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# POLITICAL CRITERIA



# Albania's Scorecard On Progress And Level Of Preparation Regarding EU Accession During 2021

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October 2022, Tirana

# **Albania's Scorecard On Progress And Level Of Preparation Regarding EU Accession During 2021**

**BASED ON THE ASSESSMENTS OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2021 AND 2022 COUNTRY REPORTS**

## **CONTEXT**

The European Commission (EC) monitors Albania's progress and level of preparation in meeting EU membership requirements on an annual basis. The country is working on the transposition of the Acquis according to the National Plan on European Integration Plan (NPEI), which serves as a tool for fulfilling the obligations arising from the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA). The organization of the First Intergovernmental Conference on July 19, 2022 was considered a huge milestone for our country as it embodies the technical aspect of the EU integration process. The conference paved the way for the approval of the negotiation framework drawn up by the European Commission and the work has started for the opening of the chapters of the First Cluster, also known as "Fundamentals".

This Scorecard on Albania's Progress and Level of Preparation towards EU membership takes as its starting point the situation described in the EC 2021 Country Report and reflects the development throughout the year crystallized in the EC 2022 Country Report. It aims to display in a more simplified way 1) the Political Criteria 2) Chapter 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights) and 3) Chapter 24 (Justice, Freedom and Security).

The Scorecard presents an assessment concerning the main fields of each chapter. The evaluation includes an elaboration on progress and preparation during 2021 in each area, as well as a graded assessment (where 10 is the highest grade and 4 the lowest), taking into account the terminology used in each case in the European Commission Reports for progress and level of preparation.

Furthermore, it considers the frequency and the relevance of the issue (new legal initiatives or strategies are generally viewed as more important than routine trainings). Particular attention has been drawn to the evaluation of the implementation of the legislation as one of the most important problems that our country faces. The methodology applied by EMA constitutes a snapshot of several components that shape a subfield, field and then chapter.

TERMINOLOGY USED FOR PROGRESS:	GRADE
Backsliding	4
No progress	5
Limited Progress	6
Some progress	7
Good Progress	8-9
Very good progress	10

TERMINOLOGY USED FOR PREPARATION	GRADE
n/a	n/a
Early stage	5
Some level of preparation	6
Some level / moderately prepared	7
Moderately prepared	8
Good level of preparation	9
Well-advanced	10

### How Should We Read This Scorecard?

Albania's Scorecard presents grades for each area analyzed by the European Commission for the preparation level and progress made regarding the European integration process for the year of 2020 and 2021. The evaluation was carried out taking into account several criteria such as:

- Assessment of the fulfillment of requirements and obligations arising from the process concerning the legislation drafting framework;
- Assessment of the progress made within the year based on the findings of the annual report;
- Reviewing whether the recommendations of the previous year were taken into consideration;

This document's main objective is to offer civil society actors, academics, governmental bodies, students, businesses and other interested citizens a clear and accurate reading, beyond the political debates, of Albania's progress in all areas that are part of the Criteria of Copenhagen for EU membership.

## SCORECARD FOR POLITICAL CRITERIA

POLITICAL CRITERIA	EC COUNTRY REPORT 2021	EC COUNTRY REPORT 2022	CHANGE
Election	<p><b>Preparation – Grade: 8</b></p> <p>Elections were generally <b>well organised</b> by the reformed Central Election Commission (CEC). The new electoral framework implemented <b>which was in line</b> with the recommendations of OSCE/ODIHR. The implementation of out of country vote <b>was not possible</b>.</p>	<p><b>Preparation – Grade: 8.5</b></p> <p>On 6 March 2022, Albania held by-elections in six municipalities. The ruling Socialist Party won five municipalities. <b>No electoral subject contested</b> the results.</p>	+0.5
	<p><b>Progress – Grade: 9</b></p> <p><b>For the first time</b>, electronic identification of votes was used in all polling stations. <b>Concerns</b> remained related to the misuse of State resource and functions by the ruling party and other public figures. Main parties <b>all attempted to augment</b> the role of women and the mandatory 30% quotas were respected and, in most cases, <b>exceeded</b>.</p>	<p><b>Progress – Grade: 8</b></p> <p>Biometric identification of voters <b>was implemented in all</b> polling stations. <b>In line</b> with ODIHR recommendations, the CEC <b>has continued</b> efforts to strengthen its oversight role over campaign financing. <b>Two out of six</b> mayors elected are women. On February 2022, the Parliament <b>decided to set up</b> an ad hoc parliamentary committee on electoral reform, which is meant <b>to follow-up on OSCE/ODIHR recommendations</b>. At the expiry of its term, it had only held its constitutive meeting.</p>	-1
Parliament	<p><b>Preparation – Grade: 6</b></p> <p>On its <b>oversight function</b>, members of parliament <b>made use</b> of the instruments at the disposal of the opposition. Public consultation with civil society and interest groups <b>remained formal</b> and <b>limited</b>. National Council for European Integration <b>still has to consolidate</b> its role.</p>	<p><b>Preparation – Grade: 8</b></p> <p>The <b>parliamentary oversight</b> of the work of independent institutions <b>remains limited</b>. Public consultation with civil society and interest groups <b>remained formal</b>. The National Council for European Integration <b>has made efforts</b> to further consolidate its role in EU integration issues. Important committees <b>continue to be chaired</b> by opposition MPs but higher ethical standards <b>are needed</b> to foster more constructive political dialogue</p>	+2

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Parliament	<p><b>Progress – Grade: 6</b></p> <p>Parliament <b>adopted a broad set</b> of amendments aimed at increasing the efficiency of the judiciary. Parliament <b>established</b> a platform for the consultation of draft laws. The administration's performance <b>is still poor</b> when it comes to implementing recommendations from the Ombudsman, showing a <b>decreasing trend</b>.</p>	<p><b>Progress – Grade: 6.5</b></p> <p>9 of the laws passed in Parliament aimed at alignment with the EU acquis.</p> <p>The Parliament has increased its efforts towards more transparency by offering more statistical data on parliamentary activity.</p> <p>The provision of the Electoral Code allowing party chairs to run in multiple districts has been criticised by OSCE/ODIHR. In the new legislature, the elected MPs from the largest opposition parties took their seats, contrary what happened in 2019. Internal conflict within the largest opposition party (DP) affected</p>	+0.5
Governance	<p><b>Preparation – Grade: 7</b></p> <p>It maintained a focus on reforms on the country's EU path, despite the challenges coming from Covid-19 and earthquake. Yet, it needs to increase dedicated human and financial resources on EU accession talks. Coordination within the administration needs to be improved, regarding their involvement in EU integration processes. The territorial administrative reform should be further consolidated. The overall ability of local institutions to deliver quality public services remains limited. Local-level implementation of the Law on public consultation remains unsatisfactory.</p>	<p><b>Preparation – Grade: 6</b></p> <p>It has continued to maintain overall focus on reforms on the country's EU path, despite the challenges coming from Covid-19, earthquake and war in Ukraine. Yet, it needs to increase dedicated human and financial resources on EU accession talks.</p> <p>Coordination within the administration needs to be improved, regarding their involvement in EU integration processes. The territorial administrative reform needs to be further consolidated. The overall ability of local institutions to deliver quality public services remains limited. Local-level implementation of the Law on public consultation remains unsatisfactory.</p> <p>Complex procedures for opening dedicated bank accounts as well as receive VAT refund also represent serious obstacles to Albanian municipalities accessing funding from IPA.</p>	-1

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Governance	<p><b>Progress – Grade: 7</b></p> <p>Adopted the National Plan for European Integration (NPEI) 2021–2023 where greater efforts have been made in achieving a higher implementation rate of NPEI. Municipalities have been given greater policy making powers. Yet LGUs' fiscal autonomy is at risk, as most of their budget is dependent on national transfers and pandemic complicated the situation.</p> <p>Consultations and stock taking on EU related matters continued with relevant stakeholders, including civil society organisations. Municipalities have encouraged public participation in their decision-making through organising online. The network of EU local coordinators has strengthened the LGUs' involvement in the EU accession process.</p>	<p><b>Progresis– Grade: 6.5</b></p> <p>Progress was made in monitoring the execution of the National Plan for European Integration. LGUs' fiscal autonomy is at risk, as most of their budget is dependent on national transfers and pandemic complicated the situation.</p> <p>Consultations and stock taking on EU related matters continued with relevant stakeholders, including civil society organisations. Municipalities have encouraged public participation in their decision-making through organising online and innovative tools. The network of EU local coordinators has strengthened the LGUs' involvement in the EU accession process. However, the frequent staff turnover in the EU municipal units endangers their ability to perform.</p> <p>EU integration structures within the government had already been substantially modified in October 2021, following the decision to set up a new agency for donor coordination. Yet without a comprehensive steering framework</p>	-0.5
Civil Society	<p><b>Preparation – Grade: 7</b></p> <p>Albania's legal and regulatory framework on the right to freedom of assembly and association and on public consultation is generally in line with EU standards. The National Council for Civil Society remains weak and should be reformed. Substantial efforts are needed to ensure meaningful and systematic consultations with civil society.</p>	<p><b>Preparation – Grade: 8</b></p> <p>Albania's legal and regulatory framework on the right to freedom of assembly and association and on public consultation is generally in line with EU standards. The ability of the National Council for Civil Society to voice priorities of CSOs in policymaking processes remains weak. The institutionalised cooperation between civil society and the Government still needs to be strengthened to ensure meaningful participation of CSOs.</p>	+1

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Civil Society	<p><b>Progress – Grade: 5</b></p> <p>Limited progress has been made on the implementation of the roadmap on an enabling environment for civil society. Adoption of the Law on registration of Non Profit Organisations brings some improvements. The Agency for the Support of Civil Society budget was reduced by 40% in 2020, making public funding insufficient to sustain CSOs' activity. Here is yet no evidence of successful VAT refund with regard to reimbursement for CSO beneficiaries of EU funding.</p>	<p><b>Progress – Grade: 5</b></p> <p>There has been no progress in the implementation of the roadmap on an enabling environment for civil society. Implementation of the new Law on registration of Non-Profit Organisations adopted in June 2021 has not started yet. The High Judicial Council has now received a budget allocation to procure the electronic register, as this process is under its responsibility according to the law. The Agency for the Support of Civil Society budget is now back at pre-COVID levels, but public funding remains insufficient to sustain CSOs' activities. Limited Progress has been made in the field of VAT refund</p>	0
Public Administration Reform	<p><b>Preparation – Grade: 8</b></p> <p>Albanian institutions have done substantive efforts in maintaining a good implementation record of the public administration reform strategy. The link between technical and political support for PAR needs to be strengthened and financial sustainability needs to be improved. The legal basis and the institutional set-up for a coherent policy making system are partially in place. Further efforts are needed to upgrade the administrative capacity in both line ministries and PMO. Public scrutiny of government work remains limited and quality control function on public consultation needs to be strengthened. Budget transparency remains satisfactory, but public participation in the budget process needs to be further strengthened. Merit-based recruitment, promotion and dismissal process needs to be consolidated. The professional administrative capacity of local-level civil servants needs to be strengthened. Institutions and laws on public service delivery are in place to ensure user-oriented administration, yet national minimum standards for services still have to be established.</p>	<p><b>Preparation – Grade: 8</b></p> <p>Albania remains moderately prepared in the area of public administration reform. Despite the COVID-19 crisis, the Albanian institutions made substantial efforts to maintain a good implementation of the public administration reform strategy. The implementation of the public administration reforms requires a continued political steer. The legal basis and the institutional set-up for coherent policy making system are partially in place. Further efforts are needed to improve the administrative capacity of line ministries and the Prime Minister's Office. Public scrutiny of government work needs to be further improved. Budget transparency remains satisfactory with the publication of all key budget documents, which allows for sufficient public debate. Progress on merit-based recruitment, promotion and dismissal needs to be consolidated by applying consistent standards across the public administration. A training cycle on quality management has not yet been set up. The administrative skills of local-level civil servants need to be improved.</p>	0

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Public Administration Reform	<p><b>Progress – Grade: 7</b></p> <p>Some progress was made in delivering on last year's report recommendation by building capacity of line ministries. The government continued to monitor the implementation of the 2015–2022 public administration reform (PAR) the 2014–2022 public financial management (PFM) reform strategies. Substantial progress was made in monitoring the execution of NPEI. Progress was made in rolling out the IT tool for an Integrated Planning System. Further progress was achieved in increasing the usage and monitoring of RIAs. The number of one-stop-shops and e-services increased. Albanian School of Public Administration continued the training programmes resulting in an increase of training courses. All the planned vacancies in 2020 were filled, but ad-hoc selection procedures continue to be used.</p>	<p><b>Progress – Grade: 6</b></p> <p>Limited progress was made in delivering on last year's recommendations. The government continued to monitor the implementation of the 2015–2022 public administration reform strategy and the 2014–2022 public financial management reform strategy. However, Bodies subordinate to ministries (agencies) continued to be created without a comprehensive steering framework, systematic attention to oversight or clear reporting lines. The authorities need to improve coherence between policy planning and budgeting by making full use of the Integrated Planning System Information System. Progress was achieved in increasing the use and quality of regulatory impact assessments for legislative proposals and trainings on these issues were delivered across the administration. In 2021, the number of one-stop-shops and e-services, even if at different levels of automation, continued to increase, and information to citizens on public services became more accessible. The Albanian School of Public Administration continued to adapt its training programmes for professional development in line with the COVID-19 measures. Compared to the previous year, it increased the thematic scope and the number of trained public servants.</p>	-1