

Screening report

Albania

Cluster 5 – Resources, agriculture and cohesion

Chapter 11: Agriculture and Rural Development

Date of screening meetings:

Explanatory meeting: 2-5 December 2019, update on 17-18 July 2023

Bilateral meeting: 13-15 November 2023

Chapter 12: Food Safety, Veterinary and Phytosanitary

Date of screening meetings:

Explanatory meeting: 18- 22 February 2019, update on 19-20 July 2023

Bilateral meeting: 20-24 November 2023

Chapter 13: Fisheries and aquaculture

Date of screening meetings:

Explanatory meeting: 12-13 June 2019, update on 18 July 2023

Bilateral meeting: 16 November 2023

Chapter 22: Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments

Date of screening meetings:

Explanatory meeting: 5 -6 February 2019

Bilateral meeting: 23-24 October 2023

Chapter 33: Financial Budgetary and Provisions

Date of screening meetings:

Explanatory meeting: 27 September 2019, update on 20 July 2023

Bilateral meeting: 25 November 2023

PREAMBLE

After the first Intergovernmental Conference on accession negotiations with Albania in July 2022, the Commission immediately launched the screening process.

The screening is based on the enhanced enlargement methodology, which was adopted in 2020 and organises the negotiating chapters in thematic clusters in order to inject dynamism into the negotiating process and to foster cross-fertilisation of efforts beyond individual chapters. These thematic clusters bring together the chapters / areas according to broader themes and will allow a stronger focus on core sectors. Within each individual cluster, screening is carried out through meetings on a chapter-by-chapter basis. The substance of those clusters and chapters, as set out in Annex II of the Negotiating Framework, mirror the requirements for membership stemming from the Copenhagen criteria.

This report provides an assessment of where Albania stands in terms of alignment and capacity to apply the *acquis* in Cluster 5. The negotiating framework also refers to the possibility of accelerated integration. At the bilateral meetings Albania has requested participation in certain areas before accession. This report provides the Commissions opinion and answer to these requests.

Regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations remain essential elements of Stabilisation and Association process.

It is important to continue the dialogue with civil society and other stakeholders, with the aim of ensuring the support of citizens for the EU accession process. Albania is expected to strategically communicate the benefits and obligations of the accession process to its public.

A) INTRODUCTION

The enhanced enlargement methodology¹, as reflected in the Negotiating Framework with Albania, puts the negotiating chapters of the EU *acquis* into clusters.

The **Resources, Agriculture and Cohesion** cluster encompasses the legislation on agriculture and rural development, fisheries and aquaculture, food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy, as well as regional policy and coordination of structural instruments, and financial and budgetary provisions. This cluster includes five chapters of the EU *acquis*:

- Under Chapter 11, **agriculture and rural development** aiming to ensure food security, safeguard farmers' income, maintain vibrant rural areas, while helping to tackle climate change and environmental challenges.
- Under Chapter 12, **food safety, veterinary, and phytosanitary policies** aiming to ensure food and feed safety as well as an high level of consumer's interests protection. The chapter also covers animal health, welfare, and the safety of food of animal origin.
- Under Chapter 13, **fisheries and aquaculture** manages the Common Fisheries Policy aiming to ensure long-term sustainability for fisheries and aquaculture, the availability of food supplies and a fair standard of living for fisheries and aquaculture communities..
- Under Chapter 22, **regional policy and coordination of structural instrument** is the EU's main tool for reducing regional disparities and investing in sustainable and inclusive socio-economic growth. This requires appropriate administrative capacity on programme and project levels as well as the fulfilment of other EU *acquis* elements such as environmental or public procurement legislation.
- Under Chapter 33, **financial and budgetary provisions** govern the funding of the EU budget, requiring appropriate administrative capacity to adequately coordinate and manage its own resources.

The chapters under the **Resources, Agriculture and Cohesion cluster** should not be seen in isolation, as several have **commonalities and so interact with each other** to be mutually reinforcing. For example, **regional policy and coordination of structural instruments** is closely related to **Green agenda and sustainable connectivity** policies.

This **screening report is structured** according to the **respective areas and chapters** of the cluster. Each area/chapter starts with a short overview of the **main content of the EU *acquis* / European standards**. Each thematic area within a chapter then first summarises the **country's presentations and the outcome of the expert discussions** at the bilateral screening meeting, followed by the **Commission's assessment**.

In the last **section**, from its findings the Commission draws **recommendations for the next steps in the accession negotiations process in the present cluster**.

Albania stated that it accepts the *acquis* in the chapters of cluster 5. It reserved however the right to request transitional arrangements in certain limited areas of the *acquis* in this cluster at a later stage in the negotiations.

¹ COM(2020) 57 final

B) CHAPTER 11 – AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The *acquis* on agriculture and rural development covers a large number of binding rules, many of which are directly applicable. Their proper application and their effective enforcement by an efficient public administration are essential for the functioning of the common agricultural policy (CAP). This requires the setting up of a paying agency and management and control systems such as the integrated administration and control system (IACS), and the capacity to implement rural development actions. Member States must be able to apply EU legislation on direct support schemes and to implement the common market organisation for various agricultural products. The introduction of the CAP Strategic Plans for the implementation period 2023-2027 gives more flexibility to the Member States in adapting measures to local conditions while delivering on overall CAP objectives.

The implementation, management and control of the CAP require the creation, modification and/or reinforcement of appropriate administrative structures. In some cases, the *acquis* sets out detailed specifications for the required administrative structures. In others the *acquis* simply uses terms such as the “competent authority” to refer to the administrative structure that is needed. This means that it is left to each Member State to decide which institution is responsible for the effective implementation of the *acquis*. However, the functions that EU Member States must carry out - through the administrative structures they establish - are clearly specified in the *acquis*.

Albania stated that it accepts the *acquis* on *Chapter 11 – Agriculture and Rural Development*.

I. HORIZONTAL ISSUES

I.A. GENERAL ELEMENTS

a. Country presentation

In 2022, Albania had 1.13 million hectares (ha) of agricultural land, i.e. 40% of total land. The greatest share of agricultural land resources consists of arable land (60%) and grassland (almost 40%). Agriculture is by far the most important activity of the population representing almost 34% of all employment; it is the main or a partial source of income for 321 250 holdings (2012). The sector represents 18.6% of the gross domestic product (GDP). Albania’s agriculture is characterised by traditional production and small subsistence farming, with an average size of a holding of 1.2 ha. This results in an unfavourable structure of the agricultural sector and low productivity. Albania is a net importer of food products.

In the coastal region production is dominated by fruit and olives. The farms in the more mountainous areas are predominantly livestock breeding with cattle, sheep and goats prevailing. Overall cereals, vegetables, white beans, potatoes and medical and aromatic plants have the highest production areas among field crops while olives, fruit trees and grapes are the most important permanent crops. Albania production covers around the national consumption of maize, fruits, vegetables, olive oil, milk and eggs. The main export products are vegetables, including tomatoes and cucumber followed by medical and aromatic plants.

Albania stated that its agricultural policy is based on the 2007 Law on Agriculture and Rural Development. This law sets out the objectives of agriculture policy and provides the general framework for the development of and support to agriculture and rural areas. The National Strategy on Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries (SARDF) 2021-2027 defines the national policy for food security, sustainable food production, natural resource management and strengthening of rural areas. An action plan for the implementation of the strategy was adopted for the years 2022-2024. An agricultural census was conducted in 2012 and updated in 2017. It provides a statistical basis for policymaking on agriculture and rural development. The next agricultural census in line with the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) and EU practices, was planned for 2024 but has not yet been conducted. The fieldwork and agricultural census is in preparation and is

scheduled to be completed in 2026. Albania stated that the overall responsibility for agricultural policy lies with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

b. Commission assessment

The Commission took note of Albania's presentation on horizontal issues on agriculture and rural development.

I.B. FINANCING OF THE AGRICULTURAL EXPENDITURE

a. Country presentation

The agricultural policy of Albania is financed from the annual state budget. Support to the agriculture policy is detailed in an annual budget law. In 2023 the agricultural budget amounted to EUR 141.9 million. Rural development, supported by the EU, is the highest budgetary programme, with 63.5% of the total, followed by food safety and consumer protection (13.4%) and irrigation and drainage (14.1%). Besides the EU, other partners also contribute to the agricultural budget through funding projects.

b. Commission assessment

Financing of Albania's agricultural expenditure is **not aligned** with the EU *acquis*. The financing of agricultural expenditure will have to be fully aligned with the EU *acquis* and the delivery model of the CAP..

I.C. AGRICULTURE SUPPORT SCHEMES

a. Country presentation

According to Albania, direct support schemes are based on the 2007 Law on agriculture and rural development, the Strategy on Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries 2021-2027 and the yearly Law on the agricultural budget. Direct payments are coupled to production and not subject to cross-compliance. Direct payments are granted for livestock (cows, sheep and goats), beekeeping and plant production in greenhouses (vegetables, strawberries and table grapes). The administration of the schemes is carried out by the Agricultural and Rural Development Agency (ARDA) and payments are made after the administrative and on the spot controls by ARDA.

b. Commission assessment

Direct payments are **not aligned** with the EU *acquis*. They are coupled to production and not subject to conditionality. The support measures need to be fully aligned with the EU *acquis*, decoupling them from production, introducing the system of conditionality and area-based payments. Under the CAP, voluntary coupled support is limited to certain sectors and types of production.

I.D. RURAL DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT

a. Country presentation

Albania's rural development policy is based on the national Strategy for Agriculture, Rural Development, and Fisheries 2021-2027. Interrelated strategies exist on irrigation and drainage and on sustainable tourism. The Strategy aims at sustainable food production and quality, sustainable management of natural resources and climate actions and strengthening the socio-economic fabric of rural areas. An Action Plan of the Strategy provides the measures for the implementation of the strategic goals. The measures are funded by the national budget, EU IPARD programme and other donors' funds.

Albania implements the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural Development (IPARD). Under IPARD II, Albania has implemented measures on investments in physical assets, on farm diversification and business development, and on technical assistance.

b. Commission assessment

Albania's policy on rural development has a **low level of alignment** with the EU *acquis*. It will need to be further aligned with EU requirements, in particular as regards the selection of measures, programming, monitoring, controlling and evaluation capacities. The environmental and climate orientation of the policy should be strengthened in line with the EU objectives and framework in rural development. The rural development expenditure will have to be adapted to the new delivery model of the CAP strategic plans.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has overall responsibility for rural development policy and implementation. This capacity will need to be strengthened.

I.E. MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING OF AGRICULTURE EXPENDITURE

a. Country presentation

The Agricultural and Rural Development Agency (ARDA) is the structure implementing the national support schemes in agriculture and rural development, also entrusted with budget implementation of the IPARD programme. Albania indicated that it has started to plan the future development of ARDA.

b. Commission assessment

Albania is **not aligned** with the EU *acquis* in the area of management and monitoring of agriculture expenditure. ARDA does not yet have the capacity to manage and control CAP payments. Particular efforts will be required to establish the necessary structures, which will comply with the requirements of the *acquis* and will administer all payments under the CAP. Extensive capacity building will be necessary well in advance of accession.

I.F. INTEGRATED ADMINISTRATION AND CONTROL SYSTEM (IACS)

a. Country presentation

Albania stated that it has currently no Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS) in line with the *acquis*. Beneficiaries of support are identified in the farm register, which also contains information such as the farm area, crops produced, number of livestock and mechanisation. Animals are registered in the livestock and veterinary information system (for bovines, sheep, goats, pigs and bees). A Management Information System (MIS) for national schemes manages applications for support including direct payments. The system manages applications of farmers for support, certain administrative and on-the-spot controls. The results of controls are also stored in the system. The system also administers to some extent the authorisation and execution of payments. Currently there is no Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS). There is a centralised Land Information System (LIS), which combines cadastral, ownership, land use and related data on land at parcel level. The programme has built a Geographic Information System (GIS) infrastructure for collecting, analysing and updating land data.

b. Commission assessment

The present control systems as applied in Albania are **not aligned** with the EU *acquis* on IACS. Particular efforts will be required to establish the necessary elements of IACS in order to comply with the requirements of the *acquis*. Extensive capacity building will be necessary well in advance of accession. A LPIS needs to be put in place in order to correctly identify all agricultural land parcels. Correctness of the information in the land registration needs to be ensured. The farm register needs to be improved to fully align with EU *acquis*.

I.G. FARM SUSTAINABILITY DATA NETWORK (FSDN)

a. Country presentation

Albania stated that it does not have a farm accountancy data network (FADN). A FADN survey collected the necessary information for the FADN and a pilot sampling with 40 farms across the

country was conducted in the first quarter of 2023 based on 2022 data. An action plan to set up the FADN with specific timelines and resource allocation was adopted in April 2023 but the implementation is delayed. The development of the FADN software is ongoing, in partnership with the National Agency for Information Society (NAIS) and a contracted company.

b. Commission assessment

Albania is **not aligned** with the *acquis* on FADN. A FADN needs to be established. Albania has only started to develop its FADN in line with the EU *acquis*. Albania needs to ensure a sufficient number of farms to be included in the network to reach a representative level across the sector. The transformation of the FADN into the new farm sustainability data network (FSDN) will have to be taken on board to ensure its full harmonisation. For this, expanding the FADN economic scope to environmental and social dimensions will be needed. Sufficient administrative capacity to deploy and maintain the FADN and to transform it into the FSDN is needed.

I.H. STATE AIDS

a. Country presentation

Albania explained that a national state aid law applies to manufacturing and services sectors except agriculture and fisheries. Albania indicated that it applies a number of support schemes through the agricultural budget for certain plant production and animal farming, as well as investments, diesel provision and advisory services. Albania furthermore indicated that it does not have yet a legal ground and administrative framework for the notification of state aid in agriculture. However, Albania has requested technical assistance for capacity building in this field.

b. Commission assessment

Albania is **not aligned** with the EU *acquis* on State aid. Albania has a detailed law on State aid, which seems to mirror the EU *acquis* on State aid. This law is, however, not applicable to agriculture (and fisheries). The Commission does not have enough information at this stage to assess whether the support schemes to the agriculture sector are aligned with the EU *acquis* on State aid. Albania will need to bring all its aid measures in line with the *acquis* upon accession. (*See Cluster 2 Chapter 8 – Competition Policy for more detailed information*)

I.I. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – HORIZONTAL MEASURES

Albania has a low level of alignment with the horizontal EU <i>acquis</i> on agriculture and rural development. Albania has a low level of alignment with the <i>acquis</i> on rural development support. Albania is not aligned with the <i>acquis</i> on financing the agricultural expenditure, agriculture support schemes, management and monitoring of agriculture expenditure, integrated administration and control system (IACS), farm sustainability data network (FSDN), and state aids.
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II. AGRICULTURAL MARKETS - COMMON MARKET ORGANISATION

II.A. TRADE MECHANISMS

a. Country presentation

Albania became member of the World Trade Organisation on 8 September 2000. Export subsidies or special safeguard measures are not permitted. Albania stated that it applies the Combined Nomenclature for the classification of products.

The use of tariff quotas is based on the "first come first served" principle managed by the Customs Administration. Albania does not apply any system of licences to imports and exports of agricultural products in line with EU standards. There are no export subsidies.

The Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU provides Albania with practically duty-free access to the EU market for most agricultural products (with the exceptions of certain live animals

and meats, while for sugar and wine tariff quotas are applied, and for fruit and vegetables subject to the entry price, the *ad valorem* duties are eliminated while the specific duties are applied). Import tariffs for agricultural products from the EU have been widely liberalised (except for certain live animals, meats, fruit and vegetables, while certain cereals and dairy products are subject to tariff quotas). There are no special provisions for the export or import of agricultural products other than the standard customs procedures and sanitary/phytosanitary checks.

Albania is a member of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), where trade in agricultural goods is fully liberalised. It has concluded Preferential Trade Agreements with EFTA countries, Türkiye and the United Kingdom.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has a **low level** of alignment with the EU *acquis* on trade mechanisms. Albania's tariffs and trade arrangements for agricultural products with third countries need to be aligned with the *acquis* upon accession.

II.B. MARKET INTERVENTIONS

a. Country presentation

Albania does not have a public intervention system where agricultural products are purchased and stored by national authorities and then sold back on the market at a later stage to prevent severe drops in prices. Albania also explained that it does not provide aid for private storage mechanisms. Albania has no provisions for exceptional support measures in case of market disruption or market monitoring. However, in 2022 it adopted a national support measure for wheat production due to market disruption. Albania does not have producer or inter-branch organisations in place.

b. Commission assessment

Albania's policy on intervention is **not aligned** with the EU *acquis*. Albania will need to apply the storage and exceptional support measures under the common market organisation of the *acquis* upon accession.

II.C. SCHOOL SCHEME

a. Country presentation

Albania implemented a two-year project in two schools for improving awareness on milk safety and quality, nutrition to school children, and educational activities with farmers, teachers and pupils. Albania intends to develop an action plan for the common market organisation and strengthen administrative capacities for the implementation of school schemes.

b. Commission assessment

Albania is **not aligned** with the EU *acquis* on the school scheme. Albania is encouraged to align with the EU *acquis* to benefit from the EU support to the distribution of fruit, vegetables, milk and milk products to children in schools and accompanying educational measures as of accession.

II. D. PLANT PRODUCTS

a. Country presentation

Albania's main arable crops produced are cereals: wheat and maize. Oilseed and protein crop production (sunflower, soybeans) is very limited. In 2022 overall, 692 329 tonnes of cereals and oilseeds were produced on 133 411 ha (about 20% of the agricultural area). Production of maize and wheat amounted to 401 419 tonnes and 233 146 tonnes in 2022, respectively. Import largely exceeds export, as production does not cover the national consumption. In 2022, Albania had a negative trade balance of EUR 81 million of cereals. Albania produced 789 tonnes of seeds of sunflower and 686 tonnes of soybeans on 572 ha in 2022, with low trade volumes. Albania has voluntary marketing

standards for cereals.

Albania has no production of sugar. Sugar beet produced on around 700 ha of land is used as fodder. Albania produced seeds of sunflower and soybeans on 572 ha in 2022, with very little trade. Albania indicated a marginal rice production and no production of fibre crops (flax and hemp) and hops. There are therefore no related specific measures for those crops. There is no production of potato starch, cotton and silkworms.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has a **low level** of alignment with the *acquis* on arable crops. Market measures such as producer organisations will need to be fully aligned with the *acquis*.

II.E. ANIMAL PRODUCTS

a. Country presentation

In the sector of **milk and milk products**, there were 261 000 cows, 1.08 million sheep and 562 800 goats in Albania in 2022, their numbers steadily decreasing in recent years. There is no division between dairy and beef production. The sector is highly fragmented with more than 85% of holdings involved in cow milk production having up to 3 dairy cows. Headage payments are made for cows, sheep and goats. Milk productivity is low. Total milk production in 2022 is recorded at 970 million litres, 85% of which was cow milk, 7% sheep milk and 8% goat milk. Albania had a negative trade balance of around EUR 44 million of dairy products in 2022. Yoghurt and cheese are the main products of Albania's processing industry. Albanian marketing standards for milk and milk products are in place and voluntary, they are not aligned with the EU *acquis*. Storage or exceptional support measures, contractual relations and producer organisations are not implemented in Albania.

As regards beef, there were 297 656 head of cattle in 2022, the number steadily decreasing in recent years. There is no division between dairy and beef production and bovine meat is mainly a side product from milk production. 85% of the cattle holdings have up to 3 heads. There are direct payments per cow. Domestic production of cattle meat decreased steadily in recent years and amounted to around 56 000 tonnes in 2022. Albania had a negative trade balance of EUR 30 million for cattle meat in 2022. Albania has a system for the identification of bovine animals by ear tags and their registration in an electronic database. Albanian marketing standards for beef and veal are in place and voluntary. Albania stated that it applies a carcass classification system that is not aligned with the EU *acquis*. Albania stated that its national labelling system of beef products is partially aligned with EU requirements. Other EU legislation is not reflected in Albanian legislation, such as storage and exceptional support measures, contractual relations in the sector, and producer organisations.

There were 1.8 million **sheep** and 562 800 **goats** in Albania in 2022. Over 80% of them are bred in small farms with up to 50 heads. 33 000 tonnes of sheep meat and 15 000 tonnes of goat meat were produced in 2022. Albania imported around 1 500 tonnes of sheep and goat meat, while exports were insignificant. Milk production is important from both sheep (69 000 tonnes in 2022) and goats (76 000 tonnes in 2022). There was also considerable import of live animals worth over EUR 4 million in 2022. There are direct payments per head of sheep and goats. There is no alignment with the EU Regulation on the common organisation of the markets (CMO) as concerns support to private storage, the carcass classification system, and exceptional measures.

For **pig meat** production, Albania had 137 200 pigs in 2022. Pig meat production amounted to around 15 000 tonnes. Albania had a negative trade balance of EUR 29 million of pork in 2022. Pig meat consumption is relatively modest compared to other types of meat such as goat, poultry and sheep. An animal identification and registration system for pigs is in place. Albania has a carcass classification system that is not aligned with the EU *acquis*. There is no private storage aid, exceptional market measures or price monitoring system.

There were 6.85 million heads of **poultry** in 2022, down 13.3% from 2021 due to bird flu. Poultry meat production in 2022 was 20 735 tonnes. Albania had a negative trade balance of live poultry and

poultry meat of around EUR 38 million in 2022. Albania, as the EU, does not grant direct payments in this sector. Albania considers that its marketing standards for poultry meat are not aligned with EU legislation. Weekly price reporting is not implemented. Albania does not have exceptional market support measures. 776 million **eggs** were produced in Albania in 2022, down from 899 million in 2021. There were 5 million laying hens (250 000 less than in 2021). Albania had a negative trade balance of EUR 1.4 million in 2022. Albania stated that its legislation for marketing and trading standards of eggs is highly aligned with the CMO Regulation. Weekly price reporting is not implemented. Albania does not apply exceptional measures for eggs and egg products.

In 2022, **honey** production was 5 391 tonnes and there were 479 000 bee colonies in Albania. Albania considers that the national law on beekeeping No. 20/2023 is partially aligned with the CMO regulation and the honey directive. Currently, Albania has direct support per hive. International trade is low, with a slight negative trade balance.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has a **low level** of alignment with the *acquis* on animal products: milk and milk products, beef, sheep and goats, pig meat, poultry, eggs and honey. The main challenge to alignment with the EU is the sector fragmentation. Carcass classification systems, animal identification and registration, storage and exceptional support measures, contractual relations in the sector, producer organisations and price reporting need to be aligned with the *acquis*.

II.F. WINE, AROMATISED WINE AND SPIRIT DRINKS

a. Country presentation

Wine production in Albania reached 3.03 million litres in 2022. Vines were grown on 11 040 ha and about 60% of the 211 178 tonnes of grape produced in Albania were processed into wine. 74 wineries were registered in the vineyard cadastre. The cadastre includes vineyards over 1 000 m². A system to survey the individual producers' harvests, production and stocks was put in place in 2022, which obliges each operator in the wine sector to declare harvest, production and stocks. Albania had a negative trade balance of around EUR 18 million in 2022. Albania stated that the framework legislation on vineyards and wines adopted in 2022 is partially aligned with the EU *acquis*, in particular with most EU definitions of wine products, oenological practices, and labelling and presentation. Albania is a member of the International Organisation of Vine and Wine (OIV) since September 2023.

Albania stated that it does not have production of **aromatised wines**. However, legislation partially aligned with the EU *acquis* on definitions of aromatised wines is in place.

Albania's production of **spirit drinks** amounted to 0.64 million litres in 2022. Brandy and Raki represent about 70% of the production. Albania stated that its current spirit drinks legislation is partly harmonised with the *acquis* on definition, description and presentation of spirit drinks.

b. Commission assessment

In the **wine** sector, Albania has **partially aligned** its legislation with the EU *acquis* but efforts are needed with a view to further aligning, in particular on support schemes, planting authorisations and market stabilisation schemes. Methods for official analysis remain to be defined. Legislations on **aromatised wines** and **spirit drinks** are partially aligned with the EU *acquis* and also need to be brought in line with the *acquis*.

II.G. FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

a. Country presentation

Fruit and vegetables account for 20% of Albania's agriculture. They covered 24% of the overall cultivated area in 2022. In 2022 the total production of fresh fruit reached 295 427 tonnes and the production of vegetables amounted to 1.35 million tonnes. The main fruits produced are pip fruit (apples, pears, quinces), and stone fruit (plums, cherries, peaches and apricots). Melons and

watermelons accounted for 23% of the total vegetable production. Other main vegetable crops are tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and cabbages. In 2022 Albania had a negative trade balance of EUR 17 million for fruit and a positive trade balance of EUR 67 million for vegetables. Albania is also a net exporter of medicinal and aromatic plants, which were produced on 7 098 ha and amounted to around 16 000 t in 2022, with a positive trade balance of EUR 44 million in 2022. Albania applies direct support for production of vegetables, strawberries and table grapes in greenhouses, as well as for medicinal and aromatic plants.

Producer organisations, producer groups or interbranch organisations as defined by EU legislation do not exist in Albania. However, agricultural cooperative societies under national legislation have some elements of producer organisations. Price reporting is available for certain fruit and vegetables sold on wholesale markets. There are marketing standards for 26 fruits and vegetables, which are not aligned with the EU *acquis*.

b. Commission assessment

As regards fruit and vegetables, Albanian has a **low level of alignment** with the *acquis*. Payments for production in greenhouses of vegetables, strawberries and table grapes as well as for medicinal and aromatic plants are not in line with the *acquis*. Albania will need to develop its administrative capacity to implement this scheme. The existing marketing standards are not aligned with the *acquis* and will need to be harmonised with EU standards. Albania will have to set up inspection arrangements for marketing standards. Albania already operates a system of price reporting for fruit and vegetables but its full compliance with the *acquis* will need to be ensured.

II.H. OLIVE OIL

a. Country presentation

Albania stated that in 2022 it produced 157 710 t of olives and 29 230 tonnes of olive oil. In 2022 Albania had a negative trade balance in olive oil of EUR 3.1 million. Legislation exists on marketing standards, quality characteristics and labelling of olive oil, which Albania considers partially aligned with EU legislation. There are no producer organisations in line with EU *acquis*.

There are no direct payments for olives and no aid for private storage. Albania is a member to the International Olive Council (IOC) since 2019.

b. Commission assessment

Albanian legislation is **partially aligned** with the EU *acquis* on olive oil. Albania needs to align its legislation with the EU *acquis* on marketing standards for olive oil, private storage aid, producer organisations and interbranch organisations. EU legislation needs to be reflected in Albanian legislation and implemented.

II.I. TOBACCO

a. Country presentation

Albania informed that 1 792 tonnes of raw tobacco (mostly oriental variety) were produced in 2022 on 832 ha of land. Albania does not apply direct payments for tobacco and does not implement rural development schemes to tobacco producers for activities directly linked to tobacco production.

b. Commission assessment

Albania will need to harmonise its legislation with the EU reporting requirements on tobacco production and price, and with the provisions on interbranch organisations in the sector.

II.J. COCOA, CHOCOLATE, COFFEE, FRUIT JUICES, JAMS

a. Country presentation

Albania produced 17.7 million liters of fruit juices and had a negative trade balance of EUR 4 million in 2022. Production of jams, jellies and marmalades amounted to 1 700 t in 2022. Trade balances for jams, cocoa and chocolate, and coffee were negative as well. Albania stated that its legislation in the field is partially aligned with the EU *acquis*.

b. Commission assessment

Albania's legislation is **partially aligned** with the EU *acquis* on cocoa and chocolate, coffee, fruit juices and jams, in particular on definitions and labelling. Albania needs to fully align its legislation and ensure sufficient control capacities.

II.K. NON-ANNEX I

a. Country presentation

Specific trade arrangements for non-Annex I products are in place with the EU, EFTA countries and UK. For all other bilateral and multilateral trade agreements, processed agricultural products (PAPs) are not explicitly specified as separate groups of products. The average shares of PAPs in total agricultural exports and imports in the period 2020-2022 was 15% and 39%, respectively. Albania does not apply specific legislation regulating the trade of PAPs. Import custom duties on PAPs are not implemented, similar to the EU. For non-Annex I products Albania applies *ad valorem* duty (% of the value). Albania does not apply the system of customs protection for PAPs on the basis of the agricultural components and stated that it cannot introduce or implement such system before its accession to the EU.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has a **low level** of alignment with the EU *acquis* on non-Annex I products. Albania will need to bring its tariff and trade arrangements with third countries for non-Annex I products in line with the *acquis* upon accession.

II.Q. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – AGRICULTURAL MARKETS - COMMON MARKET ORGANISATION

Albania has a **low level of alignment** with the EU *acquis* on trade mechanisms. Albania's policy on market intervention is not aligned with the EU *acquis*. Albania will need to apply the storage and exceptional support measures under the common market organisation of the *acquis* upon accession. Albania is not aligned with the *acquis* on school schemes. Albania has a low level of alignment with the *acquis* on arable crops, milk and milk products, beef, sheep and goats, pig meat, poultry, eggs, honey, and fruit and vegetables. Albania is partially aligned with the *acquis* on wine, aromatised wine and spirit drinks, olive oil, and cocoa, chocolate, coffee, fruit juices and jams. EU rules need to be reflected in national legislation and implemented. Albania has a low level of alignment with the EU *acquis* on non-Annex I products.

III. QUALITY POLICY

a. Country presentation

Quality policy is governed by the Law on Industrial Property No. 9947/2008, the Law on Quality Schemes for Agricultural Products and Foodstuff No. 8/2019, and the Law on vineyard and wine No. 86/2022, and the Law No. 66/2018 of 24.9.2018, on the accession of the Republic of Albania to the Geneva Act of the Lisbon Agreement on designations of origin and geographical indications, accompanied by implementing legislation. Albania stated that its quality policy legislation is partially aligned with the EU *acquis*. There is no alignment on aromatised wines and spirit drinks. Albania has

13 products registered as geographical indications and 3 products registered as traditional specialties guaranteed. There are registers for protected geographic indications, protected designations of origin, traditional specialties guaranteed and other schemes.

b. Commission assessment

Albanian legislation is **partially aligned** with the current EU *acquis* on quality policy. Albania applies a quality policy scheme with some similarities to the EU scheme of geographical indications. Legislation on quality schemes for aromatic wines and spirit drinks still needs to be developed. The system for implementation of the quality schemes needs to be further strengthened.

C. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS –QUALITY POLICY

Albanian legislation is **partially aligned** with the EU *acquis* on quality policy. Albania applies a quality policy scheme with some similarities to the EU scheme. Legislation on quality schemes for aromatic wines and spirit drinks still needs to be developed.

IV. ORGANIC FARMING

a. Country presentation

Albania stated that organic farming is governed by Law No. 106/2016 on biologic production, labelling of biologic products and their control, and implementing legislation. Albania considers its legislation as partially aligned with the EU *acquis*. The new law no.104/2024 “On organic production, labelling of organic products and their control”, was approved on 19 September 2024 by the Parliament, which is largely aligned with Regulation (EU) 2018/848 on organic production and labelling of organic products, with the exception of some mandatory provisions for Member States. The new law entered into force in October 2024 and will be implemented from October 2026, following capacity building and secondary legislation.

The sector of organic farming in Albania is small. In 2022, the share of organic area in total cultivated area was 0.15%, with a production of 2091 tonnes on 731 ha. Organic wild and forest production had a yield of 12 678 tonnes, medicinal and aromatic plants accounted for approximately 90% of the total organic wild production.

A system for control and certification of organic agriculture is in place.

Producers involved in conversion to organic production and organic farming receive support in the form of a payment per farm.

b. Commission assessment

Albania’s legislation is **partially aligned** with the EU *acquis* on organic farming. Albania should pursue its plans for alignment with the EU rules through the planned legislation. The control system needs to be further strengthened.

C. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – ORGANIC FARMING

Albania’s legislation is **partially aligned** with the EU *acquis* on organic farming. Albania should continue the alignment with the EU rules and further strengthen the control system.

V. PROMOTION OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS

a. Country presentation

The promotion of agricultural products in Albania is planned in the National strategy on agriculture, rural development and fisheries. Activities cover local, national and international levels and aim to promote local products, cooperation with international operators and agritourism. The activities are implemented through participation in national and international fairs, broadcasting campaigns, digital

and social media promotion. Albania intends to increase promotion effectiveness through an integrated communication plan and monitoring its performance.

b. Commission assessment

Albania is **not aligned** with the EU *acquis* on information and promotion policy. Albania already has promotion activities on different levels in place and intends to develop an integrated promotion plan. Albania needs to align with the EU *acquis* to implement the EU information and promotion policy upon accession.

C. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – PROMOTION OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS

Albania is **not aligned** with the EU *acquis* on information and promotion policy. Albania needs to align with the EU *acquis* to implement the EU information and promotion policy upon accession.

VI. FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION MEASURES – AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

a. Country presentation

There is comprehensive Albanian legislation in place to prevent corruption in the public administration. The Strategy against corruption with its action plan details the anticorruption pillar in the National Strategy for Development and Integration 2030. Corruption prevention measures are based on three pillars: (a) Transparency, ensured in particular through digitalisation and online services such as the Farmer's Portal and online application for support measures, (b) monitoring and auditing and (c) integrity. The integrity plans of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Agency for Rural Development and Agricultural are completed by the Code of Ethics, and defined competencies in the field, such as for whistleblowers, for anti-corruption coordination and to prevent conflict of interest. Integrity plans are reviewed every two years and the implementation checked by the Ministry of Justice every six months. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development reports every three months to the General Directorate of Anticorruption of the Ministry of Justice on the implementation of the action plan for anticorruption, including for its dependent institutions. Civil society organisations contribute to monitoring corruption and administrative and criminal punishment of corruption is in place.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has some measures in place on anti-corruption regarding agriculture and rural development and has developed some implementing capacity, which urgently needs to be strengthened to prevent corruption. The agriculture and rural development areas receive considerable public funding in the EU Member States. Support needs to be fraud-proof. The Commission will closely monitor the developments in Albania to put in place and implement the necessary standards. Albania has already established a sectoral anti-corruption policy and has put anti-corruption measures in the responsible entities in place, notably regarding transparency and the provision of information. Implementing entities involved also have measures against conflict of interests in place and have defined whistleblower competencies. For current support schemes in the sector, opportunities to establish stronger protection from multiple applications to the same support schemes should be pursued, e.g. by connecting the subsidies and the tax administration systems.

C. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – ANTI-CORRUPTION MEASURES WITH REGARD TO AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Albania has some anti-corruption measures in place in the entities responsible for implementing the EU *acquis*. It is important that these measures prove their effectiveness in practice and be extended to all institutions active under this chapter. The considerable public support in agriculture and rural development has to be fraud-proof.

C) CHAPTER 12 – FOOD SAFETY, VETERINARY AND PHYTOSANITARY POLICY

The EU *acquis* in the field of food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy aims to ensure safe and wholesome food for European citizens. The high level of safety, authenticity and integrity of food (and feed) are safeguarded thanks to the application of specific law together with rules on animal health, animal welfare, plant protection products, and plant health.

The principal pre-requisites for a candidate country in this domain are the alignment with EU legislation, as well as its correct implementation by a properly structured and trained administration. The *acquis* in this chapter consists of a very large number of Regulations, Directives and Decisions.

For the implementation of this EU *acquis* on food safety, appropriate administrative structures are needed to be able to ensure that agri-food chain legislation to protect human health, animal health and welfare, and plant health, is correctly applied and enforced including an appropriate laboratory capacity.

The General Food Law Regulation (Regulation (EC) 178/2002) is the foundation of food and feed law. It sets out an overarching and coherent framework for the development of food and feed legislation both at Union and national levels. To this end, it lays down general principles, requirements and procedures that underpin decision making in matters of food and feed safety, covering all stages of food and feed production and distribution.

Amongst other provisions, it lays down the risk analysis principle, including the precautionary principle. As regards requirements, it sets out the primary responsibility of all food and feed business operators and it requires food and feed placed on the EU market to be safe. It also sets out traceability requirements for food and feed for safety purposes, throughout the food chain. Traceability is particularly important for the protection of consumers, in light of food and feed found to be unsafe/non-compliant.

The General Food Law Regulation also sets up an independent agency responsible for scientific advice and support, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). Moreover, it creates the main procedures and tools for the management of emergencies and crises as well as the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF).

Furthermore, food-related legislation covers packaging, labelling, marketing, additives, extraction solvents, flavourings, food contact materials, food supplements, mineral waters and ionising radiations, contaminants, novel foods, quick frozen food, quality of seeds and propagating material, plant protection products, harmful organisms, plant variety rights, as well as genetically modified organisms.

The animal health law (Regulation (EU) 2016/429) lays down rules for the prevention and control of animal diseases which are transmissible to animals or to humans. In addition, concerning plant health, Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 establishes rules to determine the phytosanitary risks posed by any species, strain or biotype of pathogenic agents or parasitic plants injurious to plants or plant products ('pests') and measures to reduce those risks to an acceptable level.

Finally, EU Member States are responsible for the implementation and enforcement of agri-food chain legislation. Competent authorities organise official controls systems on their territory to verify that operators' activities and animals and goods placed on the EU market (either EU produced or imported from non-EU countries) comply with relevant standards and requirements. Regulation (EU) 2017/625 on official controls and other official activities ('Official Controls Regulation' – OCR) is a horizontal framework of basic principles and rules that apply to all areas falling in its scope and ensures that official control systems of Union Member States operate in the most effective, impartial

and transparent manner. OCR has also introduced a coherent, uniform regime for the official controls of animals and goods entering the Union.

The EU regime is based on the direct application and the effective implementation by the authorities in the EU Member States of these regulations and the delegated and implementing acts associated to them.

Albania accepts the *acquis* on chapter 12 - Food Safety, Veterinary and Phytosanitary Policy.

I. FOOD SAFETY

I.A. General FOOD LAW (REGULATION 178/2002)

a. Country presentation

Albania states to have partially aligned its 2008 Food Law, as amended - No.10/2022 with Regulation (EC) 178/2002 (General Food Law). In addition, the Albanian Food Law includes provisions from a number of EU Regulations, notably on hygiene of foodstuffs, specific hygiene rules for food of animal origin, specific control rules of products of animal origin and feed products, animal health and animal welfare rules. The Albanian Food Law is also the legal ground for the preparation and approval of secondary legislation for the implementation of the Law. The Albanian Food Law lays down competencies and responsibilities of relevant authorities covering whole legislative process from drafting of legislation and setting up foundation for adoption of the secondary legislation in the food and feed safety area (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development-MoARD) and authorities responsible for carrying out the official control (National Food Authority). The Albanian Food Law, as amended, consist of 17 chapters, covering the general principles of risk analysis, general food safety requirements, import and export of food, licensing and registration of establishments, responsibilities of food business operators, official food control, animal feed and other provisions.

In the Albanian Food Law, the National Food Authority (NFA) is in charge of risk assessment while the MoARD is responsible for legislation and coordination of risk management. Both authorities deal with the implementation of risk management. In addition, NFA authorizes the inspections during official controls while the regional laboratories which are authorized by the Minister, are responsible for the sample analysis. NFA coordinates its work also with the Reference laboratories. The Food Safety and Veterinary Institute (FSVI) is the National Reference Center. There are no provisions in the Albanian Food Law regarding EFSA and these will be implemented at the moment of accession. Nevertheless, Albania provides quarterly reports to EFSA. As regards future plans, Albania intends to further align its legislation to the Union *acquis* between 2025 and 2028.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has **partially aligned** its national legislation with the EU *acquis* on matters pertaining to food and feed law, notably in terms of the general principles and requirements of the General Food Law Regulation. However, the appropriate organisational structure allowing the correct implementation of both the General Food Law Regulation and other Union sectoral legislation on food and feed, especially as regards pre-market approvals/authorisations of food/feed related products, is not ensured, although at this stage there are no pre-market approvals/authorisations procedures in place regarding food/feed related products. As regards emergency measures, it is not clear whether the Albanian legal framework is capable to also address risks concerning the placing of feed on the market. In that context, it is also unclear how the processes related to the adoption of national emergency measures to address risks relating to the placing of a food/feed are eventually reviewed by the national risk managers. The Albanian authorities are kindly invited to ensure a clear separation between risk management and risk assessment within the FVA. Lastly, Albania is kindly reminded to incorporate into its national law more detailed traceability requirements in the context of the General

Food Law Regulation, namely the Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 208/2013 on traceability requirements for sprouts and seeds intended for the production of sprouts.

I.B. OFFICIAL CONTROLS

a. Country presentation

Albania informs to have **highly aligned** the official control rules of Regulation (EC) 882/2004, Regulation (EC) 853/2004 and Regulation (EC) 854/2004 and related implementing regulations. Albania acknowledges that Regulations (EC) 882/2004 and 854/2004 are repealed legislative acts and informs that it has already drafted a Law largely aligning with the provisions of Regulation (EU) 2017/625 on official controls and other official activities performed to ensure the application of food and feed law, rules on animal health and welfare, plant health and plant protection products with national legislation.

The institutional framework responsible for official controls is composed by MoARD, the National Food Authority (NFA), the National Authority of Veterinary and Plant Protection (NAVPP) and the Food Safety and Veterinary Institute (FSVI), which is the National Reference Laboratory Centre. While MoARD responsibility is to develop policies and strategies in this field, the NFA is responsible for the planning and performance of official controls and ensuring efficient coordination with all the bodies involved in carrying out official controls of food, feed, animal health, veterinary medicinal products and plant protection products; it verifies compliance on registration and licensing of business operators in the sector, coordinates the activity of the authorised laboratories and ensures the performance of analysis by other accredited laboratories both at central and regional level (348 employees present in all 12 regions of Albania) if needed. The NAVPP is responsible for carrying out the official controls at local level with its 227 official veterinarians.

Official controls are carried out regularly, without prior notice and in accordance with the priorities defined in the risk assessment scheme, and cover all stages of production, processing and distribution. Albania has in place an annual risk-based plan of official controls and sampling for food, animal feed, plant protection and agricultural products, as well as for import controls at Border Inspection Posts, including a border inspection posts sampling plan. For establishments approved for export to the EU, an inspection is carried out once a month. The inspection procedure is performed through the online system 'e-inspection'. Albania applies a new risk-based methodology for the planning of official food safety controls, consisting in categorising the risk of food business operators as low, medium or high risk depending on the risk associated with their activity and other influencing factors using a scoring system. Official veterinarians, in cases where during the inspection they notice that the requirements of the law are not met, must send a proposal for taking measures to revoke the license to the body that granted it.

As future plans, Albania intends to complete the drafting of the new Law on Official Controls aligning with Regulation (EU) 2017/625 within 2025.

The current structure of the competent authorities responsible for the official controls in the agri-food chain was presented by the Albanian authorities.

b. Commission assessment

Albania's legal framework **has not yet aligned** with the EU *acquis* in force on official controls. Indeed, Albania aligned with official control rules in Regulations (EC) 882/2004 and (EC) 854/2004 but these Regulations have been repealed and replaced by Regulation (EU) 2017/625 as of 14/12/2019. This new Regulation establishes a comprehensive framework for official controls and other official activities to verify compliance with the Union agri-food chain legislation. Albania **has not yet aligned** its legislation with the requirements of Regulation (EU) 2017/625. Moreover, Albania provided limited information on the rules applicable to official controls in the plant health area, food

contact materials, organic production and labelling of organic products, protected designation of origin and geographical indications, while official controls in those areas are equally covered by Regulation (EU) 2017/625. Alignment of national rules with several delegated acts supplementing Regulation (EU) 2017/625 and with several acts implementing that Regulation have not been enacted in the Albanian legal order for the majority of these acts. However, Albania is fully committed to aligning with the requirement of Regulation (EU) 2017/625, including in relation to plant health, and informed that a draft law is in preparation planned to be adopted within 2025.

On implementation and enforcement challenges, Albania's competent authorities have certain resources in terms of staff dedicated to official controls and other official control activities, the online system 'e-inspection' for performing the inspection procedures and the network of laboratories, whilst the adequacy of those resources to properly implement EU rules needs to be further examined. Based on the inputs provided by the Albanian authorities, the requirements of Articles 34 and 37 to 39 of Regulation (EU) 2017/625 are not yet applied and improvements are needed. Progress is also needed in relation to official certification system, the verification and control procedures and the fight against fraud.

There is currently no multiannual national control plan adopted in Albania, but Albania is committed to adopt such plan in the future and official controls in the food safety and veterinary area are carried out based on national control plans. Albania should continue its efforts in implementing the risk-based approach enshrined in Regulation (EU) 2017/625 including in the planned multiannual control plan covering the entire agri-food chain. Albania would need to provide guarantees that the control system is financed in a sustainable and transparent manner, including by establishing rules on fees to be paid by the operators for official controls, in line with Regulation (EU) 2017/625, that proper enforcement action is taken and that penalties applicable to infringements of the rules on official controls are effective, proportionate and dissuasive.

I.C. COMITOLOGY REGULATION

a. Country presentation

Albania is aware of the EU legislation framework on Committees and informed that Comitology applies only when the Commission has been granted implementing power by a particular EU legal act which has also provided for the Commission to be assisted by a committee. In addition, Albania is aware that within *Chapter 12*, there are two Committees, notably the Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed, and the Standing Committee on Zootechnics.

Albania still has to identify the institution that will participate in the work of the Committees.

Regarding Accelerated Integration, Albania requested to participate/be informed on the work of both Committees.

b. Commission assessment

Albania showed a good understanding of the workings of the Comitology Regulation and the workings of the Committee in the field of *Chapter 12*. Albania needs to identify the relevant institutions that will participate in the Committees. Participation in regulatory Committee meetings under chapter 12 will officially only be possible once the Accession Treaty is signed, given the sensitive nature of some of the decisions taken in these Committees.

Regarding accelerated integration, the Commission will further explore Albania's request to participate to certain specific sections of the PAFF Committee, other standing committees and expert working groups as an observer.

I.D. EUROPEAN FOOD SAFETY AUTHORITY

a. Country presentation

Albania declared active participation in EFSA working bodies and networks, including the advisory forum and the scientific network on zoonoses data collection. The country stated that it has been collecting and reporting data to EFSA. The National Food Authority (NFA) serves as the national contact point for EFSA and considers EFSA opinions in its operations.

b. Commission assessment

Albania showed a good understanding of the EFSA and its working methods and will be in position actively participate in its working bodies and networks after the accession to the EU.

I.E. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS – GENERAL FOOD SAFETY

Albania is **partially aligned** with the EU *acquis* on general food safety. National legislation is partially aligned with the EU General Food Law and Official Controls Regulation, but progress is needed regarding implementation of existing rules and risk management concerning the placing of food/feed on the market in case of emergency measures. On official controls, Albania should focus on the alignment and implementation of the requirements set out in Regulation (EU) 2017/625 to build robust official control systems in the relevant areas. Albania showed good understanding of comitology and its working methods. The country is in good position to actively participate in committees, in working bodies and networks of EFSA and to ensure the compliance of its national legislation with the EU *acquis* upon its accession to the EU.

II. VETERINARY POLICY

II.A. CONTROL SYSTEM IN THE INTERNAL MARKET AND ANIMAL HEALTH LAW

a. Country presentation

As amended, the 2011 Law on Veterinary Service is the Albanian legal framework for Animal Health. Albania acknowledged that this Law has been approximated in accordance with a number of EU *acquis* which are currently outdated. However, Albania has prepared a draft Law aligning the provisions of Regulation (EU) 2016/429 to be adopted before 2028 including secondary legislation. In addition, Albania stated to be already highly aligned with Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2018/1882 in respect to the list of animal diseases in the Order of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development No. 277 of 2022. On Veterinary Medicinal Products, Albania plans to approve an Order of the Minister approximating Regulation (EU) 2019/6 on veterinary medicinal products and repealing Directive 2001/82/EC, to which Albania is currently aligned. The Institutional structure dealing with Animal Health Law is composed by the Directorate of Veterinary Policies of MoARD, the NAVPP for carrying out the official controls on bovine, ovine, caprine, poultry and porcine species and its Regional Directorates. Albania differentiates among Official Control Veterinarians (227) who are responsible for issuing veterinary health certificates for export, and Official Service Veterinarians (303), who issue veterinary certificates for animal movements in the country. Finally, NFA carries out official controls in Border Inspection Points of life animals and food of animal origin and the FSVI as the National Reference Laboratory, analysis the samples taken as part of the official controls.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has **not yet aligned** its legislation with the requirements of Regulation (EU) 2016/429 of the European Parliament and the Council on transmissible animal diseases ('Animal Health Law') as well as with the delegated and implementing acts adopted on its basis, which represent a general legal framework for animal health in the EU. One exemption is the alignment with Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2018/1882 in respect to the list of animal diseases. However, it is

unclear how this fits in with other legislation in Albania (national law on veterinary services and sub laws adopted on its basis) which is aligned with outdated EU rules in application before the entry into application of Regulation (EU) 2016/429. However, Albania is fully committed to aligning with the Animal Health Law and delegated and implementing acts adopted on its basis (gradual alignment between 2025 and 2028). Albania seems to be rather well aware of that legislation. Albania will also proceed with the notification and reporting of animal diseases through the Animal Disease Information System (ADIS) in accordance with Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/2002.

Regarding implementation and enforcement challenges, Albania seems to have in place the main elements for the veterinary services, which are based on the national law on veterinary services. Albania has an established chain of command and rather well-staffed services at the regional and local level (over 500 official and service veterinarians), including laboratories. However, there are challenges with the timing of alignment with the recent animal health rules of the EU and their timely enforcement, ensuring awareness and understanding of all stakeholders on their roles under new legislation, planning and implementing proper surveillance for animal diseases, continuous alignment and accreditation of laboratories and laboratory methods. Albania will also need to make decisions on how to go about various categories of diseases (i.e. “Category B and C diseases” according to EU legislation), including those relevant for trade and related to it, and a timely set up of surveillance and eradication activities.

II.B. CONTROL SYSTEM FOR IMPORTS

a. Country presentation

Albania informed that import of live animals, products of animal origin, germinal products and feed, which can transmit an infectious disease or endanger the health of human beings or animals are subject to veterinary controls at border inspection posts (BIP) by border veterinary inspectors. The responsible authority for veterinary inspection and customs services at BIPs shall cooperate in organising controls at BIPs, according to the provisions of the amended Veterinary Law, and to the provisions of the Customs Code of the Republic of Albania. Only if the consignment is subjected to BIP veterinary inspection and results are free from infectious diseases and harmful contaminants, imports are allowed to enter into Albania if accompanied by the veterinary certificate and all the documentation proving the identity and origin of the consignment. In case of suspicion, Albanian veterinary inspectors are entitled to detain the consignment and can order to return it, to transfer it to a quarantine center, or destroy it. For the measures taken, the veterinary inspector of BIPs keeps the inspection report and immediately notifies the competent authority for BIPs, which notifies the Directorate of Veterinary Policies in the ministry and the competent authority. The quarantine in Albania is not less than 21 days and all expenses are borne by the importer. Albania has a list of third countries from which imports of animal and certain products of animal origins are allowed and is aware that the list would have to be aligned with the EU list upon accession.

Albania is fully committed to aligning with the requirements of the OCR and is currently preparing a draft Law scheduled for adoption for 2025. Albania provided the Commission with related table of correspondence of the draft law on official controls with Regulation (EU) 2017/625 (‘the OCR’) to show the progress of alignment of its national legal framework with Union requirements. Albania provided information in relation to the alignment of its national rules with the delegated and implementing acts adopted on the basis of the OCR that are relevant for import controls. Albania clarified that drafting of bylaws will start following the adoption of its law on official controls.

Albania expressed an interest to use TRACES to certify consignments of plants and plant products exported to the EU, as well as to engage further into the implementation of the electronic certification function of TRACES with the aim to facilitate certification and official controls.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has **partially aligned** with the EU *acquis* on import controls. Its national legal framework is aligned to different extent with various Union Directives, Regulations and Decisions relevant for import controls, most of which are repealed such as Directive 91/496/EEC and Directive 97/78/EC. Albania has not yet aligned its legislation with the requirements of Regulation (EU) 2017/625 ('the OCR') which establishes the rules for the performance of official controls on consignments of animals and goods entering the Union. The majority of national rules are not currently aligned with the delegated and implementing acts adopted on the basis of OCR that are relevant for import controls. (see section II.H for more information)

Albania provided the Commission with a table indicating for each of the acts on official controls the national legal measure and the level of alignment. In this table no national measure is fully aligned, and the majority of measures are not aligned with the EU acts.

As for implementation and enforcement challenges, according to information provided by Albania, the responsible competent authorities have been designated and appear to have an adequate structure and organisation with allocation of human resources for performing official controls on live animals and products of animal origin entering the country. Albania needs to ensure an integrated approach to those controls on all categories of animals and goods entering the country in accordance with the OCR.

Details were provided by Albania in relation to rules for border official controls on live animals and products of animal origin, including the role of the veterinarian, cooperation with customs authorities, prior notification, actions in case of suspicion of non-compliance and in case of non-compliance, and re-dispatch of consignments. Controls are to be carried out on all categories of animals and goods as referred to in Article 47(1) of the OCR. National legislation, **partially aligned** with plant health Union rules, lays down rules for official controls at border inspection posts and sampling in the plant health area. The Commission requested clarification in relation to physical checks on live animals in transit and measures taken on the consignments while waiting for the result of analysis of the sample, to which Albania replied that the Law on Official controls will align with Union requirements in 2025.

With respect to IT systems, Albania has achieved an important level of integration of TRACES, the EU electronic certification platform, while progress is being made in the alignment of its national legislation with the provisions of the relevant EU legislation, namely Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/1715 ('IMSOC Regulation'). Albania is actively using TRACES to certify consignments of animals and products of animal origin exported to the EU.

II.C. IDENTIFICATION AND REGISTRATION OF ANIMALS AND REGISTRATION OF THEIR MOVEMENTS

a. Country presentation

Albania informed that import of live animals, products of animal origin, germinal products and feed, which can transmit an infectious disease or endanger the health of human beings or animals are subject to veterinary controls at border inspection posts (BIP) by border veterinary inspectors. Albania acknowledged that its legislation on identification and registration of animals and their movements is highly aligned with old EU *acquis*. In addition, Albania informed that while the new *acquis* is the process of alignment, further strengthening of implementation is needed. Albania has in place a livestock and veterinary information system called RUDA. The database is functioning since 2011, and is organised in four sections: farm register, epidemiology, individual identification and animal movement. Equine and poultry animals are not registered yet, only the farms where these animals are present. Albania informed that identification of equine animals started in July 2024. Veterinary health certificates and veterinary movement certificates are said to be issued according to the EU *acquis*. Future plans include an update of RUDA and trainings of animal owners.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has aligned its legislation with outdated EU legal texts and has **not yet aligned** its legislation with the requirements of the following regulations currently in force: Regulation of the EU parliament and of the Council (EU) 2016/429 (Animal Health Law), Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2019/2035 of 28 June 2019 supplementing Regulation (EU) 2016/429 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards rules for establishments keeping terrestrial animals and hatcheries, and the traceability of certain kept terrestrial animals and hatching eggs, Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/520 of 24 March 2021 laying down rules for the application of Regulation (EU) 2016/429 of the European Parliament and of the Council with regard to the traceability of certain kept terrestrial animals, Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/963 on identification and registration of equine animals. However, Albania is fully committed to aligning its legislation with the above-mentioned texts.

As for implementation and enforcement challenges, Albania presents both implementation and enforcement challenges, notably the reliability of the national database for animals and holdings (in particular, the issue of the unregistered animals should be clarified); the reliability of the individual identification of animals which lost their means of identification (retagging procedure). Lastly, Albania is identifying equine animals by implantation of a transponder and issuing an identification document. ID system of equine animals is in place and identification will start in 2024. However, the system has been foreseen only for animals suitable for breeding, while it should concern all equids. Moreover, in accordance with Article 114 of the AHL, the system should include, in addition to a transponder and identification document, also a unique code compatible with universal equine life number (UELN).

II.D. CONTROL MEASURES FOR ANIMAL DISEASES

a. Country presentation

In terms of legal framework, Albania is highly aligned with Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2018/1882 on the application of certain disease prevention and control rules to categories of listed diseases and establishing a list of species and groups of species posing a considerable risk for the spread of those listed diseases, with its Order of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development No. 277 of 2022. In addition, Albania is partially aligned with Council Directive 64/432/EEC on animal health problems affecting intra-Community trade in bovine animals and swine in its Order of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development No. 505 of 2016. Albania has a number of legal acts covering the adoption of on-farm biosecurity rules and measures, for the approval of immediate notification of infectious diseases form in animals and the list of notifiable diseases in the Republic of Albania. Also, beyond to provisions set in the Veterinary Law, Albania has some specific legal acts on brucellosis, tuberculosis, and on African Swine Fever. On Avian Influenza, Albania has partially aligned Council Directive 2005/94/EC, and Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 139/2013. Albania has contingency plans for African Swine Fever, Classical Swine Fever, Rabies, Lumpy Skin Disease and Foot-and-Mouth Disease. Institutional responsibilities are shared among MoARD, NAVPP, NFA and FSVI in terms of designing prevention, control, and elimination programs aimed at eradicating infectious diseases in animals, and the implementation of official controls, test and samples analysis. The Order of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development No. 611 of 2021 sets the rules for the approval of the forms for immediate reporting of infection diseases in animals and the list of the notifiable diseases in the Republic of Albania, based on the list of diseases defined by the WOA. Currently, the Directorate of Veterinary Policies of MoARD informs the WOA, the veterinary structures of the EU and the countries with which the Republic of Albania has signed veterinary agreements, within 24 hours of the first outbreak of any infectious disease, with immediate notification of confirmed in the territory of the Republic of Albania, in which the location and the immediate measures that have been taken or should be taken are determined. The Veterinary Law sets the rules for establishing protection and surveillance zones (3km and 10 km) in case of an event of suspicion or confirmation of a disease

outbreak. The Veterinary Law in Albania has legal basis for surveillance and adoption of an annual program in which animal health surveillance may be imposed.

Albania aims at aligning the legislation in the field of control of diseases an animal health before 2028. In addition, Albania plans to extend the accreditation of tests for Rabies, FMD, ASF and TBC between 2024 and 2027. Regulation (EU) 2016/429 is foreseen to be aligned in national legislation in 2025, as well as Regulation (EU) 2017/625, and between 2025 and 2028, the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2018/1629, Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/689, Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/2002, Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/686, Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/688, Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/692, Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2019/2035 and Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/687.

As regards infection with *Brucella abortus*, *B. melitensis* and *B. suis* , Albania declared to be conducting a testing programme in dairy herds of kept bovine animals with actions in case of finding positive animals, as well as a vaccination programme of kept ovine and caprine animals. Finally, on infection with Mycobacterium tuberculosis complex (MTBC) Albania informed that testing is only conducted when there is clinical suspicion.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has **not yet aligned** its legislation with the EU *acquis* on control measures for animal diseases, notably the Animal Health Law and its subsequent delegated and implementing regulations such as the requirements of Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/687 on the issue of prevention and control of certain listed diseases, Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/689 as regards rules for surveillance, eradication programmes, and disease-free status for certain listed and emerging diseases Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2023/594). However, Albania is fully committed to aligning with the referred EU legislation during 2025-2028. Albania has however partially aligned with repealed EU legal acts by the Animal Health Law (e.g. Council Directive 64/432/EEC, Council Directive 2005/94/EC) or Regulation (EU) 2020/692 (e.g. Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 139/2013).

On implementation and enforcement challenges, some of the prevention and control rules for certain category A diseases implemented by Albania (e.g. Highly pathogenic avian influenza) seem to be already in line with the certain provisions laid down in the EU legislation (e.g. establishing of protection and surveillance zone of 3 km and 10 km respectively, culling and disposal of animals in the affected establishments, cleaning and disinfection). In addition, the indicated objectives of the surveillance plan for Avian influenza seem to be aligned with the objectives of the Union Surveillance Programme for Avian influenza. However, it is not yet clear the level of alignment with the current EU rules, and some important such rules (e.g. on duration of measures in the restricted zones, conditions to lift the restriction zones, surveillance for early detection) may still need to be included in the relevant legislation of Albania. In addition, the future possible approximation of certain EU specific legislation (e.g. Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2023/594 laying down special disease control rules for African swine fever) might require a lot of efforts from Albania, in enforcing that legislation (e.g. in a case of an outbreak of that disease, imposing and enforcing relevant restrictions for movements of porcine animals and products thereof within and outside restricted zones).

Although the current actions implemented by Albania are a good starting point, an eradication programme to achieve disease free status for the following three diseases (*Brucella abortus*, *B. melitensis* and *B. suis* and infection with Mycobacterium tuberculosis complex (MTBC)) is compulsory under Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/689 (chiefly Articles 12 to 31 and Part I and II of Annex IV).

II.E. INTRA-EU TRADE IN LIVE ANIMAL SEMEN, OVA AND EMBRYOS

a. Country presentation

The legal framework in Albania is the amended Law on Veterinary Service, and a number of Orders of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. According to the Law, the collection and storage of animal semen, eggs and embryos, as well as the methods used for collection and storage are subject to sanitary-veterinary control. Collect and/or trade semen from animals suspected of being carriers of infectious diseases or of being affected by a disease that is transmitted to other animals via biological material, eggs or embryos of the same type of animal is prohibited in Albania. In terms of institutional framework, the regional veterinary service of NAVPP (187 official control veterinarians) periodically checks the reproductive health status of animals and proposes the continuation or interruption of breeding. Import, export and transit of consignments of live animals and animals germinal products, are subject to veterinary controls at the 13 BIPs. Trading of semen to the implementers of insemination shall only be permitted through the approved semen production centres and semen trade units after the analysis of the laboratory of QTTB (ATTC) Fushë Kruje. The Republic of Albania does not produce biological material, only imports. The Veterinary Law allows the importation and exportation of semen, embryos, and ova under certain requirements. In MoARD, the responsible sector for legislation and policy of trade of live animal semen, ova and embryos is the Sector of Animal Health and Welfare (3 employees). Albania has 153 importers of live animals, 6 importers of biological materials and no establishments for germinal products. Between 2027 and 2028, Albania envisages to approximate Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2019/2035, Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/688 and Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/689. Also, Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/990, Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/520 and Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1345.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has **not yet aligned** its legislation with the EU *acquis*, especially the requirements of Regulation (EU) 2016/429 on movements between Member States of live animals and germinal products, and with supplementary rules chiefly in CDR (EU) 2020/686 on the issue of movement between Member States of germinal products of certain terrestrial animals, in Regulation CDR (EU) 2020/688 on the issue of movement between Member States of certain terrestrial animals as well as with requirements of Regulations CDR (EU) 2020/691 and CDR (EU) 2020/690 on the issue of aquatic and aquaculture animals. In addition, Albania claimed no existence of germinal products establishment on its territory and no or very little interest to send live animals or germinal products to other Member States after Accession, while accepting such movements from other Member States. Albania was informed that certain aspects of aquaculture legislation apply already domestically already in the case above (e.g. approval of establishments), as well as about the importance of preparing its operators for the reality of free movements of compliant animals and germinal products. Albania took note of the above and is fully committed to aligning with the *acquis* above, in the future. Progress on other elements of EU animal health rules (e.g. on animal identification, on disease control, etc.) may significantly contribute to alignment also on the area of movements between Member States as those other rules are a prerequisite for movements between Member States and compliance with those assists compliance with rules on movements between Member States too.

Implementation and enforcement challenges are limited for Albania, mainly at political-stakeholder level (i.e., limited/no EU market access for its operators) rather than at technical level, as safety of trade is ensured by the above rules and in case of shortcomings animals and products are automatically non-compliant, hence non-eligible for movements between Member States. Those movements are subject to official certification; such certification can easily be controlled and as necessary be denied by the competent authorities if necessary and thereby ensuring the safety of the Union market beyond the territory of Albania.

II.F. NON-COMMERCIAL MOVEMENTS OF PET ANIMALS

a. Country presentation

Albania main legal act in this area is the amended Law on Veterinary Services. In addition, Albania stated that Order of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development No. 634 of 2023 is largely approximated with Regulation (EU) 576/2013 on the non-commercial movement of pet animals and Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 577/2013 on the model identification documents for the non-commercial movement of dogs, cats and ferrets, the establishment of lists of territories and third countries and the format, layout and language requirements of the declarations attesting compliance with certain conditions provided for in Regulation (EU) 576/2013. The Animal health certificate and model of passport for pets are aligned with the identification documents (model passport) and model of health certificate for movements of dogs, cats and ferrets of Regulation (EU) 576/2013. These certificates are issued by the four Regional Directorates of NAVPP and the passports by private veterinarian in private veterinary clinics (Albania has 48). Albania accepts only passports/certificates as per the above Regulations. Any pet animal entering or exiting Albania must be vaccinated for rabies and be identified by tattoo or electronic identification. Owners are obliged to notify the veterinary service the purchase of pet animal within 14 days or to request the de-registration in cases of sale, disappearance, donation or death. MoARD's sector on animal health and welfare (3 employees) is responsible for legislation and policy. Albania plans to align with the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2018/772 and Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2018/878 within 2027. Albania plans to approve the Delegated Regulation 2021/1933 and the Implementing Regulation 2021/1938 in 2024.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has a **high level of alignment** its legislation with the EU standards, a notable exception are the requirements of Regulation (EU) 576/2013 and its derived regulations for non-commercial movement of pet animals. However, Albania is fully committed to aligning with the referred legislation in the period running from 2024 to 2027, in particular as regards pet birds and additional preventive health measures for pet dogs. Albania was informed that certain aspects of the legal framework for non-commercial movement of pet animals is to be revised before April 2026 and aligned to the Animal Health Law. Albania took note of the above and is fully committed to aligning with the new framework in the future.

Regarding implementation and enforcement challenges, Albania seems to have in place the main elements and structures for controlling non-commercial movement of pet animals. Documentary and identity checks are carried out by food authorities in border control posts, which also play the role of travellers' points of entry. Identification documents required for such movement have been introduced in the national legal framework. Responsibilities for the issuance of such identification documents seem adequate. Marking of pet animals has been made mandatory with a compulsory registration of all animals in the relevant national database. Vaccination against rabies is also compulsory for all relevant pet animals. Continued set of actions is also implemented in Albania to combat rabies in the wild fauna, including oral rabies vaccination campaigns and monitoring of such activities. However, there are still challenges with rabies surveillance and more particularly passive surveillance on indicator animals. Without such data, it is difficult to take informed decision on how to commensurate oral rabies vaccination efforts and it is necessary to continue with such efforts. Albania took note of the above and indicated that special focus is to be put on surveillance but also informed that it had not yet decided on its plans for 2024 onwards in terms of vaccination which needs attention.

II.G. PROHIBITION OF SUBSTANCES AND CONTROL OF RESIDUES

a. Country presentation

The competent authorities responsible for control residue are MoARD, NAVPP, NFA and FSVI. While the Directorate of Veterinary Policies of MoARD is responsible for drafting and supervising the implementation of the National Residue Control Plan (NRCP), the rest are implementing

authorities. The amended Law on the Veterinary Service prohibits the production, placing on the market and trading of foods of animal origin, not for human consumption, of foods of animal origin and of feed when they are produced from animals feed or treated with VMPs before the end of withdrawal period, thyrostats and beta-agonists, if milk is produced by dairy cows, treated with somatotrophins, if food of animal origin is produced from animals feed, or in which is identified the presence of contaminants and residues of VMPs above MRLs. The Order of the Minister No. 357 of 2011 on the conditions of trade and use in animals of certain substances with hormonal or thyrostatic action and of beta-agonists largely aligns Council Directive 96/22/EC, Directive 2008/97/EC and Directive 2003/74/EC. The Annex II contains the list of provisionally prohibited substances. Order of Minister No. 92 of 2012 on the administration of bovine somatotropin largely aligns the Council Decision 1999/897/EC and prohibits placing on the market of bovine somatotropin for the purpose of its marketing and administration in cows that produce milk.

Commission Regulation (EU) 37/2010 is highly aligned by the Order of Minister 609 of 2022 on pharmacologically active substances and their classification regarding maximum residue limits in foodstuffs of animal origin. Commission Regulation (EU) 2019/1871 of 7 November 2019 “On reference points for action for non-allowed pharmacologically active substances present in food of animal origin”, is highly aligned by Order of Minister No. 134, date 10.3.2023 “On reference points for action for non-allowed pharmacologically active substances present in food of animal origin”. Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2022/1644 of 7 July 2022 is highly aligned by Order of Minister No. 85 date 17.02.2023 approving regulation "On the official control over the use of pharmacologically active substances authorised as veterinary medicinal products or as additives for animal feed and their residue, as well as on the use of prohibited pharmacologically active substances, which are used in animals that produce food and their residue, for the implementation of the national residue monitoring plan". Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1646 of 23 September 2022 on uniform practical arrangements for the performance of official controls as regards the use of pharmacologically active substances authorised as veterinary medicinal products or as feed additives and of prohibited or unauthorised pharmacologically active substances and residues thereof, on specific content of multi-annual national control plans and specific arrangements for their preparation, is highly aligned by Order of Minister No. 122 of 06.03.2023 approving the regulation "for the adoption of rules for uniform practices in conducting controls on the use of pharmacologically active substances authorized as VMP or as additives for animal feed and their residue, on prohibited or unauthorized pharmacologically active substances used in animals, which produce food, their residue, as well as for the specific content of control plans and the ways of their drafting, for the implementation of the National Residue Monitoring Plan".

For 2023, Albania has drawn up and is implementing three plans controlling the use of pharmacologically active substances: risk-based plan based on national production data, random surveillance plan and risk-based plan on imports from third countries. Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2022/931 is highly aligned by Order of Minister No. 6 of 2023 on the rules for conducting official controls regarding contaminants in food, and Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/932 as well with Order of No. 7 of 23.3.2023 "Rules for drafting, content of official control plans regarding contaminants in food". Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2022/2292 is highly aligned by Order of Minister No. 162 of 23.3.2023 “For the approval of requests for the control plan of pharmacology active substances, pesticides and contaminants and the updated control plan for pharmacology active substances, pesticides and contaminants”. Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/808 is highly aligned by Order of Minister No. 163 of 23.03.2023 “On the performance of analytical methods for residues of pharmacologically active substances used in food-producing animals, the interpretation of the results, and the methods to be used for sampling”. Regulation (EU) 2023/915 of 25 April 2023 is in the approval phase. NRCP is drafted by Directorate of Veterinary Policy in cooperation with NAVPP, NFA and FSVI, during the first quarterly of the year, by including the allocation of samples for the 4 regional Directorates of NAVPP

b. Commission assessment

Albania **has highly aligned with** the EU legislation on prohibited substances and control of residues.

Albania already cooperates with EFSA as regards the submission of the results from official controls on residues as well as with the EURLs in the field regarding validation of analytical methods. Albania is committed to continue working on the process of validation of more analytical methods to be able to perform analyses of official samples without subcontracts in the EU Member States.

II.H. IMPORT REQUIREMENTS FOR LIVE ANIMALS AND ANIMAL PRODUCTS

a. Country presentation

The amended Law on veterinary service defines the procedures for the import and transit of live animals in Border Control Posts (BCPs), and it is partially aligned with Council Directive 91/496/EEC and Directive 97/78/EC. BCP inspection of consignment is carried out against a veterinary fee. The import and transit of live animals are allowed in Albania, if the consignment has been subjected to veterinary inspection and after this inspection is found to be free from infectious diseases and harmful pollution, as well as if it is accompanied by a veterinary certificate. The consignment can be blocked in BCP if the veterinary inspector suspects infectious diseases, pollution of the goods or if deficiencies in the documentation are found. It can be returned or confiscated, but also escorted to the nearest quarantine point or to the country of destination. The quarantine period is not less than 21 days, and all expenses are borne by the importer. The ungulates, poultry and rabbits imported for immediate slaughter within 72 hours, which do not pose a risk to the animal population of Albania, are not quarantined. For animal products, the Albanian Food Law 10/2022 sets the rules for safety control of imported food of animal origin at BCPs by border food safety inspectors. The consignment needs to be accompanied by the right documentation and can be blocked if deficiencies are found. Food and animal feed inspectors at BCPs also verify the safety of imported food by taking samples free of charge. Certificates must be in the Albanian language and in the language of the country from which they come. The Directorate of Veterinary policies (13 employees) and the Directorate of Food Safety Policies (9 employees) belonging to MoARD are responsible for policy development in this area. These directorates aim at approximating Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/692 as regards rules for entry into the Union, and the movement and handling after entry of consignment of certain animals, germinal products and products of animal origin by 2027-2028 as well as the Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/404 laying down the lists of third countries, territories or zones from which the entry into the Union of animals, germinal products and products of animal origin is permitted.

b. Commission assessment

Regarding legislative alignment Albania has **not yet aligned** its legislation with the EU legal requirements of Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/692 on the issue of rules for entry into the Union, and the movement and handling after entry of consignments of certain animals, germinal products and products of animal origin, as well as with Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/404 laying down the lists of third countries, territories or zones thereof from which the entry into the Union of animals, germinal products and products of animal origin is permitted in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2016/429. However, Albania is fully committed to aligning with the referred legislation in 2027-2028. There are also challenges with the broader alignment and timely update with the most recent entry into force of the Union rules (e.g. Implementing Regulations (EU) 2020/2235, 2020/2236, 2021/403, 2021/404 related to, among other, the entry requirements (listing of third countries, model certificates etc.).

As for implementation and enforcement challenges, Albania seems to have in place the main elements for the control system for entry of consignments of certain animals or products thereof. However, this would need to be verified by the EU to ensure that the health status of the Union is not endangered in the future (also taking into account the imports of products of animal origin from third countries to Albania).

II.I. EU international agreements

a. Country presentation

Albania is member of FAO since 1973 and since 1991 to the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH). Albania's delegate to WOAH belongs to the Directorate of Veterinary Policies of MoARD and has right to vote. Since 1992, Albania is part of the Codex Alimentarius, since 1993 of the European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization (EPPO), and since 2000 of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). In terms of conventions, Albania is party since 1992 to the Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), since 2005 to the International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants, and since 2010 to the Rotterdam Convention linked to chemicals and plant protection. In addition, Albania is a CEFTA Member for 15 years and has signed bilateral agreements in the areas of phytosanitary and veterinary with Czech Republic and another one with Israel.

Albania states that it will act in due course before accession to ensure alignment with the EU, including by revising all of their international agreements in views of the EU trade policy. (See Cluster 6 – Chapter 30 – External Relations)

b. Commission assessment

Part of the existing bilateral and multilateral agreements of which Albania is party to **are not aligned with EU requirements** and contains elements that are parts of the Commission competences and not of EU Member States. Albania is well aware that these agreements need to be terminated or modified. However, this will require more precise preparation for the process with a clear action plan.

II.J. ANIMAL WELFARE

a. Country presentation

Albania indicated that its legal framework on animal welfare is partially aligned with the EU *acquis*. For most of the cases, the partial alignment means that only provisions referring to specific obligations of Member States and of Commission are not aligned and in other cases, the annexes are missing. There are 407 animal transporters in Albania authorized by NAVPP (competent authority) for short distance transportation of live animals. There is no long-distance transportation of live animals in/from Albania. Albania continues to use conventional cages for laying hens. Albania's legal framework on animal welfare foresees penalties in case of noncompliance of animal welfare requirements for farmers, transporters and slaughterhouses. Penalties are decided by the official control veterinarians who do the inspection in accordance with a check list. Apart from NAVPP inspection and control role, the sector of animal health and welfare (3 employees) belonging to MoARD is responsible for the legislation and policy in this area.

Albania acknowledged lack of resources and lack of awareness and responsibility of citizens as main challenges in enforcement of animal welfare legislation in Albania. In this regard, between 2024 and 2027, Albania intends to align all relevant EU *acquis* in this area as well as to promote public education and awareness in relation to the animal welfare protection and the enforcement of administrative capacities at the national and local level.

b. Commission assessment

Regarding legislative alignment, EU animal welfare legislation is **partially aligned** in the Albanian legislation and indicated that the articles containing specific obligations for Member States and for the Commission are not aligned. At the same time, Albania expressed plans to align with relevant EU legislation for animal welfare until the end of 2027.

Albania faces challenges with the enforcement of the animal welfare legislation due to the lack of resources. Article 139 of the OCR Regulation applies also in the animal welfare domain; and penalties for non-compliance with animal welfare requirements should be proportionate and dissuasive, in accordance with the non-conformity identified.

Albania needs to finalise the process of aligning with EU's animal welfare legislation and to ensure adequate and well-trained staff in order to enable its full implementation. Sufficient staff will also be needed to make sure that the complex animal welfare legislation is enforced by carrying out risk based and efficient official controls at every level.

Another recommendation is to ensure appropriate awareness campaign and targeted trainings (when relevant) of all stakeholders playing a role in the implementation of the animal welfare rules. Albania must ensure that the entire body of the EU animal welfare legislation is complied with before accession. Therefore, it is recommended to provide action plans and plans to transition to the EU rules, with all investments needed for full compliance.II.K.

Zootechnics

a. Country presentation

The Zootechnic sector in MoARD and the Livestock Council are the responsible authorities for the legislation and policy development in this area while the NFA is responsible for inspection and official control of imported breeding materials and the NAVPP for official control at the farm and internal market. They are supported by the Agricultural Technology Transfer Centre of Fushë-Kruja that performs laboratory tests of semen and four Regional Agricultural Extension Agencies in which there are 28 zootechnics employees.

In Albania, 40% of the sheep population and 90% of the goat population are local breeds. Zootechnics in Albania are notably breed selection for milk production, or dual-purpose breeds, animal genetic improvement, breeding strategies such as pure breeding and crossbreeding, or for assisted reproductive technologies. This is regulated in the Law no. 9 426, dated 6.10.2005 "On Livestock Breeding", and amended related secondary legislation which partially aligns with Regulation (EU) 2016/1012.

Albania is now in a process of organisation of animal breeding in the country. Albania reported that the Ministry undertook to establish and maintain breeding books in particular for two commercial bovine breeds and several local breeds of sheep and goats, and to carry out breeding programmes for those breeds. Albania informed that so far there is no interest to perform those tasks within breeders and in general by private sector. The Ministry is now in a process of data collection on their breeding population and is searching for some assistance and guidance how to organise performance testing and genetic evaluation of their breeding animals. Albania informed that so far, they are only importing semen of purebred breeding animals, while they are not dispatching outside Albania any purebred breeding animals or germinal products thereof.

Albania plans to fully align with the Animal Breeding Regulation by 2026, to update its regulatory acts on zootechnics by 2025 and to fully aligned with implementing and delegated regulations on zootechnics by 2027. For these objectives, Albania requests assistance from EU expert.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has aligned its zootechnical legislation with the EU zootechnical legislation applicable before Regulation (EU) 2016/1012. Albania **has not yet aligned** with the applicable EU *acquis* on zootechnics (Regulation (EU) 2016/1012) but plans to update its zootechnical legislation to be aligned with Regulation (EU) 2016/1012, as well as with the delegated and implementing acts adopted on its basis, by 2027. Albania seems to be aware of the legislation but requested assistance from EU experts to achieve this task.

As for implementation and enforcement challenges, Albania has appointed competent authorities responsible for zootechnics, including those for official controls in zootechnical field, and has necessary organisational structures for carrying out the tasks. Albania was advised to establish a cooperation with two EU reference centres on zootechnics (<https://interbull.org/ib/eurc> and <https://www.eurc-eab.eu/>).

II.L. VETERINARY EXPENDITURES

a. Country presentation

Albania presented that the budget program ‘food safety and the protection of consumer’ is subordinated to the General Directorate of the National Veterinary and Plant Protection Authority and its four regional directorates, to the Food Safety and Veterinary Institute and to the General Directorate of the National Food Authority and its 12 regional directorates. The NVPPA takes about 40% of the funds of the total budget of the program and about 6% of the total budget of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. The use and distribution of the budget of the Veterinary Service is based on the Law No. 10 465 of 2011, as amended, DCM No. 408 of 2013 on compensation for slaughtered animals, as amended, and on the Law No. 84/2022 on budget of 2023. Albania approves yearly an order of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development on the use and distribution of financial resources of the veterinary service, the operation of FSVI and NVPPA.

The state budget financing the Veterinary Service, also finances vaccinations and monitoring of the prophylaxis program, including bovine tuberculosis control and eradication program and the vaccination against rabies among others. The budget is also used for equipment of the veterinary laboratories of the National Reference Centre and of the regional (state) veterinary laboratories, implementation of training programs for veterinary service workers and for participation in interlaboratory studies/test at the national and international level. The total budget in 2022 was of 5 409 193 EUR, of which 4 104 047 EUR was used for salaries. Albania intends to align Regulation (EU) 2021/690 no later than 2026.

b. Commission assessment

While Albania is not part of the EU support scheme, it benefits from an EU support project aiming at helping them reaching the necessary experience and administrative capacities in this domain. to identify the structures who will deal with the EU veterinary expenditures.

II.M. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS – VETERINARY POLICY

Overall, Albania **is partially aligned** with the EU *acquis* on veterinary policy. National legislation is highly aligned with the EU *acquis* on prohibition of substances and control of residues. National legislation is partially aligned with the EU *acquis* on control system for imports, identification and registration of animal movements, trade of live animals and germinal products and non-commercial movements of pet animals. National legislation is not yet aligned with the EU *acquis* in force on animal welfare, on import requirements for live animals and animal products, control measures of animal diseases and zootechnics. It is key for Albania to align its legislation with the EU standards and rules in force and to update its legal framework in line with EU *acquis* developments on veterinary policy. Upon accession, Albania will have to bring its bilateral and multilateral agreements in line with the EU requirements in the field of veterinary policy. Albania needs to provide the EU with its full legislation on animal welfare for an assessment of its alignment with the EU *acquis* on this matter. Further efforts and resources will be needed to ensure enforcement and implementation of the rules in place.

III. PLACING ON THE MARKET OF FOOD, FEED AND ANIMAL PRODUCTS

III.A. HYGIENE RULES

a. Country presentation

The competent authority responsible for hygiene rules is the Directorate of Food Safety Policies, part of the General Directorate of Development in the Field of Food Safety, Veterinary, Plant Protection, and Fishery in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MoARD). The Directorate is composed by the Sector of Products of Animal Origin (three employees), the sector of fisheries products (two employees) and the sector of products of non-animal and plant origin (three employees). The National Food Authority (NFA) carries out the official controls and certification regarding food and provides scientific opinion on food. It is present in the 12 regions and has seven regional laboratories for analysis and diagnosis. Finally, the National Authority of Veterinary and Plant Protection (NAVPP) is responsible for implementation of official controls and veterinary services at farms and slaughterhouses. Its headquarters are in Tirana, and it has four Regional Directorates reporting to MoARD.

Food Business Operators are responsible for any damage to human health, caused by the consumption of unsafe food, at all stages of production, processing and distribution. The Ordinance No. 22/2010 on general and special hygiene conditions for food establishments and food business operators largely aligns with Regulation (EC) No 852/2004. Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 laying down specific hygiene rules for food of animal origin is highly aligned by the Ordinance No. 4 of 2020, regarding the hygiene requirements for food business operators dealing with eggs and egg products, frog legs and snail, rendered animal fats and greaves, treated stomachs, bladders and intestines, gelatine and collagen, honey and food business operators dealing with other products of animal origin. In addition, the legal framework of Albania in this area is completed by the following legislative acts: Ordinance No. 17 of 2021 on specific hygiene requirements for meat and meat products, including minced meat and mechanically separated meat. Ordinance No. 5 of 2011 on specific hygiene requirements for establishments of production, collection and processing of milk and milk-based products, and Ordinance No. 316 of 2011 on hygienic conditions and controls for live bivalve mollusc, fish and fishery products. Albania is committed to fully aligning with Regulation (EC) No 852/2004 and Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 laying down specific hygiene rules for food of animal origin.

Regulation (EC) No 852/2004 on the hygiene of foodstuffs is highly aligned in Ordinance No. 20 of 2010 on the preliminary implementation of procedures of good hygiene practices and procedures based on risk analyses and critical control posts (HACCP) in food establishments. Directive 2004/41/EC is highly aligned by Order No. 292, of 2006 on the approval of the regulation on the health conditions for the production and placing on the market of fresh meat; Law No. 9441, of 2005 on the collection, processing and marketing of milk and milk-based products and Regulation No. 3 of 11.06.2004 on the sanitary-veterinary conditions for the export of fresh chicken meat to EU countries.

Specific control rules are in place for raw milk and milk-based products, notably for animals in milk production farms and to milk production and processing establishments. Samples are taken at least once a month for the reductase test, and at least four times a year for the presence of brucellosis. Specific control rules are in place for live and bivalve molluscs, fish and fishery products in terms of classification of production areas (A, B, C) according to the level of contamination by faeces, which are periodically monitored to verify microbiological quality, the presence of toxin-producing plankton and the presence of chemical contaminants. Additional measures on live and bivalve molluscs, fish and fishery products are related to hygienic rules. Specific control rules for eggs and eggs products are in place for assessing the microbiological conditions and its hygiene.

In terms of future plans, Albania intends to approve the Official Controls Law in the Parliament and to draft the secondary legislation which is yet not adopted. In addition, Albania intends to amend the Albanian Food Law and to develop a national program for improving the quality of Raw Milk in Albania.

b. Commission assessment

Albania **has not yet aligned its legislation** with the requirements of Regulation (EU) 2017/625 (OCR) on a harmonised system of official controls in the agrifood sector. Albania is fully committed to aligning with Regulation (EC) No 852/2004 and Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 laying down specific hygiene rules for food of animal origin.

Finally, Albania did not mention Salmonella control programmes in the country presentation. In view of its importance within the EU food safety *acquis*, due attention has to be given to the correct alignment and implementation in this domain

III.B. SPECIFIC RULES FOR ANIMAL PRODUCTS

a. Country presentation

The Competent authority responsible for specific rules for animal products is the Directorate of Food Safety Policies, part of the General Directorate of Development in the Field of Food Safety, Veterinary, Plant Protection, and Fishery in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MoARD). The Directorate is composed by the Sector of Products of Animal Origin (three employees), and the sector of fisheries products (two employees).

Commission Regulation (EC) 2073/2005 on microbiological criteria for foodstuffs is highly aligned in Albania's legal framework. Regulation (EU) 931/2011 on the traceability requirements set by Regulation (EC) 178/2002 is highly aligned by DCM No. 760 of 2015 and Regulation (EU) 101/2013 concerning the use of lactic acid to reduce microbiological surface contamination on bovine carcasses is highly aligned by Ordinance No. 13 of 2014. Commission Regulation (EU) 2015/1474 of 27 August 2015 concerning the use of recycled hot water to remove microbiological surface contamination from carcasses is highly aligned by Ordinance No. 15, dated 10.10.2018 On the use of recycled hot water to remove microbiological surface contamination from carcasses. Directive 2004/41/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 April 2004 repealing certain Directives concerning food hygiene and health conditions for the production and placing on the market of certain products of animal origin intended for human consumption and amending Council Directives 89/662/EEC and 92/118/EEC and Council Decision 95/408/EC, is highly aligned by: Order No. 292 of 12.06.2006 On the approval of the regulation "On the health conditions for the production and placing on the market of fresh meat; Law No. 9441 of 11.11.2005 On the collection, processing and marketing of milk and milk-based products; Regulation No. 3 of 11.06.2004 On the sanitary-veterinary conditions for the export of fresh chicken meat to EU countries.

Albania reported that food business operators must ensure that the construction, layout and equipment of slaughterhouses in which domestic ungulates are slaughtered have adequate and hygienic lairage facilities or, climate permitting, waiting pens that are easy to clean and disinfect. These facilities must be equipped for watering the animals and, if necessary, feeding them. The drainage of the wastewater must not compromise food safety. They must also have separate lockable facilities or, climate permitting, pens for sick or suspect animals with separate draining and sited in such a way as to avoid contamination of other animals. The slaughterhouse where domestic ungulates are slaughtered, in order to avoid contamination of the meat, must have a sufficient number of premises, a separate room for emptying and cleaning stomachs and intestines and ensure the separation in space or time for stunning and removal of blood and distribution of meat among other actions. These installations must avoid cross-contamination between the different parts of the slaughter line and have facilities for disinfecting tools, addition to have lockable facilities reserved for the slaughter of sick and suspect animals.

In terms of future plans, Albania intends to approve the Official Control Law in the Parliament and to draft the secondary legislation which is yet not adopted. In addition, Albania intends to amend the Food Law and to develop a national program for improving the quality of Raw Milk in the country.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has **a high level of alignment** with Commission Regulation (EC) 2073/2005 on microbiological criteria for foodstuffs as well as Regulations (EC) 852 and 853/2004 in its national legislation.

III.C. SPECIFIC CONTROL RULES FOR ANIMAL PRODUCTS

a. Country presentation

The National Food Authority (NFA) carries out the official controls and certification regarding food and provides scientific opinion on food. It is present in the 12 regions and has seven regional laboratories for analysis and diagnosis. Finally, the National Authority of Veterinary and Plant Protection (NAVPP) is responsible for implementation of official controls and veterinary services at farms and slaughterhouses. Its headquarters are in Tirana and it has four Regional Directorates reporting to MoARD.

Albania has a National Food Safety Strategy for the period 2023-2027 with four main objectives: strengthen the legislative and administrative framework, enhancing the effectiveness of the Agri-Food Control System, strengthening compliance throughout the Agri-Food sector and empowering consumers to make informed decisions. The Order No. 832 of 2006 largely aligns the Regulation (EC) 882/2004 on official controls performed to ensure the verification of compliance with feed and food law, animal health and animal welfare rules. In addition, Ordinance No. 21 of 2010 amended with Ordinance No. 4 of 2020 largely aligns Regulation (EC) 854/2004 laying down specific rules for the organisation of official controls on products of animal origin intended for human consumption. Commission Regulation (EC) 2074/2005 laying down implementing measures for certain products under Regulation (EC) 853/2004 and for the organisation of official controls under Regulation (EC) 854/2004, Regulation (EC) 882/2004, Regulation (EC) 852/2004, Regulation (EC) 853/2004, are highly aligned in the Ordinance No. 14 of 2020, Ordinance No. 23 of 2010, Ordinance No. 25 of 2010 and Ordinance No. 5 of 2011. Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2015/1375 laying down specific rules on official controls for *Trichinella* in meat is highly aligned by Ordinance No. 19 of 2023.

In terms of implementation, Albania has annual national risk-based plans of official controls and sampling for food, animal feed, plant protection and agricultural inputs, as well as the BIP sampling plan. The risk profiling methodology consists in categorising the risk of Food Business Operators as low, medium or high risk depending on the risk associated with their activity and other influencing factors using a scoring system. Official controls are carried out at all stages of the chain of production, processing, distribution, storage and marketing.

Specific control rules are in place for raw milk and milk-based products, notably for animals in milk production farms and for milk production and processing establishments. Samples are taken at least once a month for the reductase test, and at least four times a year for the presence of brucellosis. Specific control rules are in place for live and bivalve molluscs, fish and fishery products in terms of classification of production areas (A, B, C) according to the level of contamination by faeces, which are periodically monitored to verify microbiological quality, the presence of toxin-producing plankton and the presence of chemical contaminants. Additional measures on live and bivalve molluscs, fish and fishery products are related to hygienic rules. Specific control rules for eggs and eggs products are in place for assessing the microbiological conditions and its hygiene. Special control rules are in place for slaughterhouses for meat and meat products, including meat products, minced meat and mechanically separated meat, including through both ante and post-mortem inspection by an official veterinarian.

In terms of future plans, Albania intends to approve the Official Control Law in the Parliament and to draft the secondary legislation which is yet not adopted. In addition, Albania intends to amend the

Albanian Food Law and to develop a national program for improving the quality of Raw Milk in Albania.

b. Commission assessment

Regarding legislative alignment, Albania has a National Food Safety Strategy for the period 2023-2027 with four main objectives: strengthen the legislative and administrative framework, enhancing the effectiveness of the Agri-Food Control System, strengthening compliance throughout the Agri-Food Sector and empowering the Consumer to make informed

Albanian authorities are aligned with regulations that have been repealed and replaced by Regulation (EU) 2017/625 and Regulation 2019/627 respectively. Albanian authorities are **not yet aligned** with the new legislation.

III.D. RULES FOR ANIMAL BY-PRODUCTS

a. Country presentation

The Animal Health and Welfare Sector (three employees) is the unit responsible for rules for animal by-products (ABP). It belongs to the Directorate of Veterinary Policies of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. It is supported by the competent authority for control, the NVPPA and its Markets and Slaughterhouses Sector (five employees). With regards to the legal ground, Albania's Veterinary Law No. 1465 lays down the animal by-product definitions, the measures to be taken in the event of a suspected outbreak of an infectious disease and the obligations for both local governments and Competent Authorities. These aspects are further developed in the Decision of Council of Ministers No. 475 of 2021 on the cooperation of local self-government units with the veterinary service, notably on the collection, elimination and disposal of ABP. Currently, local authorities have the competence to bury the ABP. Albania states to be treating ABP categories 1, 2 and 3 according to the Regulation (EC) 1069/2009. Albania is in the process of adopting the Order of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development No. 655 of November 2023 for the establishment of the working group for some additions and changes to Law No. 10465 of 2011 on the veterinary service in the Republic of Albania. This Order further aligns Regulation (EC) 1069/2009. Albania also plans to align Implementing Regulation (EU) 142/2011 by a Decision of the Council of Minister and the Annex XVI on model health certificates of this implementing regulation in an Order of the Minister. The licensing procedure in Albania is digitalised.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has **not yet aligned** its legislation with the requirements of Regulation (EC) No 1069/2009 on the issue of animal by-products (ABP) not intended for human consumption, as well as with the requirements of Implementing Regulation (EU) No 142/2011. Specifically, categorisation of animal by-products is not legally framed as Categories 1 and 2 are currently defined as waste by the Albanian legislation. There is no economic benefit for operators to separate ABP and valorise Category 3 materials (presenting the lowest risk), as municipalities dispose them as waste, too. Assistance to understand the ABP-rules in their entirety would be recommended. However, Albania is fully committed to aligning with these rules.

As for implementation and enforcement challenges, an inappropriate legal framework and no or low implementation presents a significant risk for public and animal health, both in Albania and in the EU. For ABP, proper implementation is dependent on significant investments for at least one rendering plant and collection vehicles. Currently, no correct separation, collection, processing and/or disposal of ABPs is in place. Implementing the rules takes time even after proper legal framework is available and it is often not possible without national support. Appropriate controls are necessary, as there is no economic benefit for farmers and food operators to properly separate and dispose of Category 1 and 2 ABP produced.

All the above elements emphasise the need for Albania to act as soon as possible, especially that Albania has to build up a whole system for the collection, processing and disposal of ABP with the rules mentioned above. Within the pre-accession period, the existing non-compliances have to be overcome by substantial capital expenditure in the sector, for establishments, means of transport and manpower, as well as training for staff and operators.

III.E. FUNDING OF CHECKS

a. Country presentation

The institutions responsible for funding of checks are the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the General Directorate of the National Food Authority and its 12 regional directorates and the Food Safety and Veterinary Institute. Currently, Albania has not aligned legislation in this subject, which is covered by state budget. Tariffs exist only for sampling and to carry out tests. Currently, there are no mandatory fees and the fees that are currently collected are collected by the NFA and become revenue of the State Budget. Expenses for official control, sampling and laboratory analysis are covered by the importer, which is paying the fees to the NFA. The Ordinance of MoARD and Ministry of Finance and Economy No. 19 of 2022 defines the level of the fee for official controls, sampling and analysis. As future plans in this area, Albania intends to approve the Law on Official Controls to create a legal ground for establishment of the system of fees compliant to the EU system. In addition, the competent authority will run calculations of needed resources according to the requirement of the Law. Secondary legislation will be developed to define in more details the level of the fee and way functioning of the system, to assure that the level of fees are not lower than minimum rates.

b. Commission assessment

Albania **has not yet aligned** its legislation with the EU *acquis* on funding of checks and has only intention to adopt the necessary legislation in place. However, Albania is fully committed to aligning with the EU requirements.

III.F. SPECIFIC RULES FOR FEED HYGIENE

a. Country presentation

The institutional structure managing specific rules for feed hygiene is composed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development as a central competent authority and supported by both National Food Authority and the National Authority of Veterinary and Plant Protection. Within MoARD, the breeding, reproduction and animal feeding sector (three employees) belonging to the Directorate of Veterinary Policies is directly in charge of this area. Albania does not have a specific law on feed and currently uses the law on food for feed. HACCP rules for feed mirror requirements on food hygiene. Regulation (EC) No 1831/2003 laying down requirements for feed hygiene is not yet adopted but planned to be developed and adopted until the end of 2025.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has **not yet aligned** its legislation with the requirements of **Regulation (EC) No 1831/2003** on the issue of requirements for feed hygiene. However, Albania will align with those requirements, as well as with all EU specific legislation on feed (*see section V on specific rules for feed*), by the end of 2025. Current requirements on feed hygiene in Albania only ‘mirror’ requirements on food hygiene (e.g. HACCP rules); the specificities laid down in EU legislation for feed hygiene have not yet been adopted in the Albanian law.

Implementation and enforcement challenges are connected to the alignment with EU standards: as the Albanian legislation must still be aligned with the specific EU feed hygiene requirements, all derived

implementing rules, procedures and systems will also need to be adapted accordingly, such as the approval system for feed establishments. In view of those challenges, dedicated training/technical assistance to the Albanian authorities (including inspectors) would be recommended.

III.G. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS – PLACING ON THE MARKET OF FOOD, FEED AND ANIMAL PRODUCTS

Overall, Albania has **a low level of alignment** with the EU *acquis* on placing on the market of food, feed and animal products. Albania is highly aligned with the EU specific rules for animal products. National legislation is lowly aligned with the EU *acquis* on specific control rules for animal products. Albania is not yet aligned with the EU *acquis* on hygiene rules, specific requirements for feed hygiene, funding of checks and rules for animal-by-products. Albania should also ensure proper implementation once the adequate legal framework is in place by securing sufficient public subsidies and focusing on training of staff, notably regarding the rules for animal by-products and the specific rules for feed hygiene.

IV. FOOD SAFETY RULES

IV.A. LABELLING PRESENTATION AND ADVERTISING OF FOODSTUFFS INCLUDING NUTRITION AND HEALTH CLAIMS AND NUTRITIONAL LABELLING

a. Country presentation

Albania stated that Regulation (EU) 1169/2011 is highly aligned by its Decision of the Council of Ministers on food labelling and consumer information No. 434 of 2018. In addition, Regulation (EU) 1924/2006 is said to be highly aligned by the Order of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development on nutrition and health claims made on foods No. 182 of 2016. Finally, the Regulation (EU) 828/2014 on the requirements for the provision of information to consumers on the absence or reduced presence of gluten in food is said to be highly aligned with the Ordinance of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development No.5 of 2022. Albania acknowledged that the elements that are yet to be fully aligned are those related to mandatory food information for prepacked foods, only applicable for Member States. It is also the case for the provisions on the language requirement for imported foods, on allergens and indication of the country of origin or place of provenance. In terms of Institutional Framework, while the MoARD is responsible for policy and legislation, the National Food Authority (26 inspectors) is responsible for control and inspection of food labelling across the 12 Regional Directorates. With regards to the implementation, Food Business operators responsible for food labelling are obliged to notify the new food label to the Regional NFA Directorate (including through e-Albania). To support implementation, Albania runs awareness campaigns and capacity building through trainings. In terms of future plans, Albania intends to align before 2028 with Directive 201/91/EU on indications or marks identifying the lot to which a foodstuff belongs and Regulation (EU) 2018/775 laying down rules for indicating the country of origin or place of provenance of the primary ingredient of a food.

On Nutrition and Health Claims, Albania has highly aligned with Regulation (EC) 1924/2006 in its Order of Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development No. 182 of 2016. This is because the conditions for the use of nutrition and health claims are in partial compliance and provisions on EFSA and on the procedure of authorization, data protection, safeguard measure and monitoring are not aligned. In terms of implementation, if a health claim is made, the Food Business Operators shall justify the use of such claim and provide generally accepted scientific evidence. The EU Register of health claims is referred as scientific evidence. Future plans in this area consist of aligning by 2028 with Regulation (EC) 1924/2006, Regulation (EC) 353/2008 and Regulation (EC) 432/2012.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has **partially aligned** its legislation with the EU *acquis* on food labelling and advertising, notably with the requirements set out in Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 on the provision of food

information to consumers, in particular on the issue of origin labelling, and has not aligned at all its legislation with the requirements of Commission Implementing Regulation 1337/2013 laying down rules for the application of Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards the indication of the country of origin or place of provenance for fresh, chilled and frozen meat of swine, sheep, goats and poultry. However, Albania is fully committed to aligning with Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2018/775 laying down rules for the application of Article 26(3) of Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the provision of food information to consumers, as regards the rules for indicating the country of origin or place of provenance of the primary ingredient of a food and with Directive 2011/91 on indications or marks identifying the lot to which a foodstuff belongs.

Albania has **partially aligned** with the requirements of Regulation (EC) No 1924/2006 on the issue of the authorisation procedure of health claims made on foods, as well as with the requirements of Commission Regulation (EC) No 353/2008 and Commission Regulation (EC) No 432/2012. However, Albania expressed its commitment to further align with Regulation (EC) No 1924/2006 on the issue of the authorisation procedure, the role of the European Food Safety Authority in the scientific assessment for health claim applications as well as with the provisions referring to the different categories of health claims.

With regards to implementation and enforcement challenges, Article 8(8) of the Decision of Council of Ministers No. 434/2018 provides for a prior notification obligation of the labels of all foods to be placed on the Albanian market. Such a notification requirement is not provided for under Union law. Food business operators bear the responsibility to comply with the EU food labelling provisions, and it is the responsibility of Member States' national authorities to monitor compliance and enforce the EU rules. The Albanian authorities should ensure that monitoring and enforcement of the labelling provisions can take place through controls, when Albania joins the EU, and that Food Business Operators (FBOs) do not rely on prior authorisation of their labels to comply with the EU food labelling requirements.

A health claim that is not included in the list of authorised health claims of the EU register may currently be used in Albania if the Scientific Committee and Panels within the national authority consider that the claim is substantiated by generally accepted scientific evidence. The Albanian authorities should ensure that products placed on the Albanian market do not bear claims that are not included in the Union list of permitted health claims, when Albania joins the EU.

IV.B. FOOD ADDITIVES AUTHORISED AND PURITY CRITERIA

a. Country presentation

Albania stated that its Ordinance of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development No 18 for permitted food additives (amended in 2023) largely aligns Regulation (EC) 1333/2008 on food additives and all its annexes. Directive (EU) 2015/2203 on caseins and caseinates intended for human consumption is partially aligned in the Ordinance of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development No.12 of 2020. The wholesome list of additives allowed in the Republic of Albania and the allowed quantities of these additives are determined by the list present on the bylaw's annexes. In terms of institutional framework, MoARD is responsible for policy and legislation, the National Food Authority for official controls and inspections and the Food and Veterinary Safety Institution of Albania for food analysis. In terms of future plans, Albania envisages alignment with Regulation (EC) 1331/2008 establishing a common authorization procedure for food additives, food enzymes and food flavourings.

b. Commission assessment

Albania's legislation is **partially aligned** with Regulation (EC) No 1333/2008.

Albania has no specific training of inspectors on food improvement agents. Albania needs to increase laboratory and human capacities in this field, as it plans.

IV.C. FOOD ENZYMES

a. Country presentation

Albania stated that Regulation (EC) 1332/2008 on food enzymes is highly aligned in its Ordinance of the Minister of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration No.1 of 2014 except from articles 8, 9 and 15 to 24. In terms of institutional framework, MoARD is responsible for policy and legislation, the National Food Authority for official controls and inspections and the Food and Veterinary Safety Institution of Albania for food analysis. In terms of future plans, Albania envisages alignment with Regulation (EC) 1331/2008 establishing a common authorization procedure for food additives, food enzymes and food flavourings.

b. Commission assessment

Albania is **partially aligned** with several provisions of Regulation (EC) No 1332/2008 (subject matter, scope, definitions, general conditions for use and authorisation of enzymes, the content of the Union list and the labelling and information requirements).

IV.D. EXTRACTION SOLVENTS

a. Country presentation

Albania stated that the Directive 2009/32/EC on extraction solvents used in the production of foodstuff and food ingredients is highly aligned by its Ordinance of the Minister of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration No. 6 of 2014 except from the provisions reserved to Commission or Member States and articles 8 to 11. In terms of institutional framework, MoARD is responsible for policy and legislation, the National Food Authority for official controls and inspections and the Food and Veterinary Safety Institution of Albania for food analysis.

b. Commission assessment

Albania is **partially aligned** with several provisions of Directive 2009/32/EC (subject matter, scope, general safety and purity requirements, labelling and Annex I listing extraction solvents which may be used in the processing of raw materials, foodstuffs, food components or ingredients and their conditions of use).

IV.E. FOOD FLAVOURINGS

a. Country presentation

Albania stated that Regulation (EC) 1334/2008 on flavourings and certain food ingredients with flavouring properties for use in and on foods is highly aligned by the Ordinance of the Minister of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration No. 7 of 2015 except from provisions referring to the obligations of Member States, Annex I, and provision on ‘steeping’ in Annex II, and Order No. 33 of Minister of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection dated 26.01.2009 “On the approval of the regulation "On the source inventory of materials and substances used in the preparation of flavourings” too. The provisions of Regulation (EC) No 2065/2003 are largely included in Order No. 1, dated 26.01.2009 of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development “On smoke flavourings used or intended for use in or on foods. Albania stated to be highly aligned on smoke flavourings used or intended for use in or on foods. In terms of institutional framework, MoARD is responsible for policy and legislation, the National Food Authority for official controls and inspections and the Food and Veterinary Safety Institution of Albania for food analysis. As future

plans, Albania intends to align Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 872/2012 adopting the list of flavouring substances and Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 1321/2013 establishing the Union list of authorised smoke flavouring primary products for use as such in or on foods and/or for the production of derived smoke flavourings. Albania also envisages alignment with Regulation (EC) 1331/2008 establishing a common authorization procedure for food additives, food enzymes and food flavourings.

b. Commission assessment

Albania's legislation is **partially aligned** with the provisions of Regulation (EC) No 1334/2008 (as regards subject matter, scope, definitions, general conditions for use of flavourings, restrictions, requirements for evaluation and approval of certain types of flavourings, labelling, presence of undesirable substances, list of source materials with restrictions and conditions for the production of thermally processed flavourings). Albania has not aligned the Union list of flavourings and source material (Annex I to R. 1334/2008) and the provision on "steeping" listed among traditional food preparation processes (Annex II to R. 1334/2008).

Albania also is **partially aligned** with Regulation (EC) No 2065/2003 on smoke flavourings. Albania has not aligned the list of authorised smoke flavouring products, but it is to be noted that all current entries have been deleted from the Union list by Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2024/2067 (but can continue to be used until 1 July 2029).

IV.F. FOOD CONTACT MATERIALS

a. Country presentation

Albania stated that its Ordinance of the MoARD No.17 of 2023 on specific conditions and detailed procedures for the import of materials in contact with food, plastic containers of kitchen pads, polyamide and melamine, originating or consigned from the People's Republic of China and Hong Kong, partially aligns Regulation (EU) 284/2011. The instruction of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development No. 11, dated 2.5.2023 "On active and intelligent materials in contact with food" is partially aligned with Commission Regulation (EC) No 450/2009. In addition, its Ordinance of the MoARD No.15 of 2012 on materials and articles intended to come in contact with food largely aligns Regulation (EC) 1935/2004 except from articles 6 to 14 on national specific measures, authorisation process and role of EFSA. Albania stated that its Ordinance of MoARD No.12 of 2017 largely aligns Regulation (EU) 10/2011 on plastic materials and articles intended to come in contact with food. Regulation (EC) 2023/2006 on good manufacturing practice for materials and articles intended to come in contact with food is fully aligned by Ordinance of the MoARD No.3 of 2016, and Directive 82/711/EC laying down the basic rules necessary for testing migration of the constituents of plastic materials and articles intended to come into contact with foodstuffs is partially aligned with Order MoARD No. 167 of 2008.

The Ordinance No. 361, dated 23.10.2007 "On materials and articles which contain vinyl chloride monomer and are intended to come into contact with foodstuffs" is partially aligned with Council Directive 78/142/EEC; the Order No. 3, dated 10.03.2008 "The release of the N-nitrosamines and N-nitrosatable substances from elastomer or rubber teats and soothers" is partially aligned with Commission Directive 93/11/EEC; the Instruction of the Minister of Agriculture, Rural Development No. 9, dated 21.07.2008 "On the restriction of use of certain epoxy derivatives in materials and articles intended to come into contact with food" is partially aligned with Commission Regulation (EC) No 1895/2005

Concerning ceramic articles intended to come in contact with foodstuffs, the Council Directive 84/500/EEC is almost fully aligned in Ordinance of the MoARD No.8 of 2008 and Directive 2007/42/EC on materials and articles made of regenerated cellulose film intended to come in contact with foodstuffs in Ordinance No.7 of 2008. Albania is also highly aligned when it comes to materials

and articles which contain vinyl chloride monomer and are intended to come in contact with foodstuffs and partially aligned on active and intelligent materials and articles intended to come in contact with food.

In terms of institutional framework, the sector of non-animal origin and plant product is the responsible sector within the Directorate of Food Safety Policies of MoARD, and it has three employees. The National Food Authority is responsible for the official controls and inspections which are carried out based on annual risk-based plans, and counts with a Laboratory Service Coordination Sector. In addition, the State Inspectorate of Market Surveillance also provides support in this area. Albania's future plans include alignment with Council Directive 85/572/EEC laying down the list of simulants to be used for testing migration of constituents of plastic materials and articles intended to come into contact with food, with Commission Regulation (EC) 2018/2013 on the use of bisphenol A in varnishes and coatings intended to come into contact with food and Commission Regulation (EU) 2022/1616 on recycled plastic materials.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has **partially aligned** its legislation with EU *acquis* on food contact materials (FCMs), but only with Regulation (EC) 1935/2004. Albania should still align with Commission Regulation (EU) 2022/1616 on recycled plastic FCMs as indicated in its plans. Albania does not have to take further action to align with Council Directive 85/572/EEC and Commission Regulation (EU) 2018/213. Council Directive 85/572/EEC is superfluous as requirement at EU level, as the relevant provisions in that Directive have been replaced by point 3 of Annex III to Commission Regulation (EU) 10/2011. T

The requirements of the basic act Regulation (EC) No 1935/2004 appear well aligned, although Albania is aware that the Commission is in the process of revising EU rules on FCMs and is appears committed to following developments. Albania appears largely well aligned with the EU's main specific measure on FCMs, namely Commission Regulation (EU) No 10/2011. It should be reminded of the availability of EU Guidance on this Regulation, which does not require implementation. Overall, Albania appears fully committed to aligning legislation in the area of FCMs.

As regards official controls, Albania relies on Law No. 10433 and No. 9863 and controls are carried out by food control inspectors at food businesses. Albania should ensure however, that controls are carried out on FCM business operators both at borders and on the market. Increasing capacity as regards controls, human capacities in the field and in laboratory facilities is necessary and recommended.

IV.G. FOOD SUPPLEMENTS, FORTIFIED FOODS, FOOD FOR SPECIFIC GROUPS

a. Country presentation

Albania stated that the Albanian Order No291 of 2009 on the addition of vitamins and minerals and of certain other substances to foods is highly aligned with Regulation (EC) 1925/2006 on food fortification. Provisions on purity criteria, conditions for the addition, register, safeguard measures, monitoring and evaluation are not yet aligned. Annex II is highly aligned except from some vitamins and Annex III on prohibited substances is not yet aligned. Order No.216 of 2008 on food supplements amended by order 565 of 2014 is highly aligned with Directive 2002/46/EC on food supplements. Concerning food for specific groups, the Ordinance of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development No.20 of 2021 on food intended for infants and young children, food for special medical purposes, and total diet replacement for weight control is partially aligned with Regulation (EU) 609/2013.

In terms of institutional framework, the sector of products of non-animal and plant origin of MoARD is responsible for policy, legislation and strategy while the National Food Authority's risk assessment

and statistics sector (five employees), the laboratory service coordination sector (four employees) and the coordination of official control on food, feed and food operators (nine employees) are responsible for the implementation. Inspections and e-inspections are carried out based on annual risk-based plan. Concerning future plans, Albania envisages to fully align the EU *acquis* in this area by 2027.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has **partially aligned** its legislation with the EU *acquis* on food supplements, fortified food and food for specific groups, except with the requirements of Regulation EU (No) 609/2013 on food for specific groups, Regulation EU (No) 1925/2006 on food fortification as well as with the requirements of Directive 2002/46/EC on food supplements. However, Albania will align with these EU legislations according to their planned timeline. Albania needs to ensure the alignment of their national law with the specific information and compositional requirements laid down via Commission delegated Regulations for the food categories covered by Regulation EU (No) 609/2013.

As currently, products placed on the Albanian market do not have to comply with the EU compositional and labelling requirements, the Albanian authorities will need to ensure that those products do not remain on the market after the accession of Albania.

IV.H. CONTAMINANTS AND UNDESIRABLE SUBSTANCES

a. Country presentation

Albania has highly aligned with Council Regulation 315/93 and Delegated Regulation 2022/931 with the Ordinance of Minister No.6 of 2023 setting the rules for carrying out official controls related to presence of contaminants in food. Albania has aligned its legislation with Commission implementing Regulation 2022/932 with the Ordinance of Minister No.7 of 2022 setting the rules on drafting and content of national plan for official controls for contaminants in food, which determines the minimum frequency controls and testing for risk-based national control plans on residues as well as for imports for live animals or animal-origin commodities. Albania has highly aligned with Regulation (EC) 1881/2006 with Ordinance of Minister No.1 of 2016 on the establishment of maximum levels for certain contaminants in food products.

According to Albanian authorities, the Ordinance of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development No. 12, dated 29.09.2010 “On laying down the methods of sampling and analysis for the official control of the levels of mycotoxins in foodstuffs” is partially aligned with Commission Regulation (EC) No 401/2006. The Guideline of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development No. 1, dated 15.02.2023 “laying down the methods for sampling and analysis for control of levels of microelements and contaminants during processing of food products” is partially aligned with the Commission Regulation (EC) No 333/2007. The Guideline of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development No. 13, dated 31.05.2018 “On the definition of sampling and analysis methods for controlling the levels of dioxins, dioxin-like PCBs and non-dioxin-like PCBs in some foods” is partially aligned with Commission Regulation (EU) 2017/644. The Guideline No. 19 of Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, dated 17.11.2010 “On methods of sampling and analysing for level of nitrates in food samples taken for official controls” is largely aligned with the Commission Regulation (EC) No 1882/2006

Minister Order No. 12 of 2022 is aligned with Regulation (EC) 124/2009 is highly aligned in on the determination of the maximum levels of the presence of coccidiostats and histomonostatics in milk, kidneys, as well as other foods. Albanian Minister Order No.192 of 2011 is highly aligned with Directive 2002/32/EC on undesirable substances in animal feed, including Annex I on maximum levels and Annex II on action thresholds triggering investigations within the Order.

Competent authorities responsible for official controls for contaminants under the MoARD are the National Food Authority, the National Authority of Veterinary and Plant Protection and the Food

Safety and Veterinary Institute. Concerning implementation, the national control plan for residues in live animals and animal origin commodities is based on volumes of commodities production in different regions, the volumes of export of commodities to the EU, the non-conformities detected in previous years and the capacity of FSVI and contracted laboratories to analyse samples. There is a special plan for bivalve molluscs and there are certain groups of contaminants that are closely monitored, such as nitrates, mycotoxins, heavy metals and PCB. The legal framework for prohibited substances and residues is aligned with Regulation (EC) 2023/915 with the Ordinance of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development No.4 date 9.2.2024 “For the establishment of maximum levels for certain contaminants in food”.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has **highly aligned** its legislation with the EU standards on contaminants in food and undesirable substances, especially with the requirements of Regulation (EEC) 315/93 on contaminants in food and the implementing acts and with the requirements of Directive 2002/32/EC on undesirable substances. However, Albania is fully committed to aligning with the EU *acquis* on contaminants in food and undesirable substances in feed.

Regarding implementation and enforcement challenges, Albania has **highly aligned** its legislation with the requirements on sampling and analysis for the control of contaminants in food, established in several Regulations. Albania has also aligned with the Delegated Regulation 2022/931 and Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/932 on the performance of official controls as regards contaminants in food. Albania should extend the scope of the official controls of contaminants in food to cover all relevant contaminants and commodities, in particular in relation with food of non-animal origin.

IV.I. NOVEL FOODS

a. Country presentation

Article 3 of the Albanian Food Law defines novel foods as foods of food ingredients that have not been used for human consumption before in the territory of the Republic of Albania. Chapter VII of the Food Law differentiates categories of novel food and article 28 regulates the placing of novel food on the market, which is linked to a case-by-case authorization from MoARD. The register of authorised novel food placed on the market is kept by MoARD, which is also entitled to prohibit the placing on the market and the import of novel food to prevent or reduce the possibility of negative impact on human health. Both the National Food Authority and the Scientific committee and scientific panels are responsible for the implementation of the legislation in this area. The Decision No. 236, dated 17.4.2019 approving the regulation "On the fruit pulp of Baobab" as a novel food ingredient has fully aligned with Commission Decision 2008/575/EC.

Albania plans to align with the *acquis* on the legislation on novel food including implementing acts between 2026 and 2027.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has **not yet aligned** its legislation with the EU rules on novel foods, notably with the requirements of Regulation EU 2015/2283 on novel foods, Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2017/2470 on the Union list of novel foods as well as with the requirements of the following Implementing Regulations (EU) 2017/2468, 2017/2469 and 2018/456. However, Albania is fully committed to aligning with these EU legislations according to their planned timeline.

As currently novel products placed on the Albanian market do not have to comply with the EU legislation on novel foods, the Albanian authorities should ensure that those products do not remain on the market after the accession of Albania.

IV.J. IONISING RADIATION

a. Country presentation

The Ordinance of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development No.4 of 2014 on foods and food ingredients treated with ionising radiation is highly aligned with Directive 1992/2/EC. The non-compliance refers to the obligations for Member States (Articles 7 and 11 to 17). The national legislation also contains provisions relevant for the implementation of rules on national level. In addition, Albanian legislation contains Annex IV on Authorized Food Products for Radiation Treatment and Maximum Radiation, which is aligned with the Annex of Directive 1999/3/EC. The Ordinance of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development No.4 of 2014 on the provisions related to the establishment of a Community list of foods and food ingredients treated with ionising radiation is partially aligned with the directive..

The responsible sector within MoARD is the one on products of non-animal and plant origin (three employees) belonging to the Directorate of Food Safety Policies. The National Food Authority is in charge of implementation, together with the Public Health Institution (Directorate for Radiation protection) and the Institute of Applied Nuclear Physics, which is not accredited yet for the detection of radiated food. Albania presented that there are no establishments approved to date to carry out ionising radiation. In this regard, Albania plans to strengthen implementation by further aligning with the Commission Decision 2002/840/EC adopting the list of approved facilities in third countries for the irradiation of foods by Q2 2027.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has **highly aligned** its legislation with the requirements of Directives 1999/2 and 1999/3 on the issue of food ionisation.

Regarding implementation and enforcement challenges, administrative procedures do not yet exist for issuing an approval for production and placing on the market of irradiated food and the required documentation to be provided by the applicant, official laboratories are not accredited for detecting irradiated food which may hamper the proper implementation of the annual monitoring programme for detecting non imported food illegally irradiated.

IV.K. NATURAL MINERAL WATERS

a. Country presentation

The term ‘food’ also includes water in the Albanian Food Law. In addition, the Order on adaption of regulation No 266 of 2011, on the exploitation and marketing of natural mineral waters is highly aligned with provisions of the Directive 2009/54/EC and the Order No 314 of 2010 for the adoption of the Regulation on establishing the list, concentration limits and labelling requirements for the constituents of natural mineral waters and the conditions for using ozone-enriched air for the treatment of natural mineral waters and spring waters is fully aligned with the provisions of the Commission Directive 2003/40/EC. Finally, Order No13 of 2012 on the conditions for use of activated alumina for the removal of fluoride from natural mineral waters and spring waters is fully aligned with provisions of Regulation (EU) 115/2010. Rules of labelling are aligned too. Albania is fully committed to further align and in a timely manner the provisions of Directive 2009/54/EC.

In terms of institutional framework, the Water Resources Agency belonging to the Ministry of Environment and Tourism is responsible for policy making on water resources management on National Level. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is responsible for the legislation and strategy and the National Food Authority for official controls in the market in this area. Finally, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection is responsible for monitoring and inspection through the 36 Local Health Care Units, the State Health Inspectorate and the Institute for Public Health. In

Albania there are 39 water treating and packaging establishments allowed to produce and market mostly in domestic market but also to export. Albania imports bottled water from EU countries.

b. Commission assessment

Regarding legislative alignment, Albania has **partially aligned** with the requirements of Directive 2009/54/EC on natural mineral waters.

Regarding implementation and enforcement challenges, in Albania, inspections on food operator businesses are carried out based on annual risk based plan and in compliance with Article 41 Object of official control on food and feed based on Law on Food Nr.9863, as amended. Bottled water risk assessment is carried out by the Risk Assessment Directory of the National Food Authority.

IV.L. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS – FOOD SAFETY RULES

Overall, Albania is **partially aligned** with the *EU acquis* on food safety rules. National legislation is highly aligned with the *EU acquis* on ionizing radiation and contaminants in food and undesirable substances.. National legislation is partially aligned with the *EU acquis* on food contact materials, on food additives, enzymes, extraction solvents and flavourings, labelling, food supplements, fortified foods, foods for specific groups and Mineral waters. Albania is not yet aligned with the *EU acquis* on Novel Food and contaminants in feed.

V. SPECIFIC RULES FOR FEED

V.A. PLACING ON THE MARKET AND USE OF FEED

a. Country presentation

The Central competent authority in Albania in the area of feed is the General Directorate of Development in the Field of Food Safety, Veterinary Medicine, Plant Protection and Fisheries of MoARD. The Risk Management and Coordination of Official Controls Directorate of the National Food Authority is contributing with 9 employees and the Veterinary Directorate of the NVPPA with five employees working on the Markets and Slaughterhouses Sector. In terms of legislative alignment, Albania's Food Law regulates feed business operators, the import and export conditions for feed and its traceability and labelling. In this regard, Albania has not yet aligned its legislation with the requirements of Regulation (EC) 767/2009 on the issue of placing on the market and use of feed. In terms of implementation, sampling is carried out during official control activities and sent to accredited laboratories authorized by the MoARD. Licenses and permits are issued through the National Business Centre (NBC) following a licensing procedure. As future plans, Albania expects to adopt a new Feed Law by 2025 to align Regulation (EC) 183/2005, Regulation (EC) 1831/2003, Regulation (EU) 2019/4, Commission Recommendation 2004/704/EC, Regulation (EC) 68/2013 and Regulation (EC) 152/2009.

b. Commission assessment

Regarding legislative alignment, Albania has **not yet aligned** its legislation with the requirements of Regulation (EC) No 767/2009 on the issue of placing on the market and use of feed. However, Albania will align with those requirements, as well as with all EU specific legislation on feed, by the end of 2025. Most of the current requirements concerning feed in Albania only mirror requirements on food and do not take into account the specificities laid down in EU legislation for feed. Only very partial alignment to Regulation (EC) No 767/2009 is being referred to by Albania (in particular via Law No. 9863 of 28.1.2008 on food), such as regards certain feed labelling requirements or the Recommendation 2011/25/EU (guidelines for the distinction between feed materials, feed additives, biocidal products and veterinary medicinal products).

Regarding implementation and enforcement challenges, as the Albanian legislation must still be aligned with Regulation (EC) No 767/2009, all derived implementing rules and procedures will also need to be adapted accordingly, such as concerning the Catalogue of feed materials (Regulation (EU) No 68/2013) or the list of intended uses of feed intended for particular nutritional purposes (Regulation (EU) 2020/354).

Albanian authorities (including inspectors) will need to increase dedicated training/technical assistance.

V.B. FEED ADDITIVES

a. Country presentation

In the area of feed additives, Commission Recommendation 2011/25/EU establishing guidelines for the distinction between feed materials, feed additives, biocidal products and veterinary medicinal products is largely approximated with the Ordinance of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development 15/2023. Delegated Regulation (EU) 2019/2090 regarding cases of suspected or established non-compliance is largely approximated with the Order of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Developments 123/2023. In terms of implementation, sampling is carried out during official control activities and sent to accredited laboratories authorized by the MoARD. Licenses and permits are issued through the National Business Centre (NBC) following a licensing procedure. As future plans, Albania expects to adopt a new Feed Law by 2025 to align Regulation (EC) 183/2005, Regulation (EC) 1831/2003, Regulation (EU) 2019/4, Commission Recommendation 2004/704/EC, Regulation (EC) 68/2013 and Regulation (EC) 152/2009.

b. Commission assessment

Regarding legislative alignment, Albania has **not yet aligned** its legislation with the requirements of Regulation (EC) No 1831/2003 on the issue of additives for use in animal nutrition. However, Albania is fully committed to aligning with those requirements, as well as with all EU specific legislation on feed, by the end of 2025. Most of the current requirements concerning feed in Albania only 'mirror' requirements on food and do not take into account the specificities laid down in EU legislation for feed. Only very few provisions concerning coccidiostats used as feed additives are referred to by Albania and appear to be non-compliant with Regulation (EC) No 1831/2003 and confusing.

Regarding implementation and enforcement challenges, as the Albanian legislation must still be aligned with Regulation (EC) No 1831/2003, all derived implementing rules and procedures will also need to be adapted accordingly, in particular to comply with the positive list of feed additives authorised at Union level.

Albanian authorities (including inspectors) will need to increase dedicated training/technical assistance.

V.C. UNDESIRABLE SUBSTANCES

a. Country presentation

Undesirable substances in feed is regulated in Albania in the Order of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development 192/2011. It partially aligns Directive 2002/32/EC on undesirable substances in animal feed, Annex I on maximum levels and Annex II on action thresholds triggering investigations. In terms of implementation, sampling is carried out during official control activities and sent to accredited laboratories authorized by the MoARD. Licenses and permits are issued through the National Business Centre (NBC) following a licensing procedure. As future plans, Albania expects to adopt a new Feed Law by 2025 to align Regulation (EC) 183/2005, Regulation (EC) 1831/2003, Regulation (EU) 2019/4, Commission Recommendation 2004/704/EC, Regulation (EC) 68/2013 and Regulation (EC) 152/2009.

b. Commission assessment

Regarding legislative alignment, Albania has **low level of alignment** in its legislation with the requirements of Directive 2002/32/EC on undesirable substances in animal feed, through the Order of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development No. 192 of 6.6.2011.

Regarding implementation and enforcement, Albania needs to ensure that all provisions adopted at EU level in the framework of Directive 2002/32/EC, in particular the adaptation to the regular updates of Annexes I and II to the Directive (which are adopted through regulations since 2011), are integrated into the Albanian legislation.

Albanian authorities (including inspectors) will need to increase dedicated training/technical assistance.

V.D. MEDICATED FEED

a. Country presentation

The Law No.10465/2011 on veterinary service in the Republic of Albania regulates medicated feed in articles 82, 83 and 84. As per these articles, introduction of medical substances directly to animal feed and water shall be prohibited and medicated animal feed shall be produced only in registered facilities after issuing a prescription. The use of hormonal VMPs beta-agonist and thyrostatics is allowed to be used only for therapeutic, zootechnical and scientific research purposes. In terms of implementation, sampling is carried out during official control activities and sent to accredited laboratories authorized by the MoARD. Licenses and permits are issued through the National Business Centre (NBC) following a licensing procedure. Albania will adopt a new Feed Law by 2025 to align Regulation (EC) 183/2005, Regulation (EC) 1831/2003, Regulation (EU) 2019/4, Commission Recommendation 2004/704/EC, Regulation (EC) 68/2013 and Regulation (EC) 152/2009.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has **not yet aligned** its legislation with the requirements of Regulation (EU) 2019/4 on the issue of medicated feed. Albania plans to align with all EU specific legislation on feed, by the end of 2025. Albania also needs to align with 'medicated feed': only very few provisions concerning 'medicated feed' are mentioned by Albania (referring to Law No. 10465 of 29.9.2011 on veterinary service in the Republic of Albania) and appear to be partial or even non-compliant with Regulation (EU) 2019/4. All implementing arrangements and procedures will also need to be adopted accordingly, taking into account the provisions adopted at Union level on the basis of that Regulation until the date of accession.

Albanian authorities (including inspectors) will need to increase dedicated training/technical assistance.

V.E. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS – SPECIFIC RULES FOR FEED

Overall, Albania has a **low level of alignment** with the EU *acquis* on specific rules for feed. Albanian feed legislation only mirrors national food legislation. National legislation is lowly aligned with the EU *acquis* on undesirable substances in feed. . Albania is not yet aligned with the EU *acquis* on requirements for placing on the market and use of feed, feed additives and on medicated feed.

VI. PHYTOSANITARY POLICY

VI.A. PLANT HEALTH (HARMFUL ORGANISMS)

a. Country presentation

Albania presented a Plant Health overview of the country, highlighting the importance of agriculture in Albania's economy, and the various challenges to tackle, notably the presence of pests species. Albania actively participates in regional international fora, such as International Plant Protection Convention and European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organisation, to address common plant health challenges. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is the responsible authority in this area. The Albanian Law No. 105/2015 on plant protection, as amended by Law No.15/2022 regulates plant health in the country and it is partially aligned with Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 on protective measures against pests and plants. In addition, Albania drafted a new law on plant health for a larger alignment with the latest (to be adopted in 2025). Currently, the Ordinance of the Minister of MoARD No.10/2023 (taking affect in June 2024) largely aligns the provisions of the Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 on the format, criteria and procedures of the registration of professional operators. The National Authority of Veterinary and Plant Protection (NAVPP) is responsible for maintaining and updating this register. Albania has a Pest Monitoring Plan 2023 for the pest control in the country that defines the frequency and the locations for official controls. On sampling procedure, Albania is highly aligned with ISPM 23 and 3.

On specific control measures, Albania is highly aligned with Regulation (EU) 2020/1201 on *Xylella fastidiosa* and Regulation (EU) 2022/1192 on *Globodera pallida* Behrens and *Globodera rostochiensis* Behrens, and partially aligned with Council Directive 93/85/EEC and Council Directive 69/464/EEC on *Clavibacter spediticus*, *Synchytrium edobioticum* and other quarantine pests. In 2024, Albania drafted new ordinances for these two pests that approximate Regulation (EU) 2022/1194 and Regulation (EU) 2022/1195. Albania is properly establishing demarcated areas in terms of infected and buffer zones, although it does not have protected zones, and has an Ordinance on the rules for the recognition of protected zones highly aligned with Regulation (EU) 2016/2031, Directive 92/70/EEC and Directive 93/51/EEC. On the plant passport and movement of plants between protected zones, Albania is highly aligned with Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2017/2313 although this function is currently covered by internal phytosanitary certificates until the implementation of the plant passport (issues by the NAVPP). Albania has an Order of the Minister of MoARD highly aligned with Regulation (EU) 2016/2031, Regulation (EU) 2017/625 and related implementing regulations on protective measures against plant pests. In terms of Institutional structures on Plant Health, Albania has the sector of Health and Plant Protection and Residues (3 employees) within the Directorate of the Policies in the Plant Health, Seed, Seedling and Fertilizer in MoARD, the National Food Authority (NFA), National Authority of Veterinary and Plant Protection (NAVPP) and the Institute of Food Safety and Veterinary (IFSV). Albanian laboratories cover nematology, entomology, virology, mycology and bacteriology. Import controls of consignments are performed by 17 Plant Protection and Agricultural inputs inspectors at 13 Border Inspection Posts (BIPs) designated as official points of entry. Albania is currently drafting a monitoring plan for pests based on risk which is expected to align Regulation (EU) 2022/2389. Other plans set by Albania include the preparation and approval of contingency plans, and multi-annual control plans.

b. Commission assessment

Albania **has partially aligned** its legislation with the requirements of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 on protective measures against pests of plants. The new Plant Health Law being finalised should be aligned with EU legislation.

VI.B. PLANT PROTECTION PRODUCTS AND PESTICIDE RESIDUES

a. Country presentation

Albania reports that MoARD, particularly the Plant Health Policies, Seeds, Seedlings and Fertilizers Directorate (7 employees), serves as the competent authority for plant protection products. The National Veterinary and Plant Protection Authority (NVPPA) oversees inspection supervision with 61 inspectors throughout the country, including at the Border Inspection Points, while the Food Safety and Veterinary Institute (FSVI) (11 employees) conducts laboratory testing of phytopharmaceutical

products and their residues in food of plant origin. Additionally, the FSVI is responsible for the monitoring the National Action Plan. Albania reports having 342 plant protection products, all of them imported and mostly fungicides.

In terms of legislative alignment, the country acknowledges that Regulation 1107/2009 on the marketing of plant protection products is partially aligned in its legislation, as well as the Commission Regulation (EU) 2021/383 amending Annex III to the Council Regulation 1107/2009. Its national legislation is partially aligned with Implementing Regulation (EU) 540/2011 on the list of approved active substances, as well as Directive (EC) 2009/128 on the sustainable use of pesticides, and Regulations (EC) 1185/2009 on statistical data on pesticides and (EC) 396/2005 on maximum levels of pesticide residues are also partially aligned..

Regarding implementation, the country has established systems for mutual recognition with EU Member States and for evaluating the effectiveness of phytopharmaceutical products. The country has synchronized its phytosanitary information system with the EU database of active substances and integrated this information with all stakeholders involved in the registration and authorization of phytopharmaceutical products.

Approval of the law on plant protection products is envisaged for 2026 and the alignment of the new EU regulation for the sustainable use of plant protection products for 2027.

b. Commission assessment

The legislation of Albania **is partially aligned** with Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 and Regulation (EC) No 396/2005, but their implementation seems to be superficial. Albania needs to ensure that maximum residue levels (MRL), their alignment with the EU ones, default MRL, risk assessment, import tolerances, temporary MRLs are aligned with the *acquis*. Directive 2002/63/EC on sampling for pesticide residues has been **partially aligned**.

There is no substantial risk assessment of active substances/plant protection products at the moment as Albania relies on the list of approved active substances in the EU and on mutual recognitions. Albania should develop its human capacities and technical expertise in this area.

Currently the approved active substances at EU level are automatically approved also in Albania. However, after accession, Albania, should have sufficient human and technical capacities to be a rapporteur for active substances and to carry out full risk assessment on behalf of all Member States as per Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009. The data on the human capacities is given for the whole the Plant Health Policies, Seeds, Seedlings and Fertilizers Directorate with seven employees of which only one works on plant protection products which needs to be increased. The staffing should include experts capable to do all parts of the risk assessment as per Regulation (EU) 1107/2009 (exotox experts, microbiologists, etc.)

At product level, Albania currently does not carry out substantial risk assessment as per Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009, but only administrative checks of the documents submitted by the applicant. While the mutual recognition procedure is an option provided for by Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009, the candidate country should have the same capacities as all Member States to carry out full risk assessment of an application for a plant protection product under Article 29 of that Regulation and could not rely only on mutual recognitions/parallel trade permits.

Albania should also increase its application fees so that they cover the costs of the risk assessment/risk management procedures.

There are no criminal sanctions for non-compliance with the relevant legislation, only administrative ones. It seems also that the sanctions provided for illegal use/marketing of plant protection products are not sufficiently high in order to be dissuasive.

On pesticide residues controls, it seems that Albania has made good progress. The annual monitoring plan increasingly takes into account the EU multi-annual control programme regarding the commodities and pesticides to be analysed, and the Laboratory for pesticide residues is accredited with an increasing analytical scope. However, no details on enforcement actions taken in the case of pesticide residues related non-compliance were provided.

VI.C. QUALITY OF SEED AND PROPAGATING MATERIAL

a. Country presentation

Albania produces and certifies approximately 20% of its seeds and plant propagating material (wheat, maize, olives), while it imports around 80% from EU countries (vegetable seeds, cereals and fruit trees). The Albanian legal framework on plant propagating material is partially aligned with the EU *acquis*, except for the forest reproductive material. The Directorate of Plant Health Policies, Seeds, Seedlings, Fertilizers of MoARD (seven employees) is the responsible authority together with the State Entity for Seeds and Seedlings (SESS), NAVPP, NFA, FSVI and the five Agriculture of Technology Transfer Centres, which produce high seed links and cooperate regarding the testing of new varieties. Within the SESS, the Central Lab of Seed Testing conduct analysis as per ISTA (International Seed Testing Association) rules and procedures. The application for test purposes and the certification procedure of plant propagating material is done fully online through e-Albania. Albania expects its amended Law on plant propagating material to enter into force in Q2 2025.

b. Commission assessment

The existing legislation seems to be a good starting point for Albania's plans to complete the alignment with its legislation with the EU *acquis* on plant reproductive material and the accreditation of the Central Seed Laboratory in accordance with ISTA standards and methods over the next years.

However, Albania **has not yet aligned** its legislation on forest reproductive material with the requirements of Council Directive 1999/105/EC on the marketing of forest reproductive material, as regards the approval of basic material and the certification of forest reproductive material. Albania is committed to aligning with the EU legislation on forest reproductive material by 2027. It will be challenging to meet this target date as there is currently no legal framework in place for the production and marketing of forest reproductive material.

VI.D. PLANT VARIETY RIGHTS

a. Country presentation

Albania is an International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) member (1991 UPOV Convention). The Albania Law No 880/2002 on Plant Breeder's Right and related secondary legislation, partially align Regulation (EC) 2100/94 on Community plant variety rights and related implementing regulations. Provisions on farmer's privilege and on compulsory cross-licensing are not yet aligned. The first request for granting plant breeder's right since the entry into force of the Law 880/2002 is under examination. In terms of Institutional structures, the Directorate of Plant Health, Seeds, Seedlings, Fertilizers of MoARD is the responsible authority. Linked to it, there is the SESS, the Agriculture Technology Transfer Centre, and the Varieties Evaluation Commission for Registration in the National Catalog (VECRNC). Albania assures that at the moment of accession it will not have difficulties implementing the *acquis* in this area.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has a **low level of alignment** in the implementation of the *acquis* on plant variety rights. There is practically no experience on this in Albania as no plant variety rights have been granted yet. National legislation is based on the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants

(UPOV) Convention as the EU *acquis*. After accession, the national system for granting plant variety rights can continue to co-exist with the EU system.

VI.E. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS – PHYTOSANITARY POLICY

Overall, Albania has a **partial level of alignment** with the EU *acquis* on phytosanitary policy. National legislation is partially aligned with the EU *acquis* on plant health and no or low level of alignment on quality of seeds and plant propagating material as well as on plant variety rights.

VII. GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS

VII.A. RELEASE INTO THE ENVIRONMENT

a. Country presentation

Albania does not have a law on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and no authorisations have been given for GMOs. Albanian Law no 10 431/2011 ‘For the Protection of the Environment’ prohibits the deliberate release into the environment or placing on the market of GMOs, except in cases where it is provided otherwise by the legislation. In addition, according to its own assessment, Albanian Law no 84/2020 is aligned with the amendment on GMOs to the Aarhus Convention. Albania presented current challenges in this area, notably the approximation of the legislation with the EU legislation related to the deliberate release into the environment of GMOs, and transboundary movement of GMOs, as well as the clarification of roles and responsibilities and the improvement of professional skills. For the future, Albania expects to align with the EU legislation on GMOs by 2028.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has **not yet aligned** its legislation with the requirements of Directive 2001/18/EC on the deliberate release into the environment of GMOs, as well as with the requirements of Regulation No 1946/2003 on transboundary movement of GMOs. The Albanian legislation on GMOs remains very limited and fragmentary, consisting mainly of ratified international conventions and protocols (Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and its Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress; GMO amendment to the Aarhus Convention) and a limited number of national laws making reference to GMOs in a brief and general manner. By way of example, there is a general prohibition of the deliberate release and placing on the market of GMOs unless otherwise provided by legislation and a ban of use of GMOs in organic production. A law on GMOs has not yet been adopted.

Implementation capacities (establishment of laboratories, training of staff and inspectors etc.) are yet very limited. There is a need for clarification of roles and responsibilities of various institutions involved in GMO related matters. There is no experience with GMOs in Albania.

VII.B. GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOOD AND FEED

a. Country presentation

The Albanian Law on food contains some provisions for genetically modified food and feed in its Chapter XIV, notably the obligation to have a permit issued by the minister responsible for food to be allowed to place on the market food and food ingredients containing, consisting of, or produced from GMOs, and feed containing or consisting of GMOs. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MoARD), as responsible authority at policy level in this area, is tasked to keep a register of these permits. No authorisations have been given for genetically modified food and feed. The Albanian Decision no. 406/2020 on approval of rules on labelling of feed used for food, including those consisting or containing GMOs is according to Albania partially harmonised with the rules on GM feed labelling in Regulation (EC) 1829/2003 on genetically modified food and feed. Albanian

Law No. 106/2016 on organic production, labelling, and inspection of organic products prohibits the use of GMOs and products produced from or with GMOs in its Articles 5 and 9. In terms of institutional structures, the Seeds, Seedlings and Fertilizer Products Sector (3 employees) is the responsible authority within MoARD.

Albania presented current challenges in this area, notably the approximation of the legislation with the EU legislation related to GM food and feed but also on the clarification of roles and responsibilities and the improvement of professional skills. For the future, Albania expects to align with the EU legislation on GM food and feed by 2028.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has **not yet aligned** its legislation with the requirements of Regulation No 1829/2003 on genetically modified (GM) food and feed as well as with the requirements of Regulation No 1830/2003 on traceability and labelling of GMOs and the traceability of food and feed products produced from GMOs. Some basic elements are in place (provision establishing an authorisation requirement, scientific opinion as part of the authorisation procedure, register of authorisations, labelling of GM food and feed).. In 2020, a specific element of the EU's GM feed legislation, the scope and requirements of GM feed labelling, were partially aligned..

No GM food or feed is authorised in Albania. Consequently, there is no experience with the implementation of authorisation, traceability, labelling and other requirements for GM food and feed.

VII.C. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS – GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS

Overall, Albania has a **low level of alignment** with the EU *acquis* on genetically modified organisms. Albania is not yet aligned with the Directive 2001/18/EC on the deliberate release into the environment of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), with the requirements of Regulation No 1946/2003 on transboundary movement of GMOs as well as with the Regulation No 1829/2003 on genetically modified (GM) food and feed and with the requirements of Regulation No 1830/2003 on traceability and labelling of GMOs and the traceability of food and feed products produced from GMOs.

VIII. FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION – FOOD SAFETY, VETERINARY AND PHYTOSANITARY POLICY

a. Country presentation

Albania set out its general framework to fight against corruption through a comprehensive strategy aligned with international conventions. Based upon the national framework to prevent and fight corruption, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has built its anticorruption measures related to Food Safety, Veterinary and Phytosanitary Policy on three pillars: Transparency, Monitoring and auditing, and integrity.

Regarding transparency, Albania has an updated website, an Electronic Register of Requests and Responses, coordinators for the right of information and public consultations, moreover, it also has a point of contact. The online services help prevent corruption that could appear in other management methods. Moreover, inspections are defined online ensuring transparency and fairness In the selections of the sites to attend.

With regard to audit, there are measures for both the internal audit regulated by Law No. 114, dated 22.10.2015, "On Internal Audit in the Public Sector", as amended and external audit is regulated by Law No. 154/2014 "On the Organization and Functioning of the Albanian High State Audit Institution (HSA)".

On integrity, laboratory analysis reports for food products enables to carry out analyses within the framework of the official control for samples planned in the national plan of risk-based official controls and sampling for food, animal feed, plant protection and agricultural inputs, as well as the plan for obtaining samples in PIK, for Food Business Operators, who produce/process/package products that are intended to be put on the market. If it is necessary for the purpose of inspection, inspectors have the right to take, free of charge, samples of products, materials, goods, substances or products and subject them to examination or analysis. The samples are taken in the presence of the representatives of the inspected entity, except in cases where he is excluded, by decision, from being present during the inspection. Before choosing the samples, the inspector explains to the representative the procedure for taking them. According to the Article 36, Law No. 9863/2008 "On Food", as amended and article 8, point 8 of the DCM No. 434, dated 11.07.2018 on labelling, food that is put on the market must be equipped with a label and refer to, determines that the Food Business Operator, who is responsible for the labelling of food products, notifies the label at the Regional Directorates of the National Food Authority. Moreover, Albania also has an integrity plan to assess the integrity risks that compromise the capacities of the institution to realize the objectives and public service in an impartial and responsible manner in the system and the areas that the institution covers.

b. Commission assessment

The regulatory and legislative framework of Albania provides corruption as a serious crime, including in its cross-border dimension. Albania has ratified several international conventions against corruption and adopted specific legislation on the prevention of corruption and money laundering, including in the field of food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy.

The existence of specific anti-corruption measures in the main bodies dealing with food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy and its enforcement, supported by legal acts, in addition to the overall anti-corruption efforts of Albania, are a positive sign that, if duly implemented, sets the country in the path towards the prevention of corruption in the field of food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy. Therefore, focusing on implementation is key going forward.

c. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS – FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

Albania has institutions in place to effectively fight against corruption.
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D) CHAPTER 13 – FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE

The *acquis* in this chapter consists of a number of regulations, some of which do not need alignment into national legislation, but which require the introduction of measures to allow the administration and the operators to correctly implement the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) rules. The scope, the objectives and the principles of the CFP are laid down in the Basic Regulation on the Common Fisheries Policy (Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council (EU) No 1380/2013).

The CFP provides rules for the conservation of marine biological resources, the limitation of the environmental impact of fisheries, the conditions of access to waters and resources, and the promotion of sustainable aquaculture. It also comprises the common market organisation for fishery and aquaculture products, a structural policy with a dedicated fund (European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund), specific rules for the management of the fleet capacity, the control of fishing activity and on enforcement. The CFP promotes measures based on sound scientific advice and provides a framework for the collection, management and use of fisheries data, further developed in Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 (the data collection framework – DCF). Technical conservation measures are further developed by Regulation (EU) 2019/1241, the technical measures regulation. Specific management measures for the sustainable exploitation of fisheries in the Mediterranean Sea are laid down in Regulation (EC) No 1967/2006 (Mediterranean Regulation), while specific measures are laid down for the stock and fisheries under the purview of the relevant Regional Fisheries Management Organisations. Specific rules also apply for the management of some stocks, such as the European eel (Regulation 1100/2007).

With regard to **resource and fleet management**, the EU *acquis* contains specific rules for the adjustment of fishing capacity in order to seek a balance between fleets and stocks as well as for the measurement of engine power and vessel tonnage. Member States are requested to collect and update data related to the fishing capacity in a specific fishing fleet register according to Regulation (EU) 2017/218 of 6 February 2017.

Implementation of **inspection and control** is mainly the responsibility of Member States who need to ensure the administrative capacity for effective implementation, in line with the EU legal framework established by Council Regulation (EC) 1224/2009 which establishes *inter alia* detailed rules for the registration and reporting of catches and the operation of a satellite-based vessel monitoring system. The recent revision of the fisheries control system (through Regulation (EU) 2023/2842, amending the fisheries control regulation) expands digitalisation and monitoring of fishing activities, including for small-scale fisheries and recreational fishing. In addition, the Council Regulation (EC) No 1005/2008 establishes a community system to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing which includes a catch certification scheme for the importation and exportation of fishery products. This means that only marine fishery products accompanied by catch certificates validated by the competent flag state authorities can be imported into the EU.

On **structural support**, EMFAF Regulation (EU) No 2021/1139 lays down provisions for the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF 2021-2027) on financial support for the implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy, relevant measures relating to the Law of the Sea, the sustainable development of fisheries and aquaculture areas and inland fishing and aquaculture as well as for measures under the Integrated Maritime Policy. In order to benefit from the EMFAF, EU Member States are required to adopt a strategic document and programmes. Member States should also have the necessary administrative management and control capacity in place in order to ensure a sound and efficient implementation of the Programmes.

The **market policy** *acquis* is defined by Regulation (EU) 1379/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council and provides rules on professional organisations, common marketing standards, consumer information, competition rules and market intelligence.

In addition to general **state aid** rules, the EU *acquis* contains specific state aid rules applicable to the fisheries and aquaculture sector.

The EU does not have exclusive competence on **aquaculture**. Therefore, the *acquis* is very limited.

Nevertheless, Member States are required to establish a multiannual national strategic plan for the development of aquaculture in their territories. Furthermore, there are Strategic Guidelines² and specific recommendations at EU level that Member States are encouraged to follow. EU rules such as on environmental protection and animal health also apply to aquaculture.

Given its exclusive competence in the field of conservation of marine biological resources, the EU is party to a number of **international agreements** and organisations. Existing bilateral fisheries agreements and conventions with third countries or international organisations need to be adapted or denounced prior to accession.

Albania stated that it accepts the relevant EU *acquis* on fisheries and aquaculture. Albania reserves the right to request any derogations or transitional periods in its future negotiating position.

I. RESOURCE AND FLEET MANAGEMENT

a. Country presentation

According to INSTAT, Albania had a fisheries and aquaculture production of 17 799 tonnes in total in 2022. The categories include fishing in marine (24.3%), brackish waters and lagoons (6.6%), inland waters (19%), mollusks (5.2%) and aquaculture (44.9%). Albania stated that its fishery policy is based on the 2012 Law on Fisheries. This law sets out the objectives of fisheries policy, and, together with its amendments, is considered already widely aligned with the EU common fisheries policy and provides the framework for the management of the fisheries sector. The aquaculture policy is based on the 2016 Law on aquaculture, partially aligned with the *acquis*. Albania has a joint National Strategy on Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries (SARDF) 2021-2027 with an action plan 2021-2024. The strategy includes aquaculture. Fishery policies are established and implemented in accordance with this National fisheries strategy. Albania stated that the overall responsibility for fisheries and aquaculture lies with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. The Directorate of Fisheries and Aquaculture Services works as an agency under the Ministry to implement the fisheries and aquaculture policies, including to survey the inspection service and to manage the assets such as ports and fish breeding centres.

Regarding **Resource management**, Albania has commercial fishing activities in the Southern Adriatic Sea (geographical sub-area 18 of the list of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean - GFCM). On data collection, Albania has its national legislation fully aligned with the regulation on a Union framework for data collection and management (DCF), as well as the *acquis* including the Mediterranean fish species list and the list of mandatory surveys for the fishing area. Data is collected monthly in each of the four fishing ports. Biologic data is also collected on board of fishing vessels by monitoring/observers. Albania also collects data on recreational fisheries, aquaculture, fish processing and on the European eel (catch, effort and fish measures and maturity), partially aligned with the specifications in the EU *acquis*. Albania explained that its rules are **not yet aligned** with the EU's rules on format and timetable for submission of work plans and reports to the EU. Biological data is collected according to the plan and methodology of the GFCM for the GFCM stock assessment, mainly on fishing vessels and landing sites. Albania intends to participate in the regional scientific surveys (MEDITS, MEDIDAS) in 2025 with an own scientific vessel.

The law of Albania distinguishes between fishing for commercial, sport-recreational or scientific purposes. On sustainable exploitation (Mediterranean regulation) Albania considers its legislation partially aligned with the EU *acquis*. Albania has management plans, developed with its scientific commission, on small pelagic exploitation, on demersal fisheries and on European eel to 2024. A new multiannual management plan for eel is planned. Albania's stated its legislation to be partially aligned with the EU *acquis* on the recovery of the European eel, while its management measures are compliant with the GFCM recommendations on a multiannual management plan for European eel in the Mediterranean Sea, including e.g. silver eel release, gear and landing size rules and protection periods. Shark fishing is not allowed in Albania, but there is accidental catch, which has to be released

² [EUR-Lex - 52021DC0236 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

undamaged into the sea, as far as possible. Albania reports annually to ICCAT on shark catches. Albania informed that its national legislation has fully aligned with Council Regulation (EC) No 11/85/2003 on shark finning on board vessels through amendments to Law 64/2012 on Fisheries. Albania explained that there are some measures in place for habitats protection in line with the EU Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EC). Fishing above Posidonia beds is generally forbidden, except with some light nets, where no part of the gear is allowed to touch the meadows. Corals and sponges are also strictly protected. On discard plans, and its exceptions, Albania stated to have **aligned** its legislation with the *acquis*, as relevant for its fishing area, and is implementing the management plans, including controls. On fishing opportunities, Albania enforced management measures for sensitive species and habitats, restrictions concerning the type and areas for the use of fishing gear, minimum catch sizes and measures for recreational fishing. Albania partitions the fishing effort assigned by the GFCM for demersal fisheries among the fishers. There is a joint catch limit for small pelagic fisheries of Albania and Montenegro.

Regarding **fleet management**, in 2022 the Albanian fishing fleet was composed of 784 vessels, including small scale fisheries vessels (71%). Albania issues new fishing licenses only to replace operative or sunken vessels and for small scale fisheries. The replacement vessel shall have a gross tonnage and engine power not larger than the replaced vessel. Albania's stated its legislation to be **aligned** with the technical measures regulation, except for EU-internal procedures, and the Regulation on certain provisions for fishing in the GFCM Agreement area. The measures are equally applicable to recreational fisheries. Albania explained its legislation to be partially aligned with the *acquis* on the Union fishing fleet register, while compliant with the GFCM recommendation on registering authorised vessels over 15 metres. Albania has an electronic fishing fleet register, where all the relevant information regarding fishing vessels is stored, including information for small scale fisheries vessels. Albania does not have vessels fishing in external waters. Albania informed that its national legislation has been partially aligned with Regulation (EU) 2017/2403 on the sustainable management of external fishing fleets through amendments to Law No. 64/2012 on Fisheries.

b. Commission assessment

The legislation of Albania is **partially aligned** with the applicable *acquis* on resource and fleet management. On resource management, data collection needs to be fully aligned with the *acquis*. The aim of data collection is to produce relevant, comprehensive and reliable data, which is fit for purpose and in line with regional specificities and end user needs. Albania is recommended to further strengthen the scientific and administrative capacity for data collection and in particular the biological data collected by observers on board of fishing vessels and landing sites, recreational fisheries data, data collected for eel, as well as socio-economic data. The data storage and management should be further improved. As concerns sharks, Albania will have to report on incidental catches under EU *acquis*. This concerns all shark and ray species, caught anywhere worldwide, and with all gear. Data collection on eel should be more detailed as soon as possible, given the critical situation of the species. Albania should consider also rules beyond fisheries, under the Water Framework Directive, the Marine Framework Directive and the Habitats Directive. Albania is encouraged to further strengthen regional cooperation on eel data collection and on eel protection in the water bodies it shares with neighbouring countries. This is mandatory under the EU *acquis*. The revision of the management plan for 2025 onwards is a good opportunity for far-reaching alignment. For recreational fisheries, collecting data on eel, molluscs and highly migratory species is mandatory in the EU. Albania's additional efforts in this regard already now are acknowledged. Data collection and quality of data on recreational fisheries should be strengthened and improved through cross-checks, e.g. by phone calls. Socioeconomic data collection in aquaculture needs to be on a company basis, not fish species basis. Reporting data on processing is voluntary in the EU. If Albania decides for reporting, implementing this measure can be co-funded. On discard plans, Albania could improve its reporting by including data provided by the fishers. The Commission acknowledged Albania's full alignment with all GFCM measures and rules on discard plans and fishing opportunities.

On technical measures, Albania's alignment with the EU *acquis* (as per Regulation (EU) 2019/1241, the technical measures regulation) is advanced, such as on minimal catch sizes and mesh sizes for gear. Specific gear limitations in the EU *acquis* will have to be complied with. The latest EU *acquis*

developed towards stronger protection of habitats and other environment-regulations with objectives and targets. Albania should closely follow the EU *acquis* developments in this regard. Fishers should be embedded in scientific research, as envisaged in the technical measures regulation. Albania should ensure to align its reporting format to the EU requirements by accession.

On fleet management, Albania will have to fully align its reporting to the Union fishing fleet register.

C. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – RESOURCE AND FLEET MANAGEMENT

Albania is **partially aligned** with the EU *acquis* on resource and fleet management. Further alignment on data collection and its implementation is required in particular as concerns reporting on sharks, eel, biological data collection, recreational fisheries and discard plans. Further alignment with the EU *acquis* on technical measures is also needed, despite an advanced level of alignment. It will be important that Albania brings its legislation on the latest state of the EU *acquis* both in resource management and fleet management.

II. INSPECTION AND CONTROL

a. Country presentation

Albania stated that its national legislation, is **partially aligned** with the EU **control regulation** and the rules for its implementation, as well as the EU rules concerning illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Albania's legislation establishes a control, inspection, and enforcement system to guarantee the enforcement of the management policies and rules in fisheries.

The Fisheries Inspectorate is part of the Directorate of Fisheries and Aquaculture Services, reporting both to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development as well as to the Central Inspectorate in the Republic of Albania. For marine fisheries, there are 20 inspectors (five per port). There are three inspectors for lake freshwater fisheries and six inspectors at the coastal lagoons, inland waters and aquaculture. There are two inspection vessels, for inspections on sea as well as three small boats for coastal inspections and five off-road cars to support the work of the inspectors. Inspections are carried out in line with the annual inspection work plan, following defined procedures. Inspections are conducted using an online system, which also provides for transparent documentation. In 2022, 1 560 controls were carried out and 14 fines imposed for infringements. In 2021 it was 1 521 controls and 79 fines. Inspection controls are performed at sea, at the coastline, on inland waters and aquaculture, in the ports, at markets, of transport vehicles, and in restaurants. Inspections include also the small sector of bluefin tuna farming, where Albania is fully compliant with the ICCAT rules. Inspections are carried out by the fishing inspection bodies in close collaboration with other bodies, i.e. the State Police, tax and customs authorities, the municipal police, the Coast Guard, the port and maritime authorities, the National Food Authority, as well as any other relevant authorities. The entities coordinate and develop shared action plans to enforce fishing legislation and facilitate cooperation through established agreements.

Infringements are described in the Law on fisheries and the Law on aquaculture for both fishing and aquaculture activities. They are of administrative nature and aim to be deterrent through being proportionate to the infringements. In addition to fines, inspectors can penalise infringements by confiscating the catch, the equipment, including the vessel, withdrawal of the fishing license and deregistering the offender from the fisheries register. Additionally, there is a point system in place for serious offences, where points are reduced in case of infringements, serving as simplified infringement history evidence. Fine decisions can be appealed to the Permanent Commission of Reviewing Complaints (PCRF) at the ministry. The final decision of the PCRC can be appealed to the administrative court. The demonstrated documentation on enforcement of fines over the years 2020-2022 lists 43% of the fines as paid, 21% as successfully appealed and 36% to be still in enforcement or judicial proceedings.

A satellite-supported Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) is in place since May 2021, monitoring and reporting the activity of fishing vessels over 12 metres long to the Fishery Monitoring Centre (IMOC) and reporting them to the Fisheries Inspection and Control Sector in the Directorate of Fisheries and

Aquaculture Services at least every 24 hours. IMOC serves as a collaborative fishing monitoring centre of Albania, processing and further transmitting the VMS data and acts as a coordination body for law enforcement and control efforts.

As concerns control of fisheries products stemming from imports, Albania stated its legislation dealing with **illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU)** fishing to be **partially aligned** with the EU *acquis*. Albania's legislation establishes a system to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing through a fisheries catch certification scheme. Albania has ratified the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures.

According to national legislation, export, import or placing on the market of fishery products stemming from IUU fishing are prohibited, and fishery products can be imported or exported only when accompanied by a catch certificate in accordance with national rules. Vessels of third countries not in compliance with the national legislation are prohibited from accessing Albanian ports and receiving port services such as landing and transshipment operations. Placing on the market, import or export of fishery products from IUU fisheries, are punished with a fine up to five times the value of fishery products, as well as confiscated by the Fisheries Inspectorate.

Alignment of the Inspectorate structures of the Directorate of Fisheries and Aquaculture Services with the EU *acquis* on the European Fisheries Control Agency is planned to ensure the implementation of the requirements in this regard.

b. Commission assessment

Albania is **partially aligned** with the applicable *acquis* on inspection and control. Albania's efforts to align with the *acquis* are acknowledged. The full operability of the VMS has strengthened compliance of fisherman with the legal obligations, in particular for small scale coastal fisheries. Sufficient inspection and control capacity is in place to monitor 24/7 marine fishing activity for all vessels over 12 metres long, to control fishing activities, to prevent, reduce and eliminate IUU fishing. The inspection and control capacity to fight against IUU fishing has been strengthened through trainings and cooperation with the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA). The online electronic inspection system provides for a transparent procedure, secure data recording and transmission to the concerned authorities. Provisions for collaborating with EFCA in line with EU requirements need to be established. Albania has not yet provided its plans for the alignment with the recent revision of the Fisheries Control Regulation (Council Regulation (EC) No 1224/2009 of 20 November 2009, as amended by Regulation (EU) 2023/2842. On IUU fishing, there are several provisions in the legislation of Albania not in compliance with the EU *acquis*, concerning in particular the controls of imports from third countries. Albania's provisions focus on exports of fishery products from Albania to the EU. Albania is encouraged to continue its planned alignment process in this regard.

C. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – INSPECTION AND CONTROL

Albania is **partially aligned** with the applicable EU *acquis* on inspection and control, including as concerns illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and import from third countries. Albania needs to maintain and further strengthen its inspection and control capacities.

III. STRUCTURAL ACTIONS

a. Country presentation

Albania considers structural actions in the fisheries and aquaculture sector of Albania **highly aligned** with the EU *acquis*. Structural actions are addressed in the Law on fisheries, respectively the Law on aquaculture. Only few measures have been implemented so far under national budget, including fuel subsidies (2022) in line with EU crisis support, and fleet modernisation, without fleet capacity increase (2022, 2023). The Directorate of Fisheries and Aquaculture Policies, Strategies and Programmes in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is competent for structural actions, supported by the agency Directorate of Fisheries and Aquaculture Services. The Agency of Agriculture and Rural Development (ARDA) is responsible for managing and controlling the

structural funds. The accreditation of ARDA on the use of European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund will be required. Capacity building is needed to implement in the future structural actions in line with the EMFAF regulation.

b. Commission assessment

Albania is **partially aligned** with the EU *acquis* on structural measures. Albania should build the administrative capacity to manage EMFAF funds, in line with EU requirements. National measures not covered by the EU's structural policy will need to be notified as State aid to the European Commission upon accession.

C. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – STRUCTURAL ACTIONS

Albania is **partially aligned** with the EU *acquis* on structural measures. In parallel to continuing legislative and institutional reforms, Albania should also build the administrative capacity to manage EMFAF funds, in line with EU requirements.

IV. MARKET POLICY

a. Country presentation

Albania's framework Law on fisheries is **partially aligned** with the EU *acquis* on common fisheries and aquaculture market organisation. This includes provisions on producer organisations and trigger prices for activating the storage mechanism. Albania has different types of organisations, in which fishers and fisheries cooperate. Those are producer organisations, fisheries management organisations, which are community-based public bodies to manage a specific fisheries resource, and cooperatives. Fisheries management organisations prevail, while there is not yet a fully functioning producer organisation. Albanian marketing standards exist for processed fish products. Fresh fish is checked for compliance with the national law by inspectors (species, size, origin, catch period). Labelling rules are mostly in line with EU rules, but the fishing gear used for catching the fish is not specified. Albania plans to align with the EU rules on establishment and implementation of marketing plans of producer organisations in 2026-2027.. There are no specific competition rules defined for producer organisations. While the markets collect price information, a price reporting system is not in place. Albania has a commercial designations list for the seafood products marketed.

b. Commission assessment

Albania is **partially aligned** with the EU *acquis* on market policy. Legislation on producer organisation is in place and remains to be fully aligned, as concerns marketing plans. There are no fully functioning producer organisations yet. Albania may promote more strongly the advantages of producer organisations. Marketing standards, labelling of products and price reporting need to be aligned with the *acquis*.

C. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – MARKET POLICY

Albania is **partially aligned** with the *acquis* on market policy, legislation concerning market plans remains to be fully aligned

V. STATE AID

a. Country presentation

Specific rules for aid to fisheries and aquaculture are not in place. There are schemes to exempt fishing vessels fuel from road tax, carbon tax and value-added tax and to exempt aquaculture and fishing gear purchase from customs duties and value-added tax. Those tax exemptions are implemented under the respective tax legislation of Albania.

b. Commission assessment

Albania is **not aligned** with the EU *acquis* on State aid in the area of fisheries and aquaculture. A system for state aid controls in these sectors needs to be set up. The current schemes of fuel and gear

subsidies would need to be brought in line with the EU provisions on State aid to the fisheries sector. Albania will need to notify any State aid in fisheries and aquaculture to the Commission upon accession. (See Cluster 2 Chapter 8 – Competition Policy for more detailed information)

C. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – STATE AID

Albania is **not aligned** with the EU *acquis* on State aid in the area of fisheries and aquaculture. A system for state aid controls in these sectors needs to be set up and be operational by accession.

VI. AQUACULTURE

a. Country presentation

Albania had an aquaculture production of 7 986 tonnes in 2022, of which around 75% marine fish and 17% rainbow trout. The 2016 Law on aquaculture partly aligns with the EU *acquis* on aquaculture and aims to reflect the objectives set out in the Strategic guidelines for the sustainable development of EU aquaculture, with a focus on maritime aquaculture. The law also provides for the allocated zones for marine aquaculture (AZA), which are defined. A multiannual national strategic plan for the development of aquaculture activities, as required by article 34 of the common fisheries policy (CFP) regulation is included in the Strategy for agriculture, rural development and fisheries 2021-2027. As concerns alien and locally absent species in aquaculture (Regulation (EC) No 708/2207), Albania stated its legislation is **not fully aligned**. Cultivation of such species would however require the approval of the minister responsible for environment, with the consent of scientific institutions and is considered practically almost impossible to obtain. There has been no interest to cultivate such species yet. A register on the cultivation of alien and locally absent species does not exist as there are no cultivation requests or activities. Albania intends to align with the *acquis* on alien and locally absent species in aquaculture in the mid-term.

b. Commission assessment

Aquaculture policy in Albania is **partially aligned** with the EU *acquis* on aquaculture. There is an opportunity to give more weight to this sector by having a standalone strategic document in the future, and in which freshwater and land-based aquaculture could be reflected stronger. The plan should fully take into account the requirements set in article 34 of the CFP and incorporate the objectives of the Commission Strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture 2021-2030. Albania needs to align with the EU *acquis* on alien and locally absent species in aquaculture. Albania should give sufficient priority to its alignment.

C. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – AQUACULTURE

Aquaculture policy in Albania is **partially aligned** with the EU aquaculture *acquis*. Albania should also pay more attention to freshwater and land-based aquaculture. Albania should align with the EU *acquis* on alien and locally absent species in aquaculture at the earliest opportunity.

VII. INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

a. Country presentation

Albania is party to the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) and the International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna, (ICCAT), and is aligned with and implementing all their measures applicable to Albanian fisheries. Albania is signatory to the Agreement to promote compliance with international conservation and management measures by fishing vessels on the high seas, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the Agreement on port state measures to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Albania and North Macedonia have signed an Agreement on Joint Sustainable Fisheries Management of Lakes Ohrid and Prespa. Albania and Montenegro have signed the Joint Sustainable Fisheries Management of Shkodra / Skadar Lake and Buna / Bojana River to sustain and develop the fishery resources of Shkodra / Skadar Lake and Buna / Bojana River while fostering a dynamic fishing industry and ensuring a fair standard of living for fishing communities. Albania is a member of the regional fishery

body European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission (EIFAAC) of the FAO.

b. Commission assessment

Albania will need to ratify, upon accession, the UN Convention relating to the conservation and management of straddling stocks and migratory fish stocks. Albania's bilateral agreements need to be compliant with the EU requirements and commitments at the time of accession.

C. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

Albania's international and bilateral agreements will need to be compliant with the EU requirements and commitments at the time of accession.

VII. MARITIME SPATIAL PLANNING

a. Country presentation

Albania stated that it has no legislation to align with the Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) Directive. There is legislation for terrestrial spatial planning and an intersectoral integrated plan for the coastal zone, not fully in line with the requirements of the MSP Directive.

b. Commission assessment

Albania is **not aligned** with the EU *acquis* on maritime spatial planning. Albania is advised to enhance its activities to align with the MSP Directive, due to the demanding preparatory phase, including data gathering and stakeholder involvement.

C. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – MARITIME SPATIAL PLANNING

Albania is **not aligned** with the EU *acquis* on maritime spatial planning. Albania should intensify its work to align with the maritime spatial planning *acquis*.

VIII. FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION – FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE

a. Country presentation

There is comprehensive Albanian legislation in place to prevent corruption in the public administration. The Strategy against corruption with its action plan details the anticorruption pillar in the National Strategy for Development and Integration 2030. Corruption prevention measures are based on three pillars: (a) Transparency, ensured in particular through digitalisation and online services such as the application for freshwater fishing and aquaculture and the management of inspections through the digital government portal e-Albania. (b) monitoring and auditing and (c) integrity. The Law on fisheries specifically focuses on anti-corruption measures related to illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing. The integrity plans of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, which is competent for fisheries, and the implementing body Directorate of Fisheries and Aquaculture Services are completed by the Code of Ethics, and defined competencies in the field for whistleblowers and to prevent conflict of interest. The 2023 action plan of the integrity plan of the Directorate of Fisheries and Aquaculture Services has measures to control the integrity risks of the service. Its implementation is checked every six months and reported on.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has some relevant fisheries and aquaculture anti-corruption measures in place and has developed some implementing capacity. Albania needs to fully put in place and implement the necessary standards. Albania has already established a sectoral anti-corruption policy and has put anti-corruption measures in the responsible entities in place, which are regularly monitored and reported on.

C. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

Albania has anti-corruption measures in place in the entities responsible for implementing the EU *acquis*. It is important that these measures are fully implemented, credibly monitored and corrective action will be taken, where problems would be reported. Public support in fisheries and aquaculture has to be fraud-proof.

E) CHAPTER 22 - REGIONAL POLICY AND COORDINATION OF STRUCTURAL INSTRUMENTS

Regional policy is the EU's main tool for reducing regional disparities and investing in sustainable and inclusive socio-economic growth. The *acquis* under this chapter consists mostly of framework and implementing regulations, which do not require alignment but are directly applicable to Member States. They define the rules for drawing up, approving, and implementing the Funds (the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund and the Just Transition Fund) and setting up programmes reflecting each country's territorial organisation. These programmes operate through shared management between the Commission and EU Member States. The effective and efficient implementation of cohesion policy requires appropriate administrative capacity on programme and project levels, the establishment of systems of sound financial management, control and the fulfilment of other EU *acquis* elements such as environmental or public procurement legislation and the fulfilment of enabling conditions, for example on effective application and implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. These programmes are negotiated and agreed with the Commission, but implementation is the responsibility of the Member States. Thus, part of Cluster 5, Chapter 22 is closely interconnected to policy clusters like Competitiveness and Inclusive Growth and Green agenda and sustainable connectivity, as well as public administration reform under Cluster 1.

A **legislative framework** must be put in place allowing for multi-annual programming at national and sub-national levels and budget flexibility, enabling co-financing capacity at national and sub-national level and ensuring sound and efficient financial control and audit of interventions. Member States must also put in place procedures to ensure the respect of Union legislation, in areas relevant for cohesion policy implementation (e.g. State aid, public procurement, environmental protection, transport, gender equality, non-discrimination, sustainable development, accessibility) when selecting and implementing projects. In addition, national authorities will have to assess whether the thematic and general enabling conditions linked to selected specific objectives of the programmes are fulfilled.

Member States must set up an **institutional framework**. This includes establishing all structures at national and sub-national levels required by the regulations as well as setting up a specific framework for **financial management and control** including audit with a clear definition of tasks and responsibilities of the bodies involved, in particular with regard to requirements of Title VI of the Common Provisions Regulation. The institutional framework also requires establishing an efficient mechanism for inter-ministerial coordination as well as the involvement and consultation of a wide partnership of organisations in the preparation and implementation of programmes. The definition of conflict of interest from the EU's Financial Regulation should be carefully analysed and applied during the programmes' implementation.

Appropriate **administrative capacity** must be ensured in all relevant structures. Performance of public administration is built on three blocs: architecture/structures, human resources, and systems and tools. These include recruiting and training qualified and experienced staff and establishing measures to retain such staff. In this context, Member States need to put in place the necessary organisational arrangements, adapt procedures and organisation charts, and prepare accompanying documents.

The **programming** process covers the preparation of a partnership agreement and a series of programmes, duly supported inter alia by Strategic Environmental Assessments. There is a need to organise broad partnerships for the preparation of programming documents. A sufficient pipeline of mature projects must be established, enabling the full financial implementation of programmes. Specific information, publicity and transparency measures will also have to be carried out. Communication is an integral part of the whole programme and project cycle.

Establishing a **monitoring and evaluation** system includes the set-up of monitoring and evaluation structures and processes in different relevant bodies, as well the installation of a comprehensive management information system that is accessible and usable for all concerned bodies.

Albania accepted the *acquis* under this chapter and requested accelerated procedure in terms of early access to structural funds by 2028 under the new MFF.

I. LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

a. Country presentation

Albania's **legislation** in place will be further updated and improved to comply with all applicable provisions under Cohesion Policy. Albania has analysed the practices of the EU Member States and other Western Balkans countries to identify the need for legal amendments and new legal acts. The harmonisation of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation governed by Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013 is planned for Q4 2025. Methodology to establish a comprehensive partnership for Cohesion policy/funds, selection of partners and training is planned for Q1 2025. Albania indicates it has drafted the Action Plan for meeting *Chapter 22 – Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments* requirements.

On the **regulatory environment**, Albania established a Strategic Planning Committee, Integrated Sectoral/Cross-sectoral mechanism and a national database of integrated planning information system. Law no. 107/2014 on Territorial and Development Planning, Law no. 68/2017 on Local Self-government Finances, and Law no. 139/2015 on Local Self-government are directly relevant to regional development and cohesion policy. Law no. 102/2020 on Regional Development and Cohesion, as clarified at the meeting of the Subcommittee on Transport, Energy, Environment and Regional Development in June 2024, is relevant for the national policy for territorial development, while not being directly relevant for the implementation of Cohesion Policy in Albania and not having any foreseen impact for the future institutional set up for Chapter 22. Consequently, the implementation of Law 102/2020 is not monitored by the Chapter 22 negotiator, as it is not part of the National Plan for European Integration,

The Albanian legislative framework allows multi-annual budgeting. The Parliament of Albania approves medium-term budget framework (on three years basis) and annual budget.

A number of strategic documents addressing **horizontal principles** are in place. The latter principles are enshrined in the constitution, dedicated laws, and codes. Cross cutting issues (e.g., gender, non-discrimination, disabilities) are considered throughout the preparation, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of programmes. The Ombudsperson is an independent institution bearing a similar role and competences with the European Ombudsperson. The country's development priorities in the National Strategy for Development and European Integration (NSDEI) are linked to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Albania is preparing a comprehensive framework to assess its compliance with the horizontal and thematic **enabling conditions** on a regular basis. The first semi-annual report is planned by Q1/2025.. As regards the horizontal enabling conditions, the legal framework on public procurement is highly aligned with the 2014 Directive on public procurement and procurement of utilities. The Law on concessions and public-private partnerships (PPPs) is partially aligned with the EU *acquis*.

Albania is **partially aligned** in **state aid**, notably as concerns EU state aid related regulations. The effective application of state aid rules is ensured as all structures and authorities in the management and control systems (e.g., Managing Authorities, Intermediate Bodies, Auditors) have competences and capacities in that regard, with continuous capacity building.

The National Plan for Sustainable Development of **Digital Infrastructure, Broadband (2020-2025)** is the backbone of meeting the related enabling condition. The Plan includes assessment of the investment gap to achieve very high-capacity networks and corresponding broadband development plan in mid and long term. A new Electronic Communication Law will regulate the deployment of the networks, access and interconnection, as well as the development of 5G networks. Albania is partially compliant with this enabling condition as several actions still need to be undertaken.

Albania is currently implementing the **National Energy and Climate Plan (2020-2030)**.

On **active labour market policies**, the recently adopted National Strategy for Employment and Skills (2023-2030) incorporates the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan (2023-2024). However, according to its own assessment, Albania is still **partially aligned** with this enabling condition having to achieve key milestones such as further improving the monitoring, evaluation, and review of active labour market policies, creating evidence-based and targeted youth employment interventions, optimising the quality of employment service delivery, and infrastructure, among others.

Albania complies with NUTS classification at three levels: national level (NUTS I), three Statistical Regions (NUTS II), which are also the basis for the Regional Aid Map, and regional level (12 prefectures at NUTS III), which are used to supply **regional statistical information** of Albania. The country is **partially aligned** with regional statistics. INSTAT provides information on demographic, social, economic, labour market, transport, tourism, environmental and other related fields. In September 2023, Albania conducted its population and housing census, which will be instrumental for planning public policy and critical state measures and may lead to potential changes in NUTS application.

Financial management and control are arranged according to two dedicated laws - Law no.10296 on Financial Management and Control (latest amended in 2023) and Law No.114 on Internal Audit in Public Sector (latest amended in 2023). A number of implementing acts further govern the functioning of the internal control system. An amendment of the Law on the Audit Authority is foreseen for 2025. A new public accounting law is also foreseen to bring the government accounting system in compliance with International Accounting Standards for the Public Sector (IPSAS), on accrual basis. The adoption of this law is planned by Q4/2026 as foreseen under the Public Finance Management Sectoral Strategy 2023-2030 and Action Plan 2023-2026 that were approved by Decision of Council of Ministers No.390 on 26.6.2024. Meanwhile, extensive training on IPSAS has been provided to almost 50% of government accountants.

b. Commission assessment

Albania reached a **partial alignment** with the relevant EU legislation and policies in areas that are a prerequisite for the proper implementation of EU cohesion policy (horizontal and thematic enabling conditions). It still needs to further enhance legislative alignment in some areas of state aid, public procurement, statistics, labour, internal control, audit, territorial classification among others, in order to ensure full alignment with the *acquis*. In terms of developing an effective system for the prevention of corruption in public procurement, Albania should focus on further strengthening the functioning of the overall system to increase competition, compliance and professionalisation. Albania needs to adopt two amendments to the law on the organisation and functioning of the Audit Authority, to align with the requirements under the Financial Framework Partnership Agreement. The regular compliance assessment planned by Albania is a positive systematic approach which will provide policy input to address the shortcomings in the above areas and further facilitate future legislative and policy amendments. In terms of budget planning, mechanisms need to be established to ensure co-financing of multi-annual programmes. Although horizontal principles are enshrined in the constitution, laws and various strategies, Albania still needs to prove the proper implementation of these in practice.

Albania has laid a good foundation by significantly improving transparency through its comprehensive electronic procurement and e-appeals system, and in terms of giving participants access to redress by developing its review system.

Regarding the legislative framework for regional policy, a good body of legislation already underpins the preparatory measures for cohesion policy, the latest being the implementing legislation regarding the creation, organisation and operating rules of the National Committee for Regional Development and Cohesion in July 2022. Harmonisation with Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013 on European

Grouping of Territorial Cooperation is planned only for Q4/2025. Albania still has to decide whether the Partnership principle under cohesion policy should be regulated under national legislation.

The planned comparative study with EU Member States and other candidate countries in the Western Balkans will be beneficial for structuring the regional development and cohesion eco-system.

C. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS - LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Albania is **partially aligned** with the relevant *acquis* concerning cohesion policy.

II. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

a. Country presentation

The **current institutional framework for EU funds management**, includes among others: State Agency for Strategic Programming and Aid Coordination (SASPAC) headed by the Director General who also serves as the National IPA Coordinator (NIPAC), National Authorising Officer (NAO), NAO Management Structure, Central Finance and Contracting Unit (CFCU) acting as Intermediate Body for Financial Management, AFCOS hosted in the Ministry of Finance, IPA managing authorities in relevant ministries and agencies (SASPAC and National Agency for Information Society) and the Audit Authority (AA). The current structure also includes various committees (strategic planning, SDGs, six Integrated Policy Management Groups) and councils (regional development, central and local government, civil society, etc) as well as 11 bodies ensuring fulfilment of enabling conditions (Public Procurement Agency, Competition Authority, Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation, Ministry of Education and Sports, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy, National Civil Protection Agency, National Agency for Water and Sewerage, Ministry of Tourism and Environment, and National Agency for Protected Areas). The monthly Inter-Institutional Working Group (seven meetings held in 2023 and eight in 2024) is centred around the coordination of efforts on the implementation of requirements under *Chapter 22 – Regional Policy and coordination of structural instruments* and preparation of the negotiation positions.

The SASPAC (a new Directorate for Convergence and Cohesion, Secretariat for *Chapter 22* was established in October 2023) and the new Minister of State for Local Government have a leading role, with the Minister of State for Local Government being the National Coordinator of *Chapter 22* as per DCM No. 775/2024 amending DCM No. 422/2020 “On the composition, functioning and financial treatment of the Negotiating Group and the tasks of the Chief Negotiator for the negotiations to accession of the Republic of Albania in the EU”. Albania will establish formally a Coordination Body in the process and identify managing authorities and intermediate bodies dependent on the number and scope of programmes. SASPAC is responsible for the evaluation of investment projects with strategic importance, and as well for the preparation, approval, updating, monitoring and implementation of the National Single Project Pipeline (NSPP).

Currently, the National Territorial Planning Agency, the Agency for Local Self-Government, the Albanian Development Fund, and the National Agency Information Society have responsibilities for the preparation, implementation, monitoring and coordination of **strategies and plans for territorial development** at national and sub-national levels. The Consultative Council for Central and Local Government serves as an institutionalised platform for the consultation and dialogue with local authorities. It is aided by the Electronic Register of Public Notification and Consultation that contains all mapped stakeholders for the purposes of public consultation.

On the basis of the Prime Minister’s Order No. 211/23.10.2024 on “The establishment of the inter-institutional working group for determining the composition and duties of the National Committee for Territorial Cooperation in implementation of Cohesion Policy in Albania”, a National Committee for Territorial Cooperation will be established by Q2/2025 to promote participation of Albanian entities in URBACT and INTERREG EUROPE networks as well as increase the engagement of Albanian stakeholders in the EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region. The National Committee will also

have a consultative role in the programming of INTERREG post 2027 programmes, supporting the participation of the Albanian National Authority in the relevant task forces and committees, as well as actively enhancing wider and local stakeholder consultations.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has designated structures for the implementation of the IPA instrument, notably regarding the management of the three new multiannual operational programmes with their managing authorities prefiguring cohesion policy. Albania indicated that the IPA architecture will constitute the basis for establishing the future cohesion policy implementation system. Albania has taken first steps in mapping up all stakeholders and establishing consultative and coordination bodies. In that regard, Albania needs to ensure a full integration and transfer of responsibilities of relevant functions to line ministries and increase their institutional capacities. It needs to further clarify responsibilities between central and local authorities. Accordingly, central and local institutions need to gradually obtain full responsibility and ownership of policy planning and preparation for co-financing capacity at sub-national needs to be developed. The stability of the Albanian State Agency of Strategic Programming and Aid Coordination is critical for the coordination of future partnership agreement and programmes implementation.

Considering the wide range of functions, which cohesion policy will require, Albania should take the necessary steps to ensure that a coherent structure of coordination is established, notably between ministries, in particular the Ministry for Public Administration and Anti-Corruption and the Ministry for Local Government, and with autonomous local/regional governments. At the same time, the functional independence of the structure as a whole and separate institutions needs to be ensured, as it relates to the future managing and audit authorities and their respective responsibilities (e.g., independent audit, fiscal decentralisation, separation of authorisation of payments from other tasks). This coordination structure should support managing authorities in fully discharging their responsibilities and decision-making capacity to manage and implement the relevant programmes under their control. It should also coordinate the fulfilment of enabling conditions. Regarding the partnership principle, efforts should be made to clarify the legal and institutional framework which requires the involvement of relevant public authorities, socio-economic partners and civil society, preparing the ground for future cohesion policy in line with the European Code of Conduct on Partnership. On the integrated policy management groups (IPMGs), the reform of them foresees a revised structure including thematic sub-groups that is more in line with the government's policy priorities. This needs to be ensured and the functioning of the IPMGs needs to be improved, as it remains very limited.

C. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS - INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Albania has a **partial level of alignment** in terms of institutional framework for implementation of cohesion policy. Albania's participation in IPA and territorial cooperation programmes (e.g., Interreg IPA) has contributed to the early development of implementation structures and mechanisms that can serve as a basis for future responsibilities under EU cohesion policy. However, specific gaps remain to be addressed regarding the definition of appropriate institutional structures and stakeholders, and the upgrading of institutional capacities in compliance with the applicable regulatory framework. Albania should guarantee an effective coordination system among the implementing institutions and partners and ensure meaningful collaborative achievements.

III. ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY

a. Country presentation

The **Human Resource Management** in Albania is based and linked to a number of strategies, central of which are the Public Administration Strategy and the new strategic vision on Reforming Civil Service and Human Resources. It is further regulated by the Labour Code and the Civil Service Law.

The **recruitment system** of civil servants in Albania is divided into two tiers: centralised national level with the Department of Public Administration responsible for human resources management (HRM); and decentralised at local level where respective human resources units are in charge. Recruitment and job mobility (rotation, promotion) are based on merit, equal conditions and treatment, equal access for all interested candidates as well as fairness and transparency. Recruitment is based on Annual Recruitment plans, open competitions - written computerised and oral tests organised centrally by the Department of Public Administration.

Centralised job classification divides positions into categories, grades, based on the job description of each position. Performance appraisals are conducted twice a year and are related to participation into mobility schemes and trainings. A competency framework has been developed only for senior civil servants.

The ongoing salary reform (increase of minimum wage, restructuring) is expected to support institutions in improving their **retention** levels. In 2023 and 2024, salaries of public administration civil servants were increased, aiming to position the public service as a competitive employer in the labour market. Compared to 2013, civil servant salaries have increased on average by 35% to 65%, depending on the categories reaching EUR 1050 on average (up from EUR 530 in 2023). In September 2024, a salary reform was presented also for local government units guaranteeing equal salaries for horizontal positions in all 61 municipalities.

In addition, the Public Administration Roadmap 2023-2030 foresees development and implementation of special programmes aimed at attracting qualified prospective civil servants. These programmes will be phased in gradually in the coming years.

Training of civil servants of both central and local government are conducted by the School for Public Administration (ASPA) and by various donors, based on training plans of each institution (including IPA structures). Every year ASPA trains approximately 5 000 public officials, based on more than 100 training modules. Trainings include induction for newcomers, professional development, basic cycle of public administration, EU Integration training, specific trainings based on Government priorities, among others.

Albania conducted training needs assessment for the **negotiation structures**, both at the individual and structural levels in cooperation with the Interinstitutional Working Groups for European Integration. Between 2021-2023, 1 962 participants/ 811 members of negotiating structures received training from ASPA. During the period 2022-2023, IPA structures have received trainings on more than 15 topics, including EU project management, IPA III Programming, management of irregularities, risk management, entrustment procedures for IPA III, Workload Analysis (WLA). In addition, during December 2024 ASPA trained 126 participants from *Interinstitutional Working Groups for European Integration*. The training programs were divided into specific modules designed to address the integration processes of Albania towards the European Union.

An **Administrative Capacity Building Roadmap** will be prepared by Q4/2026 addressing the needs of relevant stakeholders and to start its implementation by Q4 2026. Focus will be on preparation and implementation of high-quality projects and sound financial management, but also on some enabling conditions such as public procurement and compliance with state aid rules. SASPAC has also established a database of experts who can help any public institution in relation to funding applications under EU and other funding sources. Under IPA III, there are 132 staff members across **IPA institutions** and structures, or 85% of the positions available (156). For comparison, under IPA II there were 166 positions, 134 of them filled or 81% of the systemised positions. For both of these programmes approximately 25% of the staff had less than 2 years of experience. Under the –Interreg-IPA and IPA-IPA CBC system, there are 35 employees, consisting of 11 staffs in SASPAC, 20 first level controllers, 6 staffs in the joint technical secretariats and 2 dedicated auditors from the AA.

b. Commission assessment

The administrative capacity of Albania remains a major concern. This concern is particularly pertinent in the context of the larger administrative resources that will be needed for the implementation of EU cohesion policy. The current levels of staffing and occupancy compared to the number of systemised jobs is insufficient. The current salary reform and review of additional benefits are positive steps forward.

Albania needs to demonstrate that the current recruitment, career development and retention policy is effective in practice in the upcoming years in order to reach an appropriate level of stability and resilience for the public administration. A sound and comprehensive retention policy targeting staff and key managerial positions, who progressively gained expertise in the management and implementation of EU funds needs to be adopted. In this context, Albania needs to apply efficient and attractive career planning and an appropriate salary policy for civil servants across all bodies involved in IPA.

Staff involved in indirect management should continue to receive training, especially those that are new to managing EU funds. Albania should improve internal resources but equally benefit from available technical assistance in order to nurture a new wave of civil servants adept at managing multi-annual comprehensive programmes. Appropriate training of local/regional authorities, especially those involved in implementing IPA programmes, is also required. Albania should invest efforts in knowledge and capacity building of all types of stakeholders that will be involved in the implementation of cohesion policy.

C. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS - ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY

Albania has **low level of alignment** in terms of administrative capacities. The shortages of staff are a serious concern when it comes to the implementation of cohesion policy. Albania needs to invest further in effective policy for staff retention, which should include remuneration stimulation, promotions, career development, among others. Further, Albania needs to build a solid comprehensive system of trainings directly related to planning, management, and control of EU funds, which should target state and local authorities as well as stakeholders involved in the implementation of cohesion policy.

IV. PROGRAMMING

a. Country presentation

A **national strategic framework** is in place, consisting of a National Strategy for Development and European Integration (NSDEI; 2022 – 2030), 43 sectoral strategies (plus nine in drafting), five cross-cutting sectoral national strategies, National Territorial Development General Plan (2015 -2030), National Plan for EU Integration (2024-2026), Economic Reform Programme (2024-2026), Priority Policies Documents (PPD) (2024-2026), which includes also the National Single Project Pipeline (NSPP). Each of the 61 municipalities has its General Local Plans for Territorial Planning. All these are linked to the Mid-term Budget Programme.

The NSDEI is the umbrella strategy encompassing democracy and good governance, sustainable economic development, and social cohesion. There are five priorities apart from European Integration: energy, tourism, agriculture, digitisation, anticorruption, which are underpinned by 50 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) (17 SDG specific).

An update of several strategies was prepared in 2024, directly linked to cohesion policy and enabling conditions: public procurement, PFM, smart specialisation, transport, tourism, Integrated Cross-sectoral Plan for the Coast 2016-2030, among others. A study assessing the number and scope of programmes to be prepared by Albania for implementing Cohesion funds has been prepared and discussed in the Inter-Institutional Working Group.

The NSPP ranks concrete **investment projects** of strategic importance for the country, at the national and local level in line with NSDEI, sectoral/cross-sectoral strategies and Government Priorities. The projects serve as a reference for budget planning or the mid-term budget programming. In accordance with the Government's methodology, approved in July 2023, projects are meant to undergo strategic relevance assessment. Environmental impact assessments are fully implemented as part of the programming process.

An Integrated Planning System Information System (IPSIS) for preparation of the government sector policies and priorities and for real-time monitoring of strategic programmes (includes PPD, NSPP) is in place but not actively used. The IPSIS is linked to other information management systems (MIS) important for the whole process - financial (AFMIS – operational and used as a tool to prepare medium-term budget), external assistance (EAMIS – not actively in use), human resources (HRMIS – under re-design).

Under IPA III, Albania follows annual programmes (15 Action Documents and two Sector Reform Contracts) for 2021-2024 and three multi-annual operational programmes (OP) prepared for 2024-2027: OP Digital Economy (EUR 44 million), OP Energy Efficiency (EUR 79 million), OP EU 4 Youth Employment (EUR 62.5 million).

The Law 146/2014 On Public Consultation requires public consultation for draft laws and draft policy strategic documents of high public interest. One month after the approval of the annual Analytical Programme, the Government publishes the Annual Public Consultation Plan as a tool for forward planning. Consultations are carried out through the Government's online consultation portal, the Electronic Registry of Public Notification and Consultation. The consultations result in a report, which will accompany all draft acts. This process is monitored by the Regulatory and Compliance Department of the Office of the Prime Minister. The Guidelines on the Public Consultation Process instructs ministries to report quarterly on the implementation of their annual consultation plans, and on preparing and publishing annual reports on the quality of public consultations.

The **partnership principle** is already applied in projects under IPA III funding, in accordance with the law. Experience with IPARD II as well as with Interreg IPA and IPA-IPA CBC implementation resulted in positive experiences and lessons learned. Partners and members of the Monitoring Committees for both the IPA annual and multi-annual Operational Programmes, were selected in a manner to have balanced representation of state institutions and partners. The Integrated Policy Management Mechanisms in place allows local government, business, and civil society partners to be closely engaged in the process. The preparation of the three operational programmes under IPA III involved consultations with more than 110 stakeholders and more than ten meetings of working group were organised.

So far, the only experience of programming and implementing **cohesion policy** was through Interreg implementation and as a National Authority (not lead country) participating in shared management programmes. Experience has been gained in first level control/management verifications of projects, application of simplified costs options, managing technical assistance grants, among others, under territorial cooperation but significant improvements are required in terms of efficiency and results.

Coordination of programming mechanisms for EU funds need to further improve, including between national and Interreg IPA and IPA-IPA cross-border cooperation programmes and the EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region, to capitalise on lessons learnt from IPA III programming as well as to enhance capacities for multi-annual programming.

The NAO ensures the availability of **co-financing** in the national budget forecast for the next budget year and the two following fiscal years and proposes any adjustments. The funds allocated for co-financing of EU projects cannot be used for other purposes. In case of shortage/excess of co-financing, funds will be provided from other appropriations of the same budget user and the unspent funds can be carried over to the following year. National co-financing for the three Operational Programmes under IPA III will be EUR 55.5 million or 30% of the total. At the local level,

municipalities can use their own sources (local taxes and fees, etc), subsidies from the government, borrowings with sovereign guarantees, among others.

The use of Simplified Costs Options (SCOs) for EU funds has been very limited in Albania, only in relation to Territorial Cooperation programmes with Member States where programme level SCOs are established. The use of SCOs will be explored in the OP “EU for Youth Employment”, which could become a model for full application of SCOs by Q3/2026.

The **communication framework** is based on IPA/IPARD communication and communication of Interreg IPA programmes. Under national IPA, all visibility requirements for contractors/grant beneficiaries follow the provisions of the Communication and Visibility Guidelines for EU External Actions. Under Interreg IPA programmes (shared management) and IPA-IPA CBC programmes under indirect management, the First Level Control bodies are responsible for administrative and on-the spot checks of the specific applicable visibility rules. Albania manages Albania Info Points/Contact points under Interreg.

Shortcomings exist in the communication processes: coordinated and strategic communication is limited to territorial cooperation or to IPARD programmes, lack of sufficient information on all IPA funds (only those in indirect management) and results of these interventions, among others. Some of these issues will be addressed by designing Communication Strategies for Multi-Annual Operational Programmes, creating a single website for all EU funds, as well as establishing a network of communications officers and training programmes starting in 2025. In 2024, SASPAC prepared an IPA communication strategy which is being implemented.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has established a well-defined strategic planning and programming architecture with horizontal and sectoral strategies linked to the enlargement process and IPA programming and implementation. Update of several strategies is due in the next period and Albania must ensure that core principles of cohesion policy are incorporated in these. Strategic priorities are aligned with the medium-term budget programming. However, IPSIS is still not fully functional. Linkages between the national and territorial planning documents, the sectoral strategies and cross-cutting national strategies and the process of multiannual national investment and budget planning need to be ensured.

Albania can build on the experience accumulated through programming and implementation of IPA/IPARD funding. But this experience is limited to a small percentage of IPA indirect management, complemented by some experience in cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation. It needs to be further enhanced to satisfy EU cohesion policy requirements. Although the programming process under IPA is inclusive, Albania still needs to demonstrate full incorporation of the partnership principle under cohesion policy.

The new multi-annual operational programmes will be Albania’s test case for its preparedness to manage more comprehensive and sizable structural programmes. There have been delays with ratifications of programmes due to the required procedures from Albanian authorities impacting both bilateral as well as cross-border financial assistance. In view of that, this issue needs to be addressed to prevent future delays in programming and implementation of new programmes. At the same time, Albania needs to address issues with strategic planning, implementation and monitoring capacity for large infrastructure projects financed by the Western Balkans Investment Framework under the Economic and Investment Plan, which exposes several systematic shortcomings. The quality of Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) needs to be improved as well as the implementation and monitoring of EIAs recommendations.

Albania needs to further mobilise sufficient resources to prepare a comprehensive and good quality project pipeline for implementation under future cohesion policy (including the preparation of accompanying technical studies and financial analyses). A key element for regional development will be to ensure ownership by public and private bodies at national and sub-national levels.

In the context of increasing transparency and accountability, the coordination structure needs to ensure coherence between macro-economic policy objectives on the one hand and co-financing needs and objectives on the other. Regarding communication, participation in Interreg IPA programmes provides Albania useful experience on EU cohesion policy communication guidelines. Under shared management, specific attention should be paid to key communication practices: what are the main communication objectives, messages, target audiences, communication channels, budget, indicators, and results. Transparency should have a focal role in programme management.

C. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS - PROGRAMMING

Albania is **partially aligned** regarding programming. Its long experience with IPA, IPARD and Interreg programmes is a preparatory useful step for future comprehensive programmes under structural funds. Albania will need to resolve any issues of securing co-financing and ensure ownership of public and private bodies at national and sub-national levels prior to the start of cohesion programmes. Albania will need to ensure that programmes are ratified in a timely manner to avoid delays in implementation.

V. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

a. Country presentation

The **monitoring and evaluation system** is based on relevant EU regulations and guidance (e.g., Financial Regulation, IPA, Interreg, IPA Result Framework) and national acts ratifying these. Under budget support operations, useful experience was gathered on drafting indicators, outcomes and outputs.

At programme level, monitoring is performed through the IPA Monitoring Committee (IPA MC), six Sector Monitoring Committees (SMCs) and IPA Annual Implementation Reports. The IPA MC (IPA II and IPA III) is composed of the NIPAC/SASPAC, the Beneficiary Institutions, the Contracting Authority, DG NEAR/EUD, NAO/Management Structures, and representatives of CSOs from relevant sectors. The SMCs' structure will be adjusted for IPA III (and future cohesion programmes) to include Multi-Annual Operational programmes, and to incorporate the comprehensive partnership principle in accordance with the European Code of Conduct of Partnership. The three Sectoral Monitoring Committees will be established in 2025 after the adoption of the Financing Agreements for the three multi-annual operational programmes.

The Monitoring Committees established for IPARD II/III programmes respected the multi-level governance and partnership principle, reflecting the relevant stakeholders in the measures of the programmes. Partners are selected according to transparent criteria agreed with DG AGRI.

At project level, monitoring responsibilities are assigned to IPA units in Beneficiary Institutions and in the case of indirect management, financial monitoring and management verifications are conducted by the CFCU. Project Steering Committees regularly monitor progress of project implementation. Currently, 60 civil servants are engaged in monitoring in SASPAC (4) and IPA Units and PIU in Beneficiary Institutions (56).

There are some challenges and weaknesses in the monitoring system. Currently Albania has limited experience in monitoring of programmes and projects since only 7% of IPA funds were implemented under indirect management by Albania under IPA in 2014-2020 . Further investment is needed in enhancing the capacities of monitoring units and improving the practice of results-oriented monitoring. The existing manual/paper-based processes entail higher administrative burden and problems accessing monitoring information. The weak capacities of applicants undermine project preparation and implementation and cause delays and low financial absorption by some beneficiaries.

A set of actions are planned to improve the current monitoring system: prepare Indicator Identification Sheets for IPA III indicators, establish the IPA III Management Information System (2024-2026), and enhance the capacities of SMC members through targeted training, among others.

The country participates in the Monitoring Committees/Joint Monitoring Committees of all Interreg IPA and IPA-IPA CBC programmes. At project level, monitoring is done by Operating Structure/National Authority and Joint Technical Secretariat/Joint Secretariat-Branch office. However, Albania has no experience as the lead country in cross-border cooperation. National authority has read-only access to information from Management Information Systems (eMS/JEMS) of Interreg programmes for monitoring purposes.

The country is responsible for planning and managing evaluations only for Programmes/Actions implemented under indirect management (e.g. only 7% under IPA II). Most of the IPA evaluations were done by or in close cooperation with the EU Delegation. Likewise, partners of Sector Monitoring Committees have limited experience in evaluation management.

Establishing evaluation plans for multi-annual Operational Programmes will provide useful experience. Further technical assistance and trainings are planned, notably for institutions involved in Indirect Management and Sectoral Monitoring Committee members.

As regards the durability and sustainability of operations under IPA III the national legal framework assigns responsibility to various structures and authorities that must ensure, monitor, and report on the sustainability of the Actions, including to the relevant Sectoral Monitoring Committees.

In the framework of future cohesion policy, between 2025-2026 detailed plans will be prepared for the establishment of the monitoring system and performance framework for Cohesion Policy, including e-cohesion system. The National Statistical Agency (INSTAT) will support responsible authorities to fill any gaps or critical issues concerning indicators in the performance framework.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has developed structures and gained some experience in monitoring and evaluation, both through IPA and Interreg IPA programmes. It disposes some operational systems and tools for monitoring and evaluation of EU programmes as well as an accounting and management information system. The experience gained in monitoring of IPARD programmes can be used also as a preparatory step for cohesion programmes. Albania's plans to incorporate the comprehensive partnership principle in the work of monitoring committees is a positive step forward.

However, as per Albania's own assessment, its capacities and experience in evaluations is rather limited. The support offices of the NAO and the NIPAC have yet to establish a list of key indicators for evaluating performance. The establishment of a Monitoring Board for Regional Development and Cohesion, that would bring together central/sectoral and sub-national partners and be complemented by the regional level Monitoring Boards for Regional Development and Cohesion with representatives from municipalities, businesses, civil society, and education institutions, would be a valuable mechanism for tracking progress.

Overall, Albania needs to reinforce administrative capacities of monitoring units and applicants/beneficiaries and build a more solid track record in monitoring and independent evaluation.

C. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS - MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Albania has **a low level of alignment** regarding monitoring and evaluation. Whereas it has established more solid track record in monitoring, Albania needs to build on positive experience and design monitoring system fit for cohesion funds. Albania needs to invest more efforts and build more track record in evaluations. Certain gaps in Monitoring and evaluation administrative capacities need to be equally addressed.

VI. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL

a. Country presentation

The entire budget execution processes and the **financial reporting** of the State Budget (both accrual-based and cash basis) goes through the Government Financial Information System (AGFIS) to which central and local entities are contributing with a full roll-out still ongoing. Presentation of financial statements is in accordance with selected standards of the International Accounting Standards for the Public Sector (IPSAS).

Based on the 2021 SIGMA Assessment for PFM in Albania, the legal and operational frameworks for internal control and internal audit have improved. The country's internal control system is partially effective based on an internal analysis in 2022. In particular, whereas organisational structures, mission statements and operational objectives were adopted, the regular periodic reporting, managerial accountability and the follow-up measures to identified issues remain to be improved. In that regard, measures will be adopted to improve the regulatory framework, the risk management process, and the rate of follow-up of recommendations, but also to perform regular assessments and evaluation of effectiveness and to further develop capacities of employees (including improved curricula for trainings) in the said units, among others.

By law, all units of the general government should establish a decentralised and independent internal audit functionally separated from other organisational units, whereas the Finance Ministry performs a coordination and harmonisation function. Additionally, all internal audit units in public sector should fulfil the mandatory requirements of the International Professional Practices Framework (IPPF, the IIA Standards). The Internal Audit Charter guides the work of auditors. Currently there are 136 units on central government level and 49 on local level (in only 92% of municipalities). The number of units rose by 14% in the past five years, but the overall number of auditors by only 9%. In the latest External Quality Assessment, opinions were issued for about 80% of internal audit units, and only 17% of the units are in full compliance with the provisions of the internal audit law and its regulations. The 2021 SIGMA Assessment claims that the quality of audits is mixed. The internal audit foresees responsibilities as regards the audit of IPA Funds. The Albanian School for Public Administration (ASPA) provided a training on auditing of IPA funds.

A new SIGMA assessment was prepared in 2024 stating that Albania's PFM system has made progress in aligning its budget preparation and internal control and internal audit framework with international standards. Between 2024-2030, further measures for **improving the internal audit system**, will be adopted including legislative amendments (as for the implementation of new Global Internal Audit Standards), reinforcing implementation of audit recommendation, full compliance with professional standard as well as further improvement of professional development programme for public internal auditors.

The Financial management and control of IPA funds is governed by framework agreements with the EU and decisions of the Council of Ministers on IPA structures and authorities. The NAO holds the supervisory functions, namely control environment (monitoring of staff capacities, etc), control activities (on-site system verifications, on the spot checks, etc), risk management, management of irregularities (findings and recommendations of audit authorities), among others. The results of this work are presented under the Management Declarations/Declarations of Assurance as applicable. Under IPA III, new bodies are established (Managing Authorities) for each OP, which will prepare the Management Declaration for each program and submit to NAO.

Statistics on the level of contracting compared to available IPA funds was 91%/99% under IPA II/IPARD II, whereas under IPA I and IPARD I the level of disbursed funds was lower between 68-74%. The indirect management of IPA II/III funds is implemented with *ex-ante* control, with the only exception of the Annual Action Programmes 2014 and 2015 when *ex-post* principle was applied partially (38% and 64% of funds respectively). De-commitment levels following the N+3/N+5 rule are low.

Risk management rests on Risk Register and High-Level Risk Committee. Risk management procedures are based on the MoP of IPA Structures with the aim of identifying and addressing risk by

taking measures that would mitigate the risk occurrence, the impact of its realization or both at the same time. The main risks identified in 2024 were experienced staff turnover, need for further training on identification, and reporting and treatment of irregularities. Under IPA and IPARD II programmes 199 irregularities were reported for the amount of EUR 13.5 million, of which 119 cases were recovered/closed, 5 cases were without financial impact and 75 cases are in process of recovery..

The Audit Authority (AA) prepares and carries out its activities according to the adopted Audit Strategy on a three-year basis. The AA issues an opinion annually on EU accredited Assistance Programmes in Albania, which is addressed to the European Commission and the Government (with copy to NIPAC and NAO). The AA carries out system audits (27%) and audits of accounts and operations (including assessment of the NAO Management Declaration). About 53% of audit recommendations are taken into consideration. The AA participates in a Group of Auditors for CBC programmes under shared management. The Single Audit Authority concept is not yet applied.

A set of preventive, punitive and training measures against corruption will be included in the Cross-Cutting Strategy against Corruption 2023-2030. All central government units and municipalities need to have Integrity Plans in place against which they will all be obliged to report by 2028. Digitalisation, including online services or e-complaint system, is a central element in that regard.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has a system on financial management, control, and audit at place, but it needs to be further made functional and show its effectiveness in practice. Albania is self-aware of partial compliance and of the deficiencies of its internal control and internal audit and has planned a good set of measures to address these. It is expected that Albania will provide sufficient staffing and training for its internal control and audit units. A new public accounting law is necessary to bring the government accounting system in compliance with International Accounting Standards for the Public Sector (IPSAS).

On the long run, Albania's Audit Authority (AA) should obtain and retain the necessary qualified staff to perform the multitude of tasks. Independence of the auditors needs to be better factored in. The AA needs to increase the number of system audits in order to address more comprehensive system issues. Albania should improve its track record in following up audits' recommendations. Albania should prepare a plan for the introduction of the single audit arrangements, in due time.

The NAO needs to ensure that its management declaration adequately reflects the results of its supervision and monitoring of management and control systems. The NAO support office will also have to strengthen its work with a view to monitor the implementation of sectoral operational programmes in indirect management by newly appointed bodies. The NAO support office has yet to establish procedures to ensure immediate dissemination and implementation throughout the institutions, regarding internal control by the Commission. Irregularities still need to be registered completely and without delay in the irregularity management system, and internal control weaknesses and non-compliance events should be systematically reported in a dedicated registry.

While the management structures have been identified and procedures developed for the multiannual operational programmes, the risk management and internal control capacities need strengthening, with a comprehensive list of KPIs as well as a risk register for the managing authorities.

The single audit arrangements, as set out in article 80 of the Common Provision Regulation (CPR – Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021), should be embedded in the legal system and later applied in practice.

C. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS - FINANCIAL AND MANAGEMENT CONTROL

Albania has a **low level of alignment** regarding financial management and control and requires a more robust implementation of the systems. More systematic follow-up of recommendations from internal and external audit is also needed.

VII. FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION - REGIONAL POLICY AND COORDINATION OF STRUCTURAL INSTRUMENTS

a. Country presentation

There is comprehensive Albanian legislation in place to prevent corruption in the public administration aligned with international conventions. A large body of laws and implementation legislation reflect anti-corruption measures, such as rules of ethics and integrity of public institutions, administrative procedures, prevention of conflict of interest, financial management and control, whistleblowing, among others.

Central to the anti-corruption efforts of the country is the establishment of the Special Anti-Corruption Structure (SPAK) formed as part of comprehensive judicial reforms in 2016, that includes a special prosecution office, the National Bureau of Investigation, and dedicated courts to handle corruption and organized crime cases. National Anti-Corruption Coordinator further coordinates anti-corruption efforts across sectors and ensures compliance with laws and regulations.

Public financial management reforms have been implemented to improve the efficiency and transparency of financial systems. Integrated IT systems have been introduced for better planning and monitoring of public funds, reducing the risk of corruption. Public procurement processes have been overhauled to align with EU standards, incorporating electronic systems to increase transparency and reduce opportunities for corruption.

Albania sees digitalisation in terms of automated interactions between economic operators/citizens and civil servants (e.g. e-procurement, e-tax services, fiscalisation, digital complaints mechanisms, etc) as a key pillar of the anti-corruption measures. All ministries and 35 municipalities (51%) have approved integrity plans, with the obligation to submit implementation reports the latest by 2028.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has advanced in establishing legislative and operational system for countering corruption, including practical measures through digitalisation. Basic principles are broadly in line with EU acquis in regard to public procurement and public finance management, but Albania should establish a solid implementation track record of these and further improve strategic framework for public administration. More systematic follow-up of recommendations from internal and external audit is also needed. Albania still needs to adopt a national strategy against corruption and fraud. Anti-fraud measures should be effectively implemented. The coordinator of Chapter 22 (SASPAC) should ensure closer coordination with Ministry for Public Administration and Anti-Corruption. Albania should further sustain salary reform as a tool for countering corruption in the larger context of staff retention policy.

C. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS - FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

Albania has institutions in place to fight corruption in Chapter 22. However, Albania needs to effectively implement its legislative and operational system for countering corruption and needs to adopt a national anti-fraud strategy and implement anti-fraud measures put in place in an effective manner.

F) CHAPTER 33 – FINANCIAL AND BUDGETARY PROVISIONS

This chapter covers the rules concerning the financial resources necessary for the funding of the EU budget ('own resources'). These resources are made up from so-called traditional own resources from customs duties and sugar levies, which are levied by the Member States on behalf of the EU; a resource based on value-added tax; a resource based on non-recycled plastic packaging waste, and finally, a resource based on each Member State's gross national income. Member States must have appropriate administrative capacity to adequately co-ordinate and ensure the correct calculation, collection, payment and control of their own resources' contributions. The *acquis* in this area is directly binding and does not require alignment into national law.

I. OWN RESSOURCES AND ADMINISTRATIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

I.A. TRADITIONAL OWN RESOURCES

a. Country presentation

Albania set out its partial alignment with EU customs legislation, including the operational set-up of the customs administration and its implementing capacity; existing IT infrastructure as well as current customs rules and procedures in place. (Customs issues are essentially covered by *chapter 29 - Customs Union*.) Albania focused specifically on the course of the customs procedure and the collection of customs debt. In doing so Albania detailed the procedures currently in place and the system of guarantees to ensure the collection of debt.

b. Commission assessment

Albania is **partially aligned** with the EU *acquis* on traditional own resources and in terms of process and practice. Further work is required to ensure full alignment and to strengthen the capacity of the administration in the areas of traditional own resources, including customs.

I.B. VAT OWN RESOURCE

a. Country presentation

Albania set out the legal framework related to value added tax which is partially aligned with the EU *acquis*. Areas of non-alignment concern a number of exemptions, such as exemptions for certain transactions in the public interest, exemptions for other activities and specific exemptions on imports. Albania set out the administrative structure of the VAT administration, the resources available and its implementing procedures. A number of areas for future work have been identified, in particular related to the organisation of the VAT administration, strengthening capacities and also improving risk assessment.

b. Commission assessment

Albania's presentation focused on the VAT system as a whole rather than on the VAT based resource itself. This distinction is important as the resource may take into account elements that are not VAT. For example, interest payments or collection fees in circumstances where collection is contracted out. Overall further work is required to align with the *acquis* in the area of exemptions and sectors of activity including public ones and to strengthen the administrative capacity to manage the VAT based resource.

I.C. GNI OWN RESOURCE

a. Country presentation

Albania set out its overall legislative framework and the institutional structure responsible for its legislation. Concerning the calculation of GNI in line with the EU approach this is an-ongoing exercise as Albania is currently engaged in the ESA 2013 transmission programme. gaps in the

statistical system, including long time series, treatment of fraud and the non-observed economy, and the use of supply, use and derived input-output tables (SUT), have been identified and a timeline of work to address these set.

b. Commission assessment

Albania's legislation on in the area of GNI is *assessed under Cluster 1 – fundamentals , Chapter 18-Statistics*. Further alignment is necessary across most of the relevant *acquis* as is strengthening administrative capacities and ensuring effective co-ordination between branches of the administration

I.D. OWN RESOURCES BASED ON NON-RECYCLED PLASTIC PACKAGING WASTE

a. Country presentation

Albania indicated that it has legislation related to the circular economy, integrated waste management and specifically on banning the use of certain plastic bags. Future work streams include reducing marine pollution and developing the circular economy.

b. Commission assessment

Albania is **not yet aligned** with the own resources based on non-recycled plastic packaging waste. Albania has environmental legislation to this particular own resources. Albania also needs to strengthen its statistical capacity is required.

I.E. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS – OWN RESOURCES AND ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY

Albania has a **low level of** alignment with the *acquis*.

Albania needs to continue alignment and preparations under the respective *acquis* chapters: VAT Customs and Excise, Environment, and Statistics. There is a particular need to develop the necessary statistical capacity. In pursuing this objective, Albania needs to take into account the on-going reform of the EU budget and ensure that the work undertaken.

Albania should develop the necessary internal co-ordination mechanisms between the services involved in the management of own resources.

VI. FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

a. Country presentation

The **fight against corruption** is regulated by the national legislation, namely the Law no. 120/2021 on Amendments and supplements to the Law no. 9917, dated 19.05. 2008 on Prevention of Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism (the “AML Law”); the law 60/2016 “On whistle-blowers and whistle-blower’s protection”; the Law no. 9643, dated 20 November 2006, “On public procurement”, which also contains anti-corruption provisions; and the Law no. 9367, dated 07 April 2005, “On the prevention of the conflict of interests in the exercising of public functions” (the “Conflict of Interest Law”).

Albania has in place a comprehensive 2015-2023 National Inter-Sectoral Strategy on fighting corruption and a corresponding Action Plan approved by the government for its implementation. The current Action Plan is for the period 2020 – 2023. Ministry of Justice of Albania is currently developing a new anti-corruption strategy for the period for 2023-2030. It should focus on three main aspects: prevention of corruption - strengthening of legal and institutional mechanisms to prevent corruption and strengthen integrity in the public administration, with a focus on sectors with a high risk of corruption; punishment of corruption - Increasing the performance of all structures responsible for pursuing, investigating and punishing corruption cases; and awareness – raising the awareness of citizens and educating young people to proactively engage in the fight against corruption.

The digitalisation of government services is used to increase transparency and curb the possibility of corruption.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has **some level of preparation** in the fight against corruption.

c. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS - FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

Albania has in place a comprehensive national legislation and strategy for the fight against corruption. It also aims at increasing the use of digitalisation as a means to fight corruption.