

# From Galati to West Glamorgan: a journey of service



At Swansea mosque with Cllr Cheryl Philpott (Lord Mayor) and Shaz Abedean DL



With Shaz Abedean DL and Cllr Cheryl Philpott (Lord Mayor) at a citizenship ceremony in Swansea registry office

## Diana Stroia

High Sheriff of West Glamorgan 2025-26

On the morning of my declaration at Margam Abbey, I walked up the ancient path with a crescendo of emotions: nervousness, humility, pride and a profound sense of responsibility. The abbey, with its centuries of history, seemed to hold every footstep in quiet reverence. Inside, the atmosphere was electric yet dignified. The pews were filled with distinguished guests, from Her Excellency the Ambassador of Romania to the Court of St James's, to leaders from South Wales Police, the judiciary and local councils, alongside friends and family who had travelled from across the UK, Romania and beyond.

A deeply moving moment came when a Welsh choral group, alongside the Romanians in attendance, performed the Romanian national anthem, learnt especially for this occasion. Hearing my country's anthem carried by Welsh voices was a moment that bridged histories, languages and lives – a reminder that belonging can be created across borders.

After the formalities, the sound of the pipes filled the abbey as I was led out by the renowned piper Robert Grey. The South Wales Police Halberdiers stood guard with ceremonial precision and the choir's voices soared. This was not just the close of a ceremony but the beginning of a year of service – one that will see the same choir travel to Romania this summer for two charitable concerts I have organised.

My journey began far from here in Galati, Romania, under the shadow of the communist regime. Life was defined by scarcity, but I was blessed with parents,

Brindusa and Mihai, who believed service to others was not optional but natural. Even with little, they found ways to help a neighbour or stranger in need.

My first connection with Wales came through kindness. After the fall of Communism, Welsh church volunteers travelled over 1,250 miles to bring aid to Romania. As a 12-year-old, receiving warm boots or a colourful dress from strangers felt like a gift from heaven.

In 2003, I made West Glamorgan my home. My early years were a mix of building a new life and helping other Romanians find their footing – translating, navigating forms or simply listening. Integration, I learnt, is not just about paperwork; it is about belonging.

From 2017, I served six years as Honorary Consul of Romania for Wales. In that role, I coordinated elections, mobilised humanitarian campaigns – including sending hospital beds from the Nightingale hospitals to Odessa – and worked to promote integration and representation.

Another milestone was establishing the first Romanian Orthodox Church in West Glamorgan, persuading a lay priest to move to Swansea, where he was ordained. For many, it became both a spiritual and cultural home.

I also worked with the anti-trafficking charity A21 to raise awareness of exploitation and supported efforts to tackle domestic violence. These were sobering challenges, but they proved what collaboration can achieve.

When I was asked in 2023 to consider serving as High Sheriff for 2025-26, I was astonished. I had never imagined that someone like me – a Romanian-born

woman – would hold such an ancient and prestigious role. I accepted with humility and stepped down as Honorary Consul to give it my full attention.

My theme for the year is The Future Starts with Kindness. Kindness costs nothing, yet it transforms everything. Already, I have seen how small acts of cooperation ripple out to change lives.

From the Danube walks of Galati to the green hills of West Glamorgan, my life has been shaped by the belief that service is both a duty and a privilege. I am often the last to leave a citizenship ceremony, not because of formality, but because I know my presence can send a clear message: this country welcomes you – not just in words, but in action.

We are stronger together and the future truly does start with kindness.



At my Declaration ceremony with Louise Fleet JP (Lord-Lieutenant) and Her Excellency Dr Laura Popescu, Ambassador of Romania to the Court of St James's