



POLITICAL CRITERIA



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PARTNERS ALBANIA
FOR CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

Albania's Scorecard On Progress And Level Of Preparation Regarding EU Accession During 2023–2024

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November 2024, Tirana



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*BASED ON THE ASSESSMENTS OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2023 AND 2024 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 (NPEI), which serves as a tool for fulfilling the obligations arising from the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA). The First Intergovernmental Conference held on July 19, 2022, marked a major milestone for Albania, symbolizing a key technical step in the EU integration process. This conference set the stage for the European Commission's approval of the negotiation framework and initiated the groundwork for the screening process. With the screening process completed in November 2023, Albania reached another significant achievement on October 16, 2024, by officially opening negotiations for Cluster 1 – 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 2023 Country Report and reflects the development throughout the reporting period crystallized in the EC 2024 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 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 reporting period covered by the reports of 2023 and 2024. 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;
- 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 Copenhagen Criteria for EU membership.

SCORECARD FOR POLITICAL CRITERIA

POLITICAL CRITERIA	EC REPORT 2023	EC REPORT 2024	CHANGE
Elections	<p>Preparation – Grade: 8.5</p> <p>On 14 May 2023, Albania held regular local elections which were conducted in a generally calm manner. Observers assessed them as well-administered, competitive and with the participation of key political actors. Yet, there were concerns about the misuse of public resources at both national and local levels, claims of pressure on voters and public sector workers, and allegations of vote buying.</p>	<p>Preparation – Grade: 8.5</p> <p>During the reporting period, no general elections took place. The Central Election Commission continued to use a digital platform for the disclosure of political parties' campaign financing. Concerns remain on OSCE/ODIHR recommendations not addressed such as ensuring vote secrecy, fighting vote-buying and the misuse of administrative resources at national and local levels; monitoring as well as oversight of campaign financing, and access for person with disabilities.</p>	0
Elections	<p>Progress– Grade: 7</p> <p>As in the previous elections, voters were identified by biometric signature in all polling stations, with technical glitches reported in some 10% of these. Vote counting was assessed to be mostly positive, though inconsistencies were noted. Despite the efforts of the Central Election Commission to advance the implementation of out-of-country voting, the required legislative changes are still pending. Legal provisions require that half of the candidates for municipal councils should be women, however this was fully respected in only 10% of municipalities. Parliament's ad hoc committee established on February 2022, on electoral reform, has not produced any results. Even though its term was extended in September 2023, no progress was made neither on the adoption of any text nor in addressing the outstanding recommendations of the OSCE/ODIHR and the Venice Commission.</p>	<p>Progress – Grade: 8</p> <p>A tense political environment and continuous divisions within the main opposition party hampered the functioning of the parliamentary ad-hoc committee on electoral reform set which ended its mandate without achieving concrete results. A cross-party dialogue group subsequently set up in the Parliamentary Legal Affairs Committee engaged in discussing electoral reform. In July 2024, with a cross-party vote, the Parliament adopted amendments to the Electoral Code, partially in response to Constitutional Court rulings, thus enabling out-of-country voting by Albanian diaspora, introducing partially open candidates lists (mixed candidate lists) and changes to the party quotient. The gender quotas in parliamentary and local elections to promote women's participation in politics are not always met. The said amendments to the electoral law on preferential vote support the enforcement of gender quotas even when the list is subject to a preferential vote. However, other outstanding OSCE/ODIHR as well as Venice Commission recommendations remain to be addressed.</p>	+1

POLITICAL CRITERIA	EC REPORT 2023	EC REPORT 2024	CHANGE
Parliament	<p>Preparation – Grade: 8</p> <p>The parliamentary oversight of the executive and of the work of independent institutions remains limited. Public consultation with civil society and interest groups remained formal. The National Council of European Integration met on a regular basis to take stock of Albania’s EU integration process. Higher ethical standards proceedings are needed. The Ethics Secretariat imposed several disciplinary measures, resulting in the unprecedented expulsion of 23 opposition MPs within a month.</p>	<p>Preparation – Grade: 8</p> <p>Parliament’s oversight of the executive remained weak. Public consultation with civil society and interest groups remained rather formal. Timely and transparent follow-up is not always ensured. National Council of European Integration has continued its activities, including reviewing key documents and raising awareness about fulfilling obligations related to EU accession. Greater transparency and higher ethical standards in parliamentary proceedings are still necessary to enable citizens to easily access information.</p>	0
Parliament	<p>Progress – Grade: 5.5</p> <p>In March 2023, amendments were adopted with a large majority to the 2015 Law on Parliament’s role in EU integration, strengthening the consultative role of Parliament. In an effort to increase transparency, the Parliament created a new website, which is still incomplete and only partly accessible. Parliamentary proceedings continued to be live-streamed on social media. The Assembly faced considerable difficulties in fulfilling its duty to elect the Ombudsperson and is still to elect a new Anti-Discrimination Commissioner. Delays and the politicisation of these appointment processes weaken these independent institutions. Parliamentary activity and parliamentary debates and proceedings continued to be negatively affected by political polarisation, by harsh political rhetoric, personal attacks and disruptive behaviour in the plenary hall. Reorganisation of Parliament’s standing committees and other bodies was not carried out, because of the conflict within the opposition and attempts to control its caucus.</p>	<p>Progress – Grade: 5</p> <p>The assembly failed to comply with some of the rulings of the Constitutional Court. These concerned the unconstitutionality of certain amendments to the Law on Inquiry Committees and to the Assembly’s Rules of Procedure, as well as the compatibility of a ruling majority MP’s mandate. Parliament once again failed to appoint chairs and members of the Ombudsperson and the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination. During the autumn 2023 session, the normal functioning of the assembly was significantly disrupted by opposition MPs due to alleged restrictions by the ruling majority on their rights, in particular the rejection of the opposition’s request to set up a number of inquiry committees. As a result, laws were adopted by the ruling majority without a proper debate. In March 2024, the ruling majority and a small part of the opposition Democratic Party reached an agreement, which restored normality.</p>	-0.5

POLITICAL CRITERIA	EC REPORT 2023	EC REPORT 2024	CHANGE
Governance	<p>Preparation – Grade: 7</p> <p>It has renewed its overall political commitment to the country’s EU path. Under the coordination of the chief negotiator and the newly reformed EU negotiation structures, Albanian institutions have mobilised significant resources to engage actively in the screening process, which is proceeding smoothly, and to prepare for the next steps in the accession negotiations. Albania will need to continue to strengthen its EU negotiating structures and coordination between subordinated bodies and line ministries, while further developing expertise on the EU acquis across the public administration. The territorial administrative reform remains to be further consolidated. The delivery of quality public services at local level remains limited. Local government units still lack sufficient financial resources and administrative capacity to perform all their devolved responsibilities.</p>	<p>Preparation – Grade: 7.5</p> <p>The government continued to show its commitment to EU integration. Albania’s EU integration coordination structures, in particular the Minister of State / Chief Negotiator, were consolidated during the reporting period, and the department in charge of EU integration at the Prime Minister’s Office was confirmed as the Secretariat of European Integration. Interinstitutional working groups responsible for the technical aspects of the EU integration process have met regularly. The European integration units at the line ministries and agencies still need to strengthen their capacity to play a more substantial role. The delivery of quality public services at local level remains limited. LGUs continue to lack sufficient and stable financial resources and administrative capacity. Efforts need to continue to reduce the staff salary gap between central and local government and between large and small municipalities.</p>	+0.5
Governance	<p>Progress – Grade: 7.5</p> <p>In early 2023, the government adopted the new National Plan for European integration for 2023–2025, and the 2023–2030 National Strategy for Development and European Integration. The government appointed a new Chief Negotiator, at Minister of State level, and with increased resources. Significant progress was made in ensuring coordination on EU integration and EU assistance between SASPAC, line ministries, and the CFCU and local government units. This now needs to be further consolidated. The LGUs’ fiscal autonomy remains at risk, as most of their budget depends on national transfers. On transparency of local government, some improvement has been noted: An integrity index methodology has been adopted and 22 LGUs have developed and approved local integrity plans. The network of EU integration local coordinators has strengthened the LGUs’ involvement in the EU accession process. On gender equality, 18 municipalities signed the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life, and 5 municipalities have developed and approved local gender action plans.</p>	<p>Progress – Grade: 7</p> <p>In early 2024, the government adopted the National Plan for European Integration 2024–2026. Several policy and legal initiatives adopted have raised concerns in terms of their alignment with European standards. In May 2024, Parliament adopted a new major reform initiative intended to review the legislation and the state’s institutional architecture in central and local government, and the role of independent institutions, deepening reforms in the area of the good governance, rule of law and anti-corruption for Albania 2030. A dedicated ad hoc parliamentary committee started its work in July without participation of the opposition. National IPA Coordinator (NIPAC) is the General Director of SASPAC and the focal point for coordinating the preparation and submission of WBI applications. A new NIPAC was appointed in December 2023, and yet another in August 2024. LGUs’ fiscal autonomy remains at risk. Consultation and accountability to the public at LGU levels remain limited. LGUs should also continue develop and implement thoroughly local integrity plans. City council commissions on EU integration have been established in 43 of the 61 municipalities. Further coordinated efforts should be pursued to raise awareness on the role of local government in the EU integration process and to build adequate administrative capacity to benefit from EU financial support.</p>	-0.5

POLITICAL CRITERIA	EC REPORT 2023	EC REPORT 2024	CHANGE
Civil Society	<p>Preparation – Grade: 8</p> <p>Albania’s legal and regulatory framework on the right to freedom of assembly and association is in line with international standards. The ability of the National Council for Civil Society to voice the priorities of CSOs in policymaking processes remains weak. An update of the Law on the National Council is still pending. The role of civil society in the EU accession negotiation process needs to be strengthened to ensure the meaningful participation and consultation of CSOs in policy-making processes. The Partnership Platform on European Integration, set up in 2019, is partly operational.</p>	<p>Preparation – Grade: 7.5</p> <p>The legal framework on the right to freedom of assembly and association is in line with international standards. The legal framework for public consultations is generally in line with European standards, but consultations remain mostly formal. A new strategic framework on enabling environment of CSOs is not yet in place. A total of 29 out of 33 of Partnership Platform on European Integration tables have now been established although they have varying levels of participation and effectiveness. The legal framework is only partially promoting access to funding. Albania still does not have tax incentives in place for individual donations, and there are only marginal tax incentives for corporate donations.</p>	-0.5
Civil Society	<p>Progress – Grade: 5</p> <p>There has been no progress in the implementation of the roadmap on an enabling environment for civil society. Preparations began in 2022 to set up the national electronic register of NPO, in line with the 2021 law. It is envisaged that the electronic register will be operational at the end of 2023. The public funding of the Agency for the Support of Civil Society remains insufficient to sustain CSOs’ activities. Limited progress continued in the field of VAT refund. In 2022, amendments were made to the 2014 VAT Law to allow tax exemptions for CSOs, however implementation has not started yet.</p>	<p>Progress – Grade: 5</p> <p>No progress was made in the implementation of the Roadmap on an Enabling Environment for Civil Society 2019-2023 or in strengthening the structures and mechanisms for dialogue and coordination between the government and civil society. The national electronic register of non-profit organisations has not yet become fully operational although it was planned to be in place by the end of 2023. Public funding for civil society organisations and support to social enterprises remains insufficient to ensure their sustainability. The ineffective new VAT exemption scheme has created major obstacles for non-profit organisations to implement foreign aid programmes. Some progress was made in the establishment of European Integration Partnership Platform consultation and discussion tables.</p>	0

POLITICAL CRITERIA	EC REPORT 2023	EC REPORT 2024	CHANGE
Public Administration Reform	<p>Preparation – Grade: 8</p> <p>Albania remains moderately prepared in the area of public administration reform. The legal basis and the institutional set-up for consistent policy making are partially in place. On public consultation, a regulatory framework is in place. The electronic web portal is operational and has been updated. However, the proportion of legal acts that undergo online public consultations remains very low. SASPAC is now staffed and assumed its mandate to manage policy and project coordination between government and donors. Further efforts are needed to strengthen the administrative capacity of line ministries and the Prime Minister’s Office and to increase the accountability of management. Public scrutiny of government work needs to be further improved. Budget transparency remains satisfactory overall with the publication of all key budget documents.</p>	<p>Preparation – Grade: 8</p> <p>The legal basis and the institutional set-up for consistent policy making are partially in place. Approximately two thirds of the approved draft laws in 2023 originated from outside the Government Analytical Programme. The administrative capacity for evidence-based policymaking and legislative development needs to be further strengthened. The percentage of legal acts that go through public consultation should be further increased. The quality control of consultations needs to be strengthened, and proper follow-up ensured. The quality of the RIAs also needs to be improved. Further efforts are needed to strengthen the administrative capacity of line ministries and the Prime Minister’s Office and to increase the accountability of management. Public scrutiny of government work remains weak, and the increased use of extraordinary proceedings limits the possibility for parliamentary scrutiny. Budget transparency is mostly satisfactory with all key budget documents regularly published. The human resources management information system (HRMIS) does not cover the entire public sector and in its current design cannot be used as an automated payroll system. There is no comprehensive strategy for service delivery in force. It should be included in the future PAR Strategy. Public entities <i>should improve</i> compliance with transparency requirements and be more responsive to requests for access to information.</p>	0
Public Administration Reform	<p>Progress – Grade: 6</p> <p>It has made limited progress in delivering on last year’s recommendations. Preparations for the new Strategies on Public Administration Reform (PAR) and Public Financial Management (PFM) have started but they still have to be adopted. The new 2023–2030 Decentralisation Strategy was adopted in April 2023. A salary reform was initiated in 2023, but does not yet fully address the complexity of the salary structure or the limited role of performance. Significant efforts were made on digitalisation of service delivery through the e-Albania platform. This was accompanied by a closure of front office contact centres. A restitution of some contact centres is under consideration, together with other ongoing efforts to improve the user experience of the portal online. Increased attention is required to digital security and protection of personal data. The Albanian School of Public Administration (ASPA) continued to adapt its training programmes for professional development, with a stronger focus on EU integration.</p>	<p>Progress – Grade: 6</p> <p>It made limited progress in delivering on last year’s recommendations. The strategic framework for public administration is not yet fully in place because the public administration reform and the anti-corruption strategies for 2023–2030 have not yet been adopted. The new 2023–2030 PFM strategy was adopted and it is comprehensive. Implementation of the 2023–2030 strategy on decentralisation and local governance stalled. No significant progress was made in the achievement of carrying out reforms in the area of good governance. The salary reform adopted in May 2023 brought very limited structural changes but significantly increased civil servants’ salaries. The reform failed to address key issues. Implementation of the 2022–2026 digital agenda has continued to progress steadily and its action plan is being successfully implemented, but digital security and equal access for vulnerable groups is still an issue. The Law on e-government was adopted in June 2023. The government continued to expand its offer of online services. Service delivery to citizens and businesses needs to be further developed. In 2023, 46 acts were subject to consultation, out of a total of 66 adopted acts. The use of RIAs was limited to half of the draft laws. Albania adopted the revised Law on access to information in September 2023. ASPA continued to make training programmes for professional development available, with a strong focus on EU integration. No progress was made to improve the school’s physical and digital infrastructure.</p>	0