduction. In almost 20 years of practice, his cases before the highest Italian and European jurisdictions changed the law in the field. He has taught and researched at universities and scientific institutions in Heidelberg, Innsbruck, Graz, Trento, Montréal, Toronto, Washington DC, Prishtina, Athens, Verona, Strasbourg and Udine.

### **Dr Desiree Attard, Lawyer, Malta**

Désirée is a human rights lawyer and activist based in Malta, where she regularly represents clients before the Courts of Malta. In her previous role as legislative drafter and advisor for the Government of Malta, she formed part of the legal team responsible for, among other reforms in the field of equality and civil liberties, Malta's leap in LGBTIQ+ rights. She holds a Doctors of Law degree from the University of Malta, where she successfully defended her thesis, titled 'Abortion in Malta: Reviewing the Legal Stance from a Pro-Choice Perspective'.

## **SESSION 2: PRIVACY AND FAMILY LIFE – PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF RAINBOW FAMILIES**

*Moderator: Mr Aaron Giardina, Assistant Director, SOGIGESC Unit, Maltese Human Rights Directorate*

Aaron Giardina (he/they) is an Assistant Director at Malta's Human Rights Directorate, directly responsible and specialising in LGBTQIA+ policy and mainstreaming. With academic credentials in European Studies and Gender, Society and Culture, their research centres on intersectionality, representation and the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ persons and voluntarily engaged sex workers. Aaron lectures on policy development at the University of Malta and actively contributes to international conferences and European LGBTQIA+ fora. They represent Malta in the European Union's LGBTIQ Subgroup and serve as Vice-Chair of the Council of Europe's ADI-SOGIESC Committee. They served as Malta's nominated expert in the co-drafting of the Council of Europe's Ministerial Recommendation on the Rights of Intersex Persons. A committed activist, Aaron is deeply engaged in intersectional feminist and LGBTQIA+ movements.

### **Ms Kate Osborne, Member of the PACE Platform for the rights of LGBTI persons, United Kingdom**

Kate Osborne has been a Member of Parliament in the United Kingdom since 2019, representing the Jarrow and Gateshead East Constituency. Kate has been a UK Delegates to the Council of Europe since 2020. Prior to her election as an MP, Kate served as a Local Councillor in the Northeast of England for 10 years and has been active in equalities campaigns for more than 40 years. Kate served on the National Executive for the UK's largest Trade Union for 20 years and is committed to fighting for workers rights.

Kate has served on the Women and Equalities Committee in the UK as well as the Equalities and Migration Committee in the Council of Europe and is currently involved in campaigning for access to fertility treatment for LGBTQIA people in the UK. Kate is currently the Rapporteur for the PACE Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination report for a ban on so-called Conversion therapies.



### **Ms Catherine Clavin, Co-President of Association des parents et futurs parents gays et lesbiens (APGL)**

Catherine Clavin has been co-chair of the APGL (Association of Gay and Lesbian Parents and Future Parents) since 2019, alongside Dominique Boren. A barrister at the Marseille Bar (France) since 1996, she is a recognised specialist in family law, personal law and property law, with particular expertise in filiation law. She assists many LGBT+ families, particularly those formed through medically assisted reproduction or surrogacy, providing them with legal and activist support. Committed to defending LGBT+ rights, Catherine Clavin is actively involved in promoting equal rights for parents and children and the social and legal recognition of LGBT families in Europe, both through her advocacy work in the voluntary sector and her professional involvement in serving families.

### **Ms Denitsa Lyubenova, Head of the Legal Programme, Youth LGBT Organisation Deystvie, Bulgaria**

Denitsa Lyubenova is a human rights lawyer and the co-chair of LGBTI Organization Deystvie - Bulgaria's only LGBTI organisation which does advocacy and strategic litigation. Denitsa is leading hundreds of cases before the national courts, the ECtHR and CJEU to protect the rights of LGBTIQ+ people in Bulgaria and with legal connection to Bulgaria. Denitsa successfully litigated the CJEU case C-490/20 V.M.A against Stolichna Municipality, Pancharevo District for the issuance of a birth certificate for a child with two parents of the same sex, better known as Baby Sara case. The case set a precedent in Europe and led logically to a proposal for a Regulation by the European Parliament on the rules on issuing birth certificates in cross-border situations. Denitsa successfully litigated the ECtHR case Koilova and Babulkova v. Bulgaria (App. № 40209/20) and is currently litigating three cases on the establishment of the legal connection of a child with its two parents of the same-sex - Angelova and Others v. Bulgaria (App. № 23111/23; App. № 28033/23; App. № 36720/23). Denitsa took part in numerous legislative initiatives in Bulgaria and is leading infringement requests to the European Commission on the lack of implementation of the Baby Sara case in Bulgaria.

### **Ms Colette Farrugia Bennett, Family Therapist and Social Worker, Malta**

Colette Farrugia Bennett is a dedicated activist and professional advocate for LGBTIQ rights, with over 24 years of experience in Malta's movement for equality and diversity. She actively raises awareness among helping professionals about gender and sexual diversity, emphasising affirmative practices. Colette co-founded the Rainbow Support Service under the Malta LGBTIQ Rights Movement (MGRM), where she currently coordinates and offers support to LGBTIQ individuals and their families. Additionally, she manages the LGBTIQ+ Wellbeing Service and is part of the psycho-social team at the Gender Wellbeing Clinic. Her involvement extends to the Intersex Protocol Working Group, aiming to develop specialised services for intersex persons. As a systemic therapist and social worker, she focuses on empowering and affirming diverse gender and sexual identities through individual, couple, and family therapy.

### **Ms Angelica Polmonari, Chair of the Women's Committee of ILGA World; Co-Secretary of the EuroCentralAsian Lesbian\* Community; President of Arcigay Modena "Matthew Shepard, Italy**

Italian, transfeminist, lesbian, working as Policy Advisor, Project Manager, Consultant for international, national and local NGOs and institutions fostering LGBTQIA+ rights and as a certified professional trainer on DE&I, gender equality and LGBTQIA+ allyship in the workplace. Angelica is also Chair of the Women's Committee of ILGA World; Co-Secretary of the EuroCentralAsian Lesbian\* Community (EL\*C); International and National Advocate of Arcigay; President of Arcigay Modena "Matthew Shepard.





## SESSION 3: PROMOTING INCLUSION FOR RAINBOW FAMILIES – THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS

*Moderator: Ms Béatrice Fresko-Rolfo, PACE General Rapporteur on the rights of LGBTI persons*

### **Dr Helena Dalli, former EU Commissioner for Equality**

Dr Helena Dalli held an uninterrupted tenure as a Member of the Maltese Parliament from 1996 to 2019 before being appointed the first European Commissioner for Equality. She entered politics at a very early age and on being elected to Parliament in 1996, she was appointed Parliamentary Secretary in the office of the Prime Minister. Subsequently, as a minister from 2013 to 2019, Dr Dalli managed various portfolios encompassing social dialogue, consumer affairs, civil liberties, European affairs, and equality. An advocate for social justice, Dr Dalli led significant social reforms, particularly in the domain of equality. She spearheaded legislation addressing gender equality; violence against women; work/life balance structures; increasing women's participation in the labour market; conditions of employment and civil liberties.

She is the recipient of various international awards in the area of human rights and equality. Dr Dalli initiated the process in the United Nations introducing the International Day for Women and Girls in Science, commemorated every 11th of February. Holding a PhD from the University of Nottingham, Dr Dalli integrated academic insights into her political career, also contributing as a lecturer at the University of Malta. As the European Commissioner for Equality, she led on EU equality laws and launched five European Equality Strategies. Dr Dalli's multifaceted career solidifies her position as an influential figure in both Maltese and European politics.


### **Hon. Graziella Attard Previ, Shadow Minister for Equality, Civil Liberties, and Children's Rights, Malta**

Graziella Attard Previ was elected to Parliament in 2022 in the name of Partit Nazzjonalista. She is the Shadow Minister on Equality, Civil Liberties and Children's Rights and currently serves as a member of the Parliamentary Committee on Family Affairs. Ms Attard Previ is a social worker by profession, with a master's in social policy. Worked with children in care for 18 years within a residential setting, and for the past 4 years in the disability sector. Currently leading a team of social workers working with young adults with disability.

Involved in politics for the past 12 years, she occupied the post of President of the Equal Opportunities Forum of Partit Nazzjonalista (FOIPN) between 2014 and 2020, during which time she worked relentlessly in favour of LGBTIQ+ and other minority groups' issues, fighting discrimination and promoting inclusion. In 2020, was elected President of the Women's Movement of Partit Nazzjonalista (MNPN), and till 2022 worked upon formulating policy and advocating in favour of women's rights and progress. On a local government level, in 2015, was elected as Councillor in the locality of Gzira. In 2019, was elected Vice Mayor of Sliema, and in 2021, became the Mayor of Sliema. During her years in local government, as Councillor and vice-Mayor, she was responsible for the dicastery of social inclusion and disability.

### **Ms Lucia Plaváková, Member of the PACE Platform for the rights of LGBTI persons, Slovakia**

Lucia Plaváková is a lawyer, human rights activist and progressive politician. Since 2023 member of Slovak Parliament, chairperson of the Human Rights Committee and member of the Slovak delegation in Council of Europe. In 2015, she defended a dissertation on the right to privacy with a focus on the rights of LGBTIQ+ people and received a PhD in international law. She is a co-founder of an NGO focused on rainbow families. For almost 10 years, Lucia has been providing pro bono legal advice at a counselling centre for LGBTIQ+ people. After Russia attacked Ukraine, she has provided pro bono legal advice to people fleeing Ukraine. As a politician she is dealing with the topics of the rule of law, human rights and equality. She has received the FLAMMA award for inspiring Czech and Slovak female lawyers and award Women in Politics Champion of the Year. She has a rainbow family.



### **Ms Mirosława Makuchowska, Executive Director, Campaign Against Homophobia, Poland**

Mirosława Makuchowska is the executive director of the Campaign Against Homophobia (KPH), the biggest LGBT+ organization in Poland. Mirka has over 15 years of professional experience in the LGBT+ advocacy, campaigning and supporting the LGBT+ movement in Poland. Started as an LGBT+ grassroots activist in Wrocław in 2005 as a coordinator of KPH's local branch and a few years later, was promoted as a community builder officer responsible for establishing 12 new local branches on KPH nationwide. This experience provided a deep understanding of LGBT+ community's needs and the challenges new organizations and local activist groups face. Author of a number of publications, including the biggest social study examining the daily lives of LGBT+ in Poland titled Report on the Social situation of LGBT+ people in Poland. Five years' experience as an advocacy director in KPH, enabled developing insight into and understanding of the social and political context of discrimination and violence experienced by LGBT+ persons in Poland. Obtained a master's degree at the University of Wrocław, at the faculty of sociology. Scholar of Open World Programme at the Central European University and graduate of EMBA program. Certified antidiscrimination trainer and graduate of the Anti-Discrimination Training Academy in Krakow. European Commission's official expert in non-discrimination measures on basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

### **Mr Daniel Martinović, President of the Network of European LGBTIQ\* Families Associations (NELFA), Dugine obitelji, Croatia**

Daniel Martinović is a human rights activist with over 15 years of experience, dedicated to advancing equality and the rights of LGBTIQ families. He currently serves as President of both the Network of European LGBTIQ\* Families Associations (NELFA) and Rainbow Families Croatia, where he leads strategic litigation, advocacy initiatives, and public awareness campaigns to secure recognition and protection for diverse families across Europe. A proud parent to a 10-year-old, Daniel combines personal experience with professional dedication to drive change. By day, he works as a web designer; by heart, he's an activist 24/7 - committed to building inclusive societies where all families can thrive.

