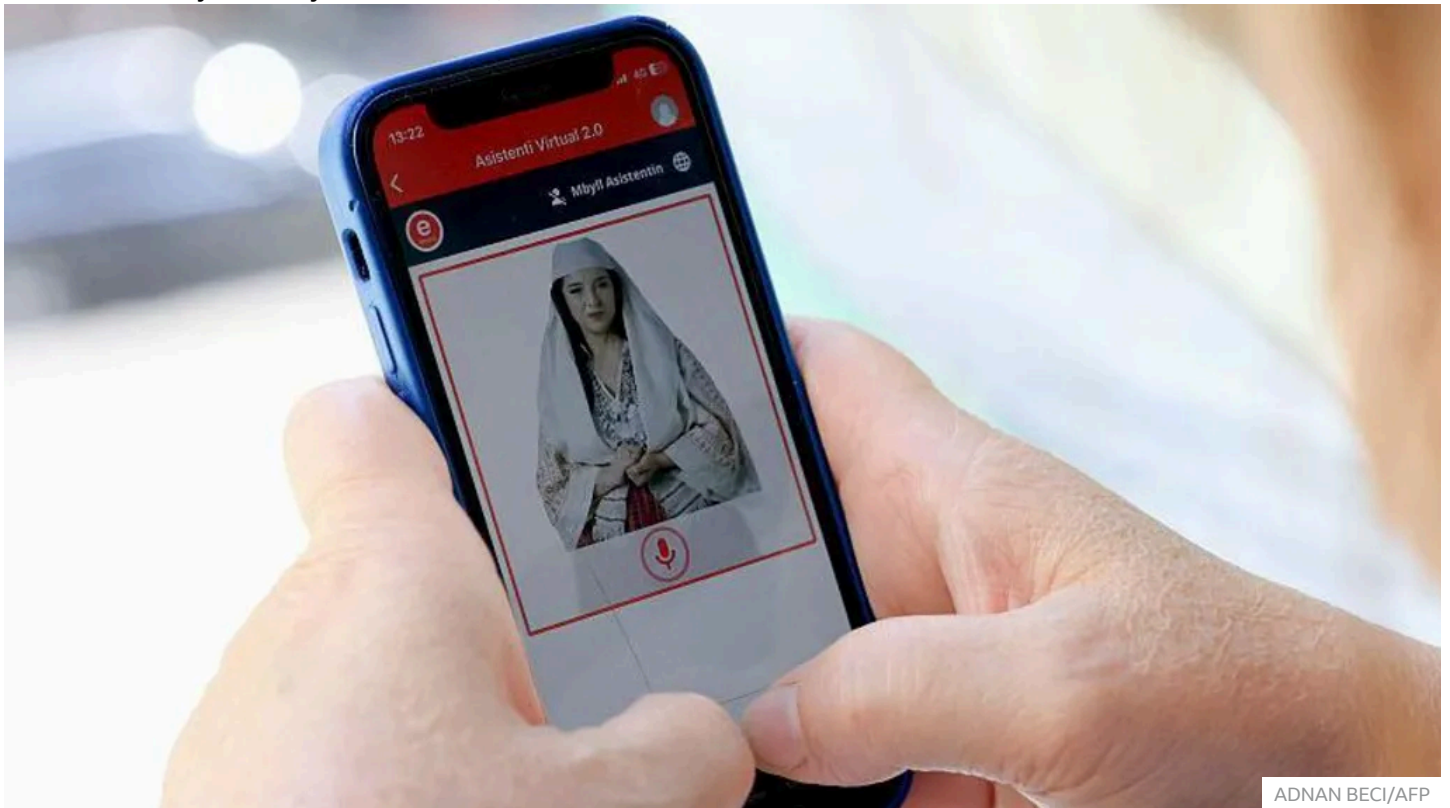


World's first AI minister will eliminate corruption, says Albania's PM

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ADNAN BECI/AFP

The new minister, named Diella, has already been active as a bot, guiding applicants through a process to obtain official documents.

For government officials, being called "heartless" is an occupational hazard. But Albania has chosen to turn that insult into a positive quality, by appointing an AI minister.

Not a minister for artificial intelligence. Rather, a cabinet member who is, literally, the work of AI.

The new addition is, like a pop star, known simply by the single name: Diella.

Prime Minister Edi Rama introduced her as a member of his new cabinet on Thursday, four months after securing his fourth term in office in May elections.

However, the move was symbolic rather than official, as Albania's constitution insists that government ministers must be mentally competent citizens aged at least 18. Still, the advantages of appointing a bot over a human are obvious.

Diella, whose name means sun in Albanian, is unlikely to be the source of any unflattering leaks about the government. She will only be power-hungry in the sense of the electricity she consumes. And a damaging expenses scandal would appear to be out of the question.

In fact, corruption was uppermost in Rama's mind when he made Diella part of his team as minister for public procurement.

Her role will be to ensure that Albania will become "a country where public tenders are 100% free of corruption".

"We're working with a brilliant team, which is not only Albanian but also international, to come out with the first full AI model in public procurement," the prime minister told the BBC.

"Not only will we wipe out every potential influence on public biddings – we will also make the process much faster, much more efficient and totally accountable."

Diella had already been working in Albania even before the government "appointment". Her first incarnation was as an AI-powered virtual assistant, guiding applicants through the process to obtain official documents.



Albania's prime minister, Edi Rama, won a fourth term in office in May and introduced his cabinet on Thursday. Rama boasts that Diella has "helped more than a million applications" on the e-Albania platform. But his vision for AI's government role is a lot grander than a mere chatbot.

He talks of "leapfrogging" bigger, more advanced countries, which are still locked into "traditional ways of working".

Reactions to Diella's new role are, understandably, mixed. The opposition Democratic Party has labelled the initiative "ridiculous" and "unconstitutional".

But others are cautiously optimistic.

The founder of financial services company Balkans Capital, Aneida Bajraktari Bicja, notes that Edi Rama "often mixes reform with theatrics, so it's natural people wonder if this is symbolism". But she says the "AI minister" could be constructive if it develops into real systems that improve transparency and trust in public procurement".

Anti-corruption experts have also noted the potential for AI to be deployed to minimise graft.

"AI is still a new tool – but if it is programmed correctly, when you put a bid in online, you can see clearly and more closely if a company meets the conditions and the